



WESTERN CASPIAN UNIVERSITY
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE CENTER

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Introduction

To ensure the improvement of education quality at Western Caspian University, the Examination and Quality Control Center was established in 2017. Since 2020, the “Quality Control Center” has continued its independent activities. In 2021, changes were made to the structure of the Center; it was renamed the “Quality Assurance Center,” and its new Charter was adopted.

WCU Quality System

The working principle of the Quality Assurance Center is based on the Internal Quality Assurance Standards set out in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015).

The main functional activities of the Quality Assurance Center are as follows:

1. Evaluation of the University’s compliance with state education standards;
2. Creation and maintenance of an efficient and modern teaching environment at the University;
3. Ensuring the continuous development of the University’s activities through self-assessment;
4. Cooperation with local and international evaluation agencies in the field of quality assurance;
5. Organization of the quality assurance system;
6. Coordination of the collection of essential data/indicators for the Quality Assurance System from all sources;
7. Identification of stakeholders’ expectations;
8. Providing consultative support to the University and faculty units in organizing self-assessment, conducting it, and preparing for accreditation;
9. Conducting regular internal training on quality assurance;
10. Involving external stakeholders in the quality assurance process together with other structural units of the University;
11. Defining the overall framework of quality assurance systems for learning and teaching at the European, national, and institutional levels.

The Quality Assurance Center organized its activities for the 2022/2023 academic year in six sections.

1. General Activities:

1.1. For regularly analyzing curricula and making proposals in line with new requirements, by Order No. 24/2 dated 20.12.2022, initiated by the QAC, two working groups were established to examine the curricula of three specializations and provide new proposals. Specialists in the respective fields were involved in the groups. The curricula of all three specializations were reviewed, and reports on the results were prepared.

For the Accounting specialization, the report noted uncertainties in courses determined by the higher education institution, and that teaching loads were concentrated mainly in the Fall semester. It was proposed that the names of certain unclear courses—such as Theoretical Foundations of Audit Standards (Block II), Inspection and Control (Block IV), Supervision of Extra-budgetary Funds and Their Audit (Block V), and Taxation Audit (Block X)—should be clarified in consultation with experts and submitted to the academic department.

For the Finance specialization, the commission recommended moving the courses Microeconomics and Macroeconomics to earlier semesters. It was also emphasized that the logical sequence of courses should be maintained.

For the Forestry specialization, the commission recommended renaming certain courses, aligning elective courses with specialization requirements, maintaining logical sequence in course delivery, and ensuring equal distribution across semesters. The proposals in the report are expected to be taken into account in the next academic year. Further analysis of curricula for other specializations is also planned.

1.2. Recommendations were prepared on structuring lessons correctly, ensuring that relevant documents (programs, syllabi, lecture texts) comply with standards, presenting material clearly during lessons, and increasing student engagement. These were uploaded to SharePoint for accessibility.

1.3. The results of surveys conducted among students during the 2022/2023 academic year were analyzed. Proposals were developed to eliminate areas with low student satisfaction.

Question 1 – How did you choose the specialty you were admitted to?

1. By my own choice – 71%
2. At the request of my parents – 8%
3. In order not to remain without a specialty – 21%

Recommendation- Research shows that the vast majority of applicants face difficulties in making decisions about their future specialty and profession. Some choose their specialty under the influence of parents, teachers, or relatives, while others do not consider this issue seriously at all. The survey conducted among university students also aimed at measuring this problem.

Most of the students who selected the third option (“in order not to remain without a specialty”) are from the fields of Forestry, Ecology, Aquatic Bio-resources, Philosophy, Philology, and Design.

In particular, for students of Philosophy, Ecology, Forestry, Aquatic Bio-resources, Aquaculture, and other related specialties, it would be useful to organize awareness-raising meetings to change their perception of the specialty they have chosen and to explain that these fields are a priority not only for Azerbaijan but also for the whole world. At the same time, it seems advisable to organize such meetings with schoolchildren to encourage them to make more informed choices in the future.

Over the last century, the rapid development of all areas of the economy, especially industry, has led to an increase in the negative impact of human activity on the environment and the excessive exploitation of natural resources. The preservation of ecological balance, efficient use of natural resources, and protection of water, soil, and atmospheric air from pollution have become global problems.

