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DRAFT STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MAJOR OBJECTIVES OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT IN LINE WITH THE EHEA PRINCIPLES AND TOOLS

The Strategic Action Plan is based on the “Concept of the Development of the System of Education of the Republic of Belarus for the Period till 2020 through 2030” agreed upon by the Republican Pedagogical Conference with the participation of the President of the Republic of Belarus (23-24.08.2017) and approved by the Order of the Minister of Education of the Republic of Belarus No. 742 as of 27.11.2017.

The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus within its competence re-affirms its commitment to further implementation of the European Higher Education Area (further referred to as the EHEA) principles and tools in the higher education system of the Republic of Belarus and its willingness to joint work on these issues with the Bologna Follow-Up Group (further referred to as the BFUG).

For this purpose the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus shall do the following:

- develop and approve in 2018 the “Work Plan for Implementing EHEA Tools in the Education System” based on this Strategic Action Plan;
- appoint in 2018 the National Working Group for further implementation of the EHEA tools in the higher education system;
- create in 2018 the information Internet portal/website and hold regular workshops and seminars aiming at raising awareness of a wide scope of stakeholders about the processes of optimising the higher education system in the Republic of Belarus.

The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus wishes to invite the BFUG to support Belarus in this work. For this purpose the Ministry of Education will approach the BFUG with the following request:

- to appoint upon the agreement with the Ministry of Education in 2018 the staff of experts/consultants for the Republic of Belarus having the required experience and professional competencies. Each expert/consultant will be asked to advise on a number of sections of this Strategic Action Plan. Their mission will be to provide Belarus with assistance in the area of further implementation of the EHEA tools and further international cooperation in the field of higher education;
- to assist in arranging in 2018-2020 study visits for higher education specialists from the Republic of Belarus to the EHEA education institutions (organisations) which have successful EHEA tools implementation experience;
- to involve Higher Education Reform Experts of Belarus in consultations regarding the scope of implementing EHEA principles and tools in the higher education system of the Republic of Belarus;
- to hold on a regular basis ongoing consultations to discuss implementation of the major goals and objectives with the above mentioned National Working Group, international consultants/experts and representatives of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus.

Major Goals and Objectives

1. Qualification Framework

By early 2018 the Republic of Belarus had drafted the Higher Education National Qualifications Framework (BelQF) (the 4th step of the development of the NQF). Taking that into consideration, measures will be taken to adopt it by 2019 and to prepare it for self-certification in 2020.

This work will ensure the following:

- introduction of the multi-cycle system of higher education with the bachelor degree of 180-240 ECTS credits and the master degree of 90-120 ECTS credits and, correspondingly, gradual phase-out of the remaining 5-year bakalavr degree;
- harmonisation of the national system of classification of educational programmes (State Classifier of the Republic of Belarus "Specialties and Qualifications" OKRB 011-2009) with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011), which includes referencing education programmes to the BelQF and the QF-EHEA;
- further improvement of HEIs implementation practice of measuring the student workload in ECTS in line with the revised "ECTS Users' Guide".
- International experts/consultants (including experts from Georgia, Italy, Austria, Germany, France) will be asked to advise on implementing measures that are specified in the "Action Plan of Development of the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Belarus" (adopted 04.10.2017). The National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education will be compatible with the QF-EHEA.

2. Quality Assurance

The Republic of Belarus has developed the concept of establishing the national independent system of higher education quality assurance. Taking that into consideration, measures shall be taken to further improve the procedures of internal quality assurance in HEIs by 2020 and to develop legal framework for the activities of an independent quality assurance agency with the purpose of launching its full-scale practical activities by 2022.

The activities aimed at establishing the independent higher education quality assurance system and preparing the national independent quality assurance agency to associate with ENQA/EQAR will be carried out in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG-2015).

International experts/consultants, first of all, ENQA/EQAR representatives, will be asked to advise on implementing measures that are specified in the "Action Plan on Development of Independent Higher Education Quality Assurance System of the Republic of Belarus" (adopted 14.02.2017). Development and capacity building of the quality assurance system and activities of the national agency will cover all levels of education.

3. Recognition of Qualifications

The Republic of Belarus has been consistently carrying out activities aimed at:

- further extension of mutual recognition of educational certificates with various countries on the basis of respective agreements;
- further improvement of the current system of recognition of qualifications in compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

The result of these activities is positive. It is stated in the Report from the Belgium (Flemish) NARIC center on recognition "Peer-review report of Belarus ENIC" (http://media.ehea.info/file/20171018-19-Rome/11/6/ENIC-NARIC_peer-review_report_ENIC_Belarus_final_877116.docx).

Taking that into consideration, by 2019 measures will be taken to facilitate the information support of ENIC Belarus activities (presenting information about ENIC Belarus activities in English).

The legal framework for the procedure of prior learning recognition and