



Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Western Caspian University

Strategic Development Plan

2021–2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present a brief overview of Western Caspian University's identity, activities, ideology, and historical achievements. Our university has a 30-year history, which may seem short compared to institutions that have been operating for decades or even centuries. However, the accomplishments we have achieved in this short period inspire confidence and optimism about the bright future of Western Caspian University. WCU is a modern higher education institution, and there remains much to be done to ensure its continued development.

- We are steadily progressing toward the strategic goals we have set for ourselves.
 - Our institutional activities and collaborative partnerships continue to expand in scope and impact.
 - We maintain an open and adaptive approach to constructive change across all areas of development.
 - We are committed to remaining forward-thinking and aligned with contemporary global trends.
 - We place strong confidence in innovative initiatives and future achievements, approaching the continued development of Western Caspian University with optimism and determination.

Professor Huseynqulu Baghirov

2. WESTERN CASPIAN UNIVERSITY

Western Caspian University is a private higher education institution operating in the higher education sector since 1991. The university's multicultural community creates long-term prospects and multifaceted opportunities for lifelong learning and skill development.

Western Caspian University:

- Continues to expand its agreements with international partners and broaden its educational activities;
- Is creating an excellent educational environment for global collaboration and internationally recognized, world-class instruction;
- Aims to stay progressive by keeping pace with global academic trends.

2.1 Areas of Activity

Education.

Western Caspian University offers full-time and part-time education across bachelor's, master's (including MBA), doctoral, and second-degree programs. Education is provided in three languages – Azerbaijani, English, and Russian. In addition, each year, the university invites instructors from countries such as the USA, UK, France, and Germany, alongside local experts. Students have the opportunity to study abroad for both short and long-term periods under exchange programs like Erasmus+, Mevlana, etc.

Research.

Creating a high-quality educational and research environment and ensuring the quality of teaching and research to make a positive contribution to society is one of WCU's focus areas. Western Caspian University operates on a modern infrastructure for research. It has research centers, laboratories, and departments for conducting scientific research. A permanent scientific research fund is in place to support research activities and the publication of scientific papers. The university prioritizes improving its research infrastructure and increasing the number of scientific publications indexed in prestigious databases. WCU has its own scientific journals, which serve as platforms for publishing and sharing research with international academic communities.

Social Services.

WCU supports student initiatives through various academic and social organizations. The university also engages in numerous corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. These include community programs, volunteer work, and partnerships with local organizations. Events and seminars are held to address societal issues and contribute to cultural and social development. WCU is also actively exploring ways to enhance entrepreneurship and knowledge among the population, especially in support of regional economic development.

2.2 About the Strategy

This document outlines Western Caspian University's Development Strategy for 2021–2025. The strategy was developed using international best practices in higher education management, the "State Program for Increasing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System in Azerbaijan for 2019–2023", and results from surveys conducted among students, faculty, and both public and private organizations.

2.3 SWOT Analysis

During the period 2021–2025, the strategic development priorities of the university and related goals and objectives are determined based on an analysis of WCU's general operational conditions, strengths and weaknesses, and potential risks and opportunities.

Strengths (S):

- The university's location in a dynamically developing economic center;
- A developed and innovative ecosystem;
- High prestige within the country;
- A documented system of responsibility and accountability between departments, faculties, and internal units;
- A wide spectrum of professional and higher education programs, including opportunities for additional education;
- A qualified academic staff capable of meeting modern requirements;
- Availability of textbooks, manuals, and teaching programs approved by the Ministry of Education;
- High productivity in priority research areas;
- A system of additional educational services for professional training;
- A fundamental library with 300,000 volumes, computerized with internet access and connected to the national information resources;
- An electronic information education environment with an integrated information system for education, research, and training processes;
- Regular student surveys for evaluating teaching quality and academic staff ratings;
- Popular extracurricular arts and sports activities among students;
- Enhanced university image through active engagement with media and public relations.

Weaknesses (W):

- Relatively low preparation levels of students in certain areas;
- Imbalanced age distribution among academic staff;
- Organizational and structural issues in governance, marketing activities, and outdated university websites
- Insufficient attention to alumni relations;
- Weak promotional efforts to attract graduates of vocational and secondary education institutions;
- Delays in implementing the mentoring system in lower-year courses;
- Limited research activity;
- University budget heavily dependent on tuition fees;
- Relatively low number of academic staff proficient in foreign languages;
- Lack of active participation in international rankings;
- Weak participation in international educational and scientific grant programs.

Opportunities (O):

- Becoming a national hub for education and science;
- Strengthening collaboration with regional firms and companies to develop applied research;
- Expanding core and additional vocational programs in response to economic development and emerging industries;
- Promoting various forms of education (adult learning, lifelong learning, distance education, etc.);
- Designing and implementing education programs aligned with national education law and professional standards;
- Actively participating in dual and practice-oriented education programs;
- Investing in human capital: promoting continuous education and creating effective ecosystems and infrastructure;
- Establishing strategic partnerships with institutions for training professional personnel and developing competency-based graduate models;
- Rapid development of employment sectors (construction, tourism, culture and arts, public catering, food industry, and general education);
- Developing Technopark and small innovative enterprises;
- Reducing university operating costs through business process automation;
- Developing a consulting service market in various activity areas;
- Promoting student self-governance, organizations, and volunteer movements;
- Advancing the internationalization of education;
- Organizing school visits and excursions for regional school students to increase university enrollment;
- Expanding the use of digital technologies;
- Advocating for needed specialties for regional development at local and national levels;
- Creating an academic hub in science and technology by establishing an education-research center based on innovative needs;
- Establishing a “Graduate – Career Center” and organizing regular fairs with representatives from business sectors.

Threats (T):

- Demographic crisis, declining number of students;
 - Decline in the level of entrance exam preparation due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - Decreased motivation to improve the quality of educational activities due to the observed downward trends in the social status of faculty members at higher education institutions;
 - Limited capacity of the labor market and, as a result, a significant drop in demand for graduates' knowledge and competencies;
 - Limited opportunities for extrabudgetary funding due to the demographic situation and the population's decreasing payment capacity;
 - Unstable economic performance of industrial enterprises operating in the country;
 - Decrease in government orders for training qualified specialists.
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2.4 Our Mission

The university aims to respond to global challenges by having a modern, innovative educational and teaching infrastructure and by preparing highly qualified specialists in the fields of humanities, social sciences, and engineering through education and research. It strives to ensure the continuous development of the following:

- Increasing graduates' employability
 - Foreign language proficiency
 - Enhancing entrepreneurial skills
 - Training professionals fully capable of achieving high standards in personal and professional fields
 - Analytical reasoning skills
 - Acting as a motivating and stimulating force for scientific research
 - Critical and solution-oriented thinking
 - Striving to be progressive by keeping up with global trends
 - Strong academic writing skills
 - Supporting the economic, social, and political development of Azerbaijan by training specialists who can serve the national interests
 - Sufficient professional knowledge
 - Empirical analysis skills
 - Establishing teacher-mentor and student-mentor systems across the university
 - ICT proficiency
 - Leadership and teamwork skills
 - Enhancing the effectiveness of "Orientation Days" to help adapt associate and bachelor's degree students to the university, forming and teaching a short-term course for this purpose
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2.5 Our Strategic Vision

To become a university that offers the most modern and high-quality education and research in the region, aligned with the needs of the labor market.

3. Strategic Objectives

Strategic objectives are grouped into 8 categories. Strategic goals have been defined for achieving each objective.

Strategic Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Improving the quality of education
- **Objective 2:** Student-centered development
- **Objective 3:** Creating an innovative, initiative-driven, and internationally compliant research environment
- **Objective 4:** Enhancing international competitiveness

- **Objective 5:** Implementation of digitalization and innovative solutions
 - **Objective 6:** Improving the work environment and labor conditions
 - **Objective 7:** Strengthening infrastructure and ensuring sustainability
 - **Objective 8:** Increasing social responsibility and public reputation
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Objective 1: Improving the Quality of Education

Goal 1: Ensuring highly competitive education (degrees)

- Aligning curricula (syllabi) with international standards
- Involving employers in the process of updating curricula
- Strengthening ties with international accreditation bodies
- Aligning academic programs with the requirements of international accreditation agencies
- Integrating business and entrepreneurship training across all educational areas
- Modularizing education and enhancing the transition to distance (hybrid) education within the legal framework
- Expanding the use of modern, interactive teaching methods and information-communication technologies
- Creating and developing an education infrastructure that meets modern requirements and supports lifelong learning
- Achieving the implementation of ISO 9001 standard at the university

Goal 2: Improving the personnel training system and academic programs

- Implementing a standard that transforms the university into an education-research Innovation center

Renewal and Development of Academic Staff Structure

- Youthful restructuring of the academic staff through students educated abroad via various programs and domestically trained young professionals
- Efficient use of laboratories, centers, and educational-practical potential resources
- Increasing the number of dual degree programs in cooperation with foreign higher education institutions
- Enhancing support for young academic staff
- Involving employers in the teaching and internship process
- Conducting employer satisfaction surveys
- Continuously increasing the number and effectiveness of targeted training for academic staff
- Continuous increase in the number of academic staff participating in international exchange programs
- Updating textbooks, providing libraries with literature in accordance with modern standards, and improving mechanisms to engage students with library resources

- Continuously increasing the number of foreign academic staff
 - Standardizing requirements for syllabi according to state standards
 - Stimulating the creation of various boards and clubs among academic staff
 - Increasing the practical orientation of lessons
-

Goal 3: Analysis of Specializations and Ensuring Attractiveness

- Monitoring staff training, analyzing the current situation, and evaluating the results
 - Identifying specializations and programs that do not meet labor market requirements
 - Preparing short- and long-term solution plans for identified problems
 - Identifying new specializations that may be needed in the future
 - Conducting market research to align admission plans with labor market needs and demands
 - Continuing awareness and marketing work on specializations
 - Increasing student admissions in line with the university's profile
 - Developing the Admissions Advisory Center
-

Goal 2: Student-Oriented Development

Target 1: Organization of Student Affairs

- Structuring work with group leaders
- Preparing and implementing an educational and disciplinary activity plan
- Organizing sports and cultural events
- Establishing various clubs and ensuring voluntary participation
- Creating debate clubs, organizing systematic knowledge competitions, and ensuring voluntary participation
- Organizing corporate tours and excursions
- Establishing clubs within TGT (Student Youth Organization), TEC (Student Scientific Society), THK (Student Creativity Center), and interest groups
- Enhancing students' (and young lecturers') engagement with local and international public organizations

Target 2: Organization of Internships

- Structuring internships according to seasons and linking them with the labor market
- Establishing efficient collaboration with internship supervisors and conducting systematic skills training
- Monitoring student attendance and evaluating learning outcomes at the end of the internship

Target 3: Preparing Specialists According to Labor Market Demands

1. **Enhancing students' knowledge and skills in various sectors:**
 - Business and Engineering
 - Recycling technologies
 - Robotics and autonomous management systems
 - Analysis and diagnostics
 - Sales and marketing
 - Application of standards
 2. **Improving IT knowledge and skills:**
 - Microsoft Office
 - AutoCAD
 - Statistical analysis (R, Python)
 - SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
 3. **Improving soft and additional skills:**
 - English language
 - Creative and innovative thinking
 - Initiative and independent decision-making
 - Communication and business
 - Leadership
 - Time management
 - Critical thinking
 - Lifelong learning skills
 - Design thinking
 - Enhancing academic writing and presentation skills
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Target 4: Creation of an Effective Career System

- Establishing and regularly updating the graduate database
 - Improving the operations of the Student and Alumni Career Development Center
 - Organizing meetings between the university's graduates (notable figures, entrepreneurs) and students
 - Increasing the number of meetings of the “WCU Alumni Association”
-

Goal 3: Creating a Creative, Initiative-Driven, and Internationally Compliant Research Environment

Target 1: By 2025, creating a research environment that is creative, initiative-based, and meets international standards, and improving the quality of research work

- Prioritizing natural, social, and humanitarian sciences
- Enhancing the use of the university’s material and technical resources in conducting research work
- Ensuring that dissertation topics align with current scientific issues

- Supporting the further development and commercialization of research outcomes
- Establishing a mechanism for selecting scientific supervisors from prestigious universities
- Encouraging publication of research results in high-impact journals and developing incentive packages
- Establishing a mechanism for plagiarism checking dissertations
- Founding scientific and popular scientific online journals, obtaining international impact factor indexes, and promoting them.

Goal 2: Formation of a creative, initiative-oriented, and internationally compatible research environment by 2025 and obtaining the status of a “Research University”

- Modernization of library operations, expansion of the electronic library network, use of digital educational resources, and ensuring access to international information resources
- Increase in the number of articles published in journals indexed in international scientometric databases (Web of Science, SCOPUS) over the past calendar year
- Acquisition of at least one grant in the field of science and education from local and international donors by various faculties
- Systematization of the activities of dissertation councils
- Creation of a fund for publishing articles in journals indexed in international scientometric databases

Goal 3: Formation of a creative, initiative-oriented, and internationally compatible research environment and implementation of high-level, impactful research by 2025

- Establishment of a mechanism encouraging researchers to apply for international funding
- Support for corporate cooperation by developing an inter-faculty partnership model
- Establishment of a quality assurance system for all university activities
- Creation of an internal university research grant fund
- Development of international research projects with prestigious universities worldwide

Goal 4: Formation of a creative, initiative-oriented, and internationally compatible research environment and improvement of scientific-pedagogical staff training by 2025

- Submission of relevant proposals for learning and improving international standards for PhD applications and admissions
 - Systematization of the doctoral admission process
 - Targeted training of personnel in scientific fields with staff shortages
 - Establishment of a Young Researchers Union
 - Creation of a mechanism for monitoring internships and lab work during doctoral studies
 - Ensuring participation of researchers in international exchange programs
-

Goal 5: Formation of a creative, initiative-oriented, and internationally compatible research environment and alignment with the requirements of internationally indexed journals by 2025

- Establishment and strengthening of collaboration with internationally indexed journals
 - Publication of international indexed journals in various scientific fields
 - Inclusion in scientific journals such as Scopus, Web of Science, Thomson Reuters
 - Establishment of a research and advisory commission for scientific fields
 - Selection of editorial board members from reputable scholars
-

Goal 4 (Overall): Increasing international competitiveness

Target 1: Execution of work related to university rankings

- Establishment of a ranking evaluation system to improve the university's ranking
- Development of an action plan to be included in international ranking lists
- Entry into the top 100 of the "QS World University Rankings"
- Entry into the top 400 of the "QS University Rankings: Emerging Europe & Central Asia (QS EECA)"
- Entry into the top 100 of the "Unirank: Top 200 Universities in Asia"
- Achieving higher positions in ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities), QS, and Times Higher Education rankings (World, Impact, and Subject Validation)
- Entry into the 200-300 range of the "UI GreenMetric" ranking
- Implementation of initiatives to be included in the "Entrepreneurial University" ranking system

Target 2: Expansion of international relations

- Increase in the number of incoming and outgoing students through exchange programs
- Expansion of admission opportunities based on international entrance exam results
- Implementation of measures to raise the image of WCU in target countries
- Increase in the number of faculty members sent and invited through exchange programs
- Opening of WCU admission offices in target countries
- Improvement of the process to increase the number of international students at WCU
- Establishment of effective and efficient relations with international education intermediary companies
- Implementation of programs to ensure participation of faculty and researchers in international conferences, seminars, and various professional development courses

Target 3: Participation in international exchange programs

- Improvement of the electronic application system for international students
- Increase in the effectiveness of relations with international partners

- Provision of opportunities to learn the Azerbaijani language for foreign students and teachers
 - Establishment of a flexible admission commission for international student enrollment
 - Offering of scholarship programs (especially for countries with lower poverty levels)
-

Goal 5: Digitalization and application of innovative solutions

Target 1: Establishment of an electronic management system and digitalization of the educational environment

- Implementation of an electronic management system
- Digitalization of attendance (for both teachers and students)
- Creation of an electronic archive program in the library
- Digitalization of the examination process
- Digitalization of teaching and student inquiries
- Provision of corporate email addresses for teachers and students (e.g., @wcu.edu.az)
- Development of a mobile app for Android and iOS operating systems for following lessons