In Azerbaijan, large-scale measures are being taken to address environmental issues, and the state policy aimed at improving the ecological situation is an important part of the country's long-term development strategy.

In this regard, measures are being implemented within the framework of the "Socio-Economic Development Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2022–2026", the "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", the "State Program on the Socio-Economic Development of the Regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019–2023", the "Action Plan for Ensuring Efficient Use of Water Resources for 2020–2022", the "State Program on Geological Study of the Earth's Interior and Efficient Use of the Mineral Resource Base for 2020–2024", and other programs.

In addition, draft projects of the "State Program on the Protection and Sustainable Development of Forests in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2022–2030" and the "National Strategy on Efficient Use of Water Resources" are being prepared.

At a time when the world is facing ecological problems, and Azerbaijan is shifting its economy from the oil sector to the non-oil sector (particularly prioritizing the development of agriculture), explaining the necessity of specialists in these fields for the country may help achieve different and more positive outcomes.

Philosophy is a field that influences all stages of the development of society. Specialists in philosophy possess the ability to approach the understanding of the world and society from different perspectives and to correctly evaluate the events taking place around them. There is a need for individuals who possess the capacity to generate new ideas and innovative ways of thinking, thereby providing society with fresh concepts and perspectives. It can be explained that, for properly guiding the social and legal development of our society, specialists in this field are required.

Question 2 – How is the quality of education at the university?

According to the analysis, the majority of students who answered “poor” (10.3%) are from the Psychology specialty. They noted that the topics of the courses do not correspond to contemporary realities or are perceived as unnecessary information.

Recommendation:

- It is advisable to establish a working group to analyze the curricula and educational programs of the Psychology specialty.
- Conduct monitoring of subject syllabi and analyze the relevance of course topics.
- The working group should take into account international experience in this area, which would have a positive impact.
- Monitoring of lessons in the Design specialty should be organized.
- The quality of visual aids used during lessons should be assessed (if necessary, with the involvement of external experts).
- English Language and Literature instructors (Mehri Zahidova, Tabarruk Jihangirli, and Gunay Valibeyli) should have their classes observed for a period of time by the Monitoring Sector.
- If student complaints are confirmed, appropriate measures should be reported to the administration for action.

Question 3 – Where do you learn about the rules regulating university life?

The main complaints of students who answered “I cannot learn the decisions” are as follows:

1. Everyone says different things.
2. Decisions are announced at the end of the academic year, which causes serious problems.
3. New decisions are made almost every day, and constantly changing regulations are very problematic.

Recommendation:

-It is advisable to prepare and distribute a Student Handbook containing stable and unchanging rules regulating student life.

-In cases where new decisions are necessary, their application should either start from the next semester or the following academic year.

-It would be appropriate to familiarize structural units with new decisions in advance.

-At the end of the current academic year or before the start of a new academic year, meetings should be held with students to explain the adopted changes.

Questions on Quality Indicators

Question 1 – The Dean’s Office carefully considers students’ problems and suggestions and resolves them promptly.

Students who responded “disagree” were mainly from:

1. Faculty of Political and Social Sciences
2. Faculty of Economics and Business

Recommendation:

To meet with staff in both dean’s offices, investigate the root causes of the problem, and, if necessary, direct staff to training in communication and problem-solving.

Question 3 – Artistic activities are carried out at a satisfactory level.

Question 4 – Sports activities are carried out at a satisfactory level.

Question 5 – The number of social events is satisfactory, and clubs corresponding to my interests and abilities are functioning.

Based on the feedback of students who answered “disagree” to these questions, it would be appropriate to prepare surveys reflecting their suggestions regarding activities that cover questions 3, 4, and 5. The collected proposals can then be analyzed to determine the appropriate course of action.

2. Activities on the Improvement of Documents and Teaching Methods

2.1. A new edition of the Quality Assurance Policy has been developed and approved by the Academic Council of the University, Protocol No. 02 dated 12.10.2022. In order to ensure accessibility of the policy across the university, it has been uploaded both to the University Website and SharePoint. In addition, according to the schedule, meetings were held in all university structures to disseminate the policy; a short version of the policy was printed as posters and placed in university corridors (by scanning the QR code on the posters, the full version of the document can be accessed in electronic format). The full version of the policy was also published in booklet form and distributed among structural units.

2.2. The Guidelines for Monitoring and Evaluation of Teaching and Learning have been improved and approved by the Academic Council, Protocol No. 02 dated 12.10.2022. The document consists of five sections: General Provisions, Purpose and Objectives of Monitoring, Organization of Monitoring, Participants, Rights and Responsibilities, and Final Provisions. Four annex tables were added to the document. To ensure access for academic staff, the document was uploaded to SharePoint.

2.3. The Activity Plan of the Quality Assurance Center for the 2023/2024 academic year was prepared and approved in June.

3. Internal Audit Activities

3.1. Another important task was to verify the compliance of course syllabi submitted to the Ministry of Science and Education for approval with the current educational programs. This work was carried out together with the Teaching-Methodological Council. It should be noted that in some departments, there was a shortage of officially approved programs (bearing ministerial approval stamps) corresponding to the educational programs approved in 2020. For the 2022/2023 academic year, the Teaching-Methodological Council presented a report on approved programs. According to the report, the following were approved by the Ministry of Science and Education: 4 programs from the Department of “Azerbaijani Language and Literature,” 9 from the Department of “Mechanics and Mathematics,” 4 from the Department of “History and Philosophy,” and 1 from the Department of “Political Science, Psychology and Social Work.”

3.2. To ensure that working syllabi are developed in line with standards and requirements, the Monitoring Sector of the educational process, together with departments, carried out document reviews at the beginning of each academic semester to check the compliance of syllabi with standards. Recommendations were provided for syllabi that did not meet standards, and corrections were required to be made promptly.

3.3. To evaluate university teaching staff, in addition to student surveys and self-evaluation by faculty, it is important to include peer and administrative evaluations. For this purpose, open classes were organized according to a pre-scheduled plan to monitor the activities of teaching and administrative staff. Open classes were conducted across 15 departments and 1 center. The classes were discussed within the departments, and detailed analyses were carried out. Young teachers received recommendations from their colleagues. Overall, open classes were assessed as satisfactory. Based on the results of these open classes, feedback from the Monitoring Sector was prepared and submitted to the administration.

3.4. To ensure the sustainability of the Electronic Journal concept, regular inspections are carried out by the Monitoring Sector. While no problems were identified regarding the accurate completion of e-journals, issues were discovered with the uploading of electronic materials to teachers’ personal accounts. To resolve this problem, it was recommended that department heads and laboratory assistants be involved in the process.

3.5. Student satisfaction surveys were conducted by the Student Information Center through an online platform, ensuring anonymity. A statistical report was prepared, and the results were analyzed and submitted to the administration, faculties, and departments.

3.6. Surveys among academic staff were also conducted on the online platform. The results were analyzed, and notifications were sent to the relevant departments.

4. External Audit Activities

4.1. To provide consultation support in organizing and carrying out self-assessment and accreditation preparations, a working group was established within the center. Reviews were conducted in faculties and departments according to the schedule. The report is attached.

5. Awareness-Raising Activities

5.1. To ensure effective use of the E-Journal by academic and administrative staff, an instructional video was prepared and uploaded to the university's website. In addition, a meeting was held where the rules of use were explained on campus.

5.2. A training session was held for the teaching staff of Western Caspian University by the Head of the Quality Assurance Department, Vonda Grobbelaar. The training covered topics such as effective communication, creative thinking, and emotional intelligence, as well as their impact on quality in the educational environment. To explain the topics more practically, various interactive games were organized among participants.

<https://wcu.edu.az/az/news/muellimlerimiz-uchun-telim-teshkil-olunub>

5.3. Another training was conducted by Vonda Grobbelaar for the teaching staff of Western Caspian University, dedicated to the topic "Student-Centered Education." To provide a practical understanding of the discussed topics, various interactive games were organized among the participants.

<https://wcu.edu.az/az/news/muellimlerimiz-uchun-telim-kechirilib>

6. Cooperation Activities

6.1. For the purpose of obtaining international standardization certificates, a contract was signed with the Turkish Standards Institution (TSE). Training sessions were conducted by TSE's Department of Education as follows: General Training on Quality Management Systems (11.04.2022–12.04.2022), Documentation Training in TSE ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Systems (13.04.2022), and Internal Technical Training (13.05.2022–14.05.2022). An audit was carried out by TSE at the University for the establishment and certification of integrated management systems in accordance with standard requirements.

Director of the Quality Assurance Center
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