

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON 2023 ACTIVITIES OF ERASMUS+ HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS EXPERTS OF UZBEKISTAN¹

In the ongoing year, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation successfully developed and integrated four information systems to streamline the documentation processes of educational institutions and ministry functions. Simultaneously, six government services are now operational on the unified interactive portal. To optimize enrollment and re-evaluation procedures for higher, secondary specialized, and vocational education, ministry meticulously refined six information systems for seamless online document submissions. Thorough evaluations have ensured strict adherence to set requirements, admission criteria, and the efficient operation of all associated processes. As evident from the 2023 mid-year digital transformation rating, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation has achieved a top-tier "green" rating, marking excellence in comparison to other ministries.

"Uzbekistan – 2030" Strategy Implementation document, initiated through the Presidential Decree PF-158-158 and signed on September 11, 2023, delineates crucial recommendations for the efficient execution of the "Uzbekistan – 2030" strategy during the designated "Year of Attention to the People and Quality Education." Aligned with strategic objectives encompassing individual empowerment, economic growth, environmental sustainability, rule of law, and national security, the recommendations encompass diverse initiatives. These include providing fortified nutrition in schools, introducing specialized training courses, implementing healthcare measures, and offering social services for families in need. The document also underscores empowering women in challenging social conditions. Additionally, it emphasizes operational planning, economic growth measures, and the timely imposition of penalties for tax offenses, contributing to the broader objectives of the national strategy for sustainable development.

Following the 2023 Annual Conference of Experts on "Perspectives of Higher Education Development in the Republic of Uzbekistan" and the 7th Republican Conference on "Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility: Role in Improving the Quality of Education and Research," the Uzbekistan Higher Education Experts present the following comprehensive recommendations:

Enhancing International Rankings and Quality of Education:

- a) Prioritize improving the global ranking of universities by focusing on inclusive education, conditions for students with disabilities, various scholarships, and aligning with the UN's sustainable development goals.
- b) Invest in infrastructure for scientific research, provide modern equipment, and strengthen international cooperation to elevate the quality and impact of academic work.

Green Policies in Education:

- a) Integrate environmental education into the core curriculum across subjects to foster environmental awareness and sustainability among students.
- b) Conduct comprehensive teacher training programs to equip educators with the necessary tools to effectively deliver environmental education, emphasizing the importance of sustainability, climate change, and conservation.

¹ Following the results of 2023 activities of the National Team of HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS EXPERTS (HEREs), training seminars organised for HEREs by the SPHERE for 2023, as well as based on the resolution of the Annual HEREs&ICM Conference on 22nd December 2023 in TSUOS, the Set of Recommendations of UZ HEREs for 2024 has been developed and published on the NEO website.

Adapting to Innovation, Digitalization, and International Collaboration:

- a) Embrace technology by incorporating digital tools and platforms into the learning process, enhancing engagement and interactivity.
- b) Promote collaboration by creating opportunities for students to work with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, fostering an inclusive and respectful learning environment.
- c) Provide real-world experiences through case studies, simulations, and project-based learning, connecting education to practical contexts and global issues.

Comprehensive Digital Strategy:

- a) Develop a clear roadmap for digital transformation in higher education, outlining goals, objectives, and required actions.
- b) Enhance digital infrastructure by investing in high-speed internet, secure networks, and up-to-date hardware and software.

Student Participation and Academic Independence:

- a) Ensure active student participation in all educational processes by introducing self-management mechanisms.
- b) Establish a system for the election of leading personnel, aligning with international norms, and granting academic independence to higher education institutions.

Sustainable Education Practices:

- a) Implement greening activities in extracurricular activities, study programs, and curriculum reforms to create sustainable education at the university level.
- b) Introduce digital tools for teleworking, teleconferencing, and virtual mobility, promoting the use of green travel.

Integration of ChatGPT in Higher Education:

- a) Recognize the importance of ChatGPT in higher education for its simplicity and convenience, allowing for virtual tutoring, interactive study materials development, collaborative learning experiences, language learning support, and continuous improvement.

Water-Saving Technologies and Management:

- a) Implement water-saving technologies through the construction and reconstruction of irrigation systems, canals, and hydraulic structures.
- b) Improve forecasting and accounting of water resources, introduce "Smart Water technology," and encourage the adoption of water-saving irrigation technologies.
- c) Attract foreign investments and grants for modernization and development of water facilities.

Introduction of Self-Management Mechanism:

- a) Implement a comprehensive self-management mechanism that actively involves students in decision-making processes within educational institutions.
- b) Facilitate the inclusion of students in key committees and administrative discussions, fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership for their educational experience.

System of Election for Leading Personnel:

- a) Establish a transparent system for the election of leading personnel in higher education institutions, aligning with international norms and best practices.
- b) Initiate a thorough study of international models for the selection of department heads, deans, vice-rectors, and rectors, ensuring a democratic and participatory approach in leadership appointments.

Granting Academic Independence:

- a) Empower higher education institutions with academic independence to enhance their ability to shape and deliver curriculum, research, and other academic activities.
- b) Encourage institutions to develop and implement policies that uphold academic freedom while maintaining accountability and quality standards.

Incorporating Student Exchange Programs:

- a) Integrate participation in student exchange programs as an integral part of the educational trajectory.
- b) Collaborate with international partners to facilitate seamless exchange opportunities, providing students with diverse cultural experiences and broadening their perspectives.

These recommendations are imperative for fostering a dynamic and inclusive educational ecosystem. By prioritizing student involvement, implementing transparent leadership selection processes, ensuring academic independence, and promoting global engagement through exchange programs, we can collectively contribute to the holistic development of higher education institutions.

Acknowledging the transformative impact of technological progress and the imperative for digital transformation, the following comprehensive recommendations are proposed to elevate the higher education landscape in Uzbekistan:

Revise Professional Roles and Qualifications:

- a) Pioneer innovative teaching methods infused with artificial intelligence, Internet technologies, data analytics, and other advanced tools.
- b) Embed comprehensive support for these innovations in the methodological and guiding principles of higher education, aligning them with the skills imperative for success in the digital economy.

Overhaul Educational Models for Digital Integration:

- a) Initiate transformative projects to craft new educational models, institutional approaches, and dynamic university leadership structures attuned to the demands of the digital economy.
- b) Conduct a series of seminars, promoting the pivotal role of higher education in the digital era, and laying the groundwork for the development of new educational models, institutional frameworks, and changes in financing, duration of training, and teaching methodologies.

Enhance Publication Activity for University Rankings:

- a) Facilitate methodological seminars encompassing the entire spectrum of scientific writing, from article composition to dissertation crafting, with a particular focus on publishing in high-ranking journals such as Scopus and Web of Science.
- b) Provide targeted training on the intricacies of analytical systems and databases from renowned global publishing houses, catering especially to doctoral students and aspiring researchers.

Integrate Courses on Science Metrics and Ethics:

- a) Introduce robust courses covering science metrics, world information resources, publication ethics, and patent science into master's and doctoral curricula.
- b) Elevate the standard of dissertations and scientific research through a holistic education approach that instills ethical research practices.

Promote Green Measures in Higher Education:

- a) Champion the cause of environmental sustainability within higher education institutions by fostering a comprehensive "Green University" culture.
- b) Organize impactful conferences, seminars, and training sessions on pertinent environmental topics such as "Green Space" and "Green Plan."

Develop Targeted Projects for Socio-Economic Issues:

- a) Pave the way for targeted projects under Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) and International Credit Mobility (ICM) to address pressing socio-economic concerns.
- b) Spearhead initiatives such as training sessions and seminars in universities within affected regions, aiming to actively involve the public and institutions in collaborative efforts to tackle environmental challenges through new CBHE and ICM projects.

Prioritize Inclusion in Education:

- a) Undertake a comprehensive modernization of educational institutions to create a truly inclusive, barrier-free environment catering to the diverse needs of all students, including those with physical and mental disabilities.
- b) Drive the adoption of innovative teaching methods, adaptive curricula, and inclusive evaluation processes to ensure equal educational opportunities for everyone.

Strengthen Technical Support for Teachers:

- a) Provide unwavering technical support for teachers, encompassing digital skills training and ensuring accessibility to online platforms for collaboration.
- b) Enhance the functionality of bodies handling accreditation/attestation issues, possibly by developing by-laws and regulations to invite international agencies on quality assurance into the country and establishing conditions for independent national/local quality assurance organizations.

Legislative Framework and Stakeholder Collaboration in terms of Microcredentials:

- a) Develop a comprehensive legislative framework explicitly recognizing and endorsing microcredentials within the Uzbekistan education system. This framework should define the scope, purpose, and standards for creating, recognizing, and validating microcredentials.
- b) Foster collaborative efforts among government bodies, educational institutions, industry representatives, and stakeholders to collectively design and implement a cohesive strategy for the introduction of microcredentials. Align this strategy with national educational goals and the dynamic needs of the labor market.

Quality Assurance and Practical Integration:

- a) Establish robust quality assurance standards specifically tailored to microcredentials, ensuring their academic rigor and relevance to industry needs. Implement accreditation mechanisms for institutions offering microcredentials, emphasizing credibility and program quality.
- b) Encourage higher education institutions to collaborate with industry partners in designing practical and relevant microcredential programs that address specific skills gaps. Promote the integration of microcredentials into traditional degree programs and as standalone professional development courses, offering flexible learning pathways.

These recommendations aim to lay the groundwork for a seamless integration of microcredentials into the Uzbekistan education system, fostering a dynamic, skill-oriented, and adaptable learning environment that meets both academic and industry standards.

Digital Integration of Higher Education (HE) in Uzbekistan:

- a) **Initiate Innovative Projects:** Launch groundbreaking projects aimed at developing adaptive educational models to seamlessly integrate the Republic of Uzbekistan's higher education into the global digital economy.
- b) **Raise Awareness Through Seminars:** Conduct a series of dynamic seminars to promote the pivotal role of HE in the digital era, laying the groundwork for the subsequent implementation of digital initiatives.

Enhancing University Rankings through Publication Activity:

- a) **Methodological Seminars for Research Excellence:** Organize comprehensive methodological seminars, including proofreading sessions, focusing on enhancing the quality of research articles and dissertations. Prioritize skills essential for publishing in high-ranking journals like Scopus and Web of Science.
- b) **Incorporating Science Metrics and Environmental Awareness in Curricula:**

Holistic Curriculum Development: Integrate cutting-edge courses on science metrics, world information resources, and ethical considerations in publications into master's and doctoral curricula.

- c) Green University Culture Initiative: Promote the importance of environmental sustainability by developing specialized courses and organizing conferences, seminars, and training sessions on topics such as "Green Space" and "Green Plan."

Targeted Projects for Socio-Economic Issues:

Strategic Project Development: Formulate targeted projects under the Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) and International Credit Mobility (ICM) programs, addressing urgent socio-economic challenges, particularly in regions affected by environmental crises.

Research Methodologies in Postgraduate Education:

Advanced Postgraduate Education: Introduce advanced subjects on research methodologies in postgraduate education, emphasizing global best practices and fostering a research-driven culture among young scientific personnel.

Sustainable Development Principles in Higher Education:

Innovative Integration: Seamlessly incorporate principles of sustainable development across university disciplines, emphasizing the need for an annual "Investment Program for Targeted Greening of Uzbekistan" to propel sustainability-focused curriculum development.

Implement Gender Equality and Inclusion Strategies: Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for promoting gender equality and inclusivity within the academic environment. This involves creating awareness campaigns to eliminate gender stereotypes, fostering an inclusive learning environment, and prioritizing accessible education for students with disabilities. Modernize educational institutions by redesigning facilities to accommodate diverse needs and introducing innovative teaching methods and adapted curricula.

Enhance Quality Assurance Systems: Rigorously review and update the quality assurance system within universities, aligning it with international standards. Develop new approaches, tools, and mechanisms to ensure the continuous improvement of educational processes, programs, and the competence of teaching staff. Embrace a student-centered approach to education that focuses on key competencies, creativity, and self-education.

Foster a Culture of Quality and Autonomy: Promote a culture of quality within the national education system, emphasizing continuous professional training for academic staff, management, and students. Establish conditions for implementing relevant skills in practice and ensure certain institutional autonomy for prompt decision-making and strategic planning.

Provide Robust Technical Support: Acknowledge the pivotal role of constant technical support in maintaining quality standards. Ensure teachers have access to adequate and accessible learning resources, including digital skills training and online platforms for collaboration. Improve the activities of bodies handling accreditation/attestation issues, exploring possibilities of international collaboration and the development of local quality assurance organizations.

Ensure Quality in Online Learning: Develop and implement comprehensive policies and strategies for digitalization in online learning, addressing issues such as monitoring tools, compliance with digital tools, curriculum development, and digital evaluation techniques. Provide support for staff and students, fostering academic honesty, and creating online communities for effective communication.

Promote Internal Quality Assurance: Strengthen internal quality assurance mechanisms, including the evaluation of curricula, internal monitoring, and evaluation. Encourage active participation of students, employers, and civil society in the process, ensuring transparency through public review and the publication of results.

Utilize Erasmus+ Recommendations for Credit-Module System: Actively leverage the recommendations and methodological materials of the Erasmus+ projects, particularly in the implementation of the recent Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers on the introduction of a credit-modular system in technical schools. Collaborate with the "RUECVET" project to pilot the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) in national education systems. These recommendations, coupled with a well-defined implementation mechanism, will contribute to the holistic improvement of the higher education system in Uzbekistan, aligning it with global standards and fostering a culture of continuous quality enhancement.