Target 2: Organization and monitoring of examinations

- Structuring of the examination and monitoring center according to international standards
- Creation or evaluation of a test bank
- Analysis of the effectiveness of examination methods and implementation of new ones
- Analysis of exams (by the Quality Assurance Center)

Target 3: Management of information resources

- Establishment of an Information Management System
 - Enhancement of the security and quality of provided electronic services
 - Expansion of online services and creation of free Wi-Fi zones
 - Ensuring access to scientific databases like “Scopus” and “Ebsco”
 - Integration of electronic services with each other and with external systems
 - Creation of a data warehouse (Data Cube)
-

Goal 6: Improvement of the work environment and working conditions

Target 1: Improvement of management

- Implementation of ISO 9001:2015, ISO 45001:2018, and ISO 14001:2015 standards
- Improvement of the activities of university and faculty scientific councils
- Consolidation and restructuring of structural units

Development of the structure of the Quality Assurance Center in accordance with international standards

Target 2: Determining the policy for staffing, training, and development

- Improvement and digitalization of the recruitment mechanism
- Implementation of internal procedural rules covering verification of appointments to elective positions, identification of candidates for elective positions, holding meetings with them, organizing voting, video surveillance, and participation of Ministry representatives in elections
- Encouraging the employment of graduates of master's and doctoral programs
- Assessment of teachers' knowledge and skills, identification of training needs, preparation of training plans, and organization of trainings accordingly
- Establishment of a Teacher Development Program Center
- Strengthening the involvement of foreign teachers in the teaching process and as scientific advisors
- Improving the work with tutors
- Creation of a talent pool (including candidates from other universities in Baku) and working with them

Target 3: Formation of a safe working environment

- Establishment and implementation of a safe working environment in accordance with ISO 45001:2018 standard requirements
- Conducting regular audits in this area
- Organizing practical training at regular intervals to ensure compliance with safe working environment certification requirements

Target 4: Performance assessment and motivation

- Establishment of a performance evaluation mechanism for teachers and staff
- Involving students in the process of evaluating the quality of teaching and the performance of teachers
- Establishment of a motivation system for teachers and staff
- Establishing a competitive salary system using the resources of WCU

Goal 7: Strengthening infrastructure and ensuring sustainability

Target 1: Strengthening material and technical base

- Improvement of teaching and practical training opportunities
- Expansion of video surveillance systems in academic buildings
- Improvement of the electronic access control system to monitor employees' work schedules

- Development of technoparks and business incubators, organization of startup projects and Hackathon competitions
- Creation of a dormitory complex
- Establishment and development of infrastructure to ensure ease of movement for people with physical disabilities in academic buildings
- Expanding the use of solar panels and other alternative energy sources
- Promotion of the use of public transport

Target 2: Diversification of funding and ensuring financial sustainability

- Organization of trainings and courses for business and ICT entities
 - Establishing cooperation with donors such as the Science Development Fund under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the ICT Development Fund, the Knowledge Fund, etc.
 - Building cooperation with the Azerbaijan office of the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ), the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Azerbaijan, TIKA, and other international organizations
 - Identification of alternative financial sources and establishment of implementation mechanisms
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Goal 8: Increasing social responsibility and public reputation

Target 1: Increasing the sense of social responsibility

- Increasing the social responsibility of students and teachers
- Involvement of students in volunteer programs
- Increasing parents' sense of social responsibility towards the university and society

Target 2: Improvement of activities in promoting education among youth and public relations

- Conducting relevant research and surveys within WCU's PR and marketing strategy in the field of education, studying international experience, preparing a SWOT analysis based on trends in modern education, and determining further steps
- Continuation and development of relations with media (presenting university activities on television, websites, newspapers, and magazines; highlighting new projects and achievements; and informing/educating parents and prospective students)
- Expanding activity on social media (daily updates of university pages on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, and effective use of these networks to reach a wider audience)
- Daily updates of the university's website, continuous improvement of content, and enrichment of materials to enhance its informational and educational function
- Organizing open house days and ensuring participation of secondary school students in these events

- Conducting trainings, seminars, and meetings in schools; supporting students in choosing a major; introducing new majors
- Preparation of relevant publications for promoting the university and its programs
- Organizing webinars and seminars with the participation of the public, including parents and prospective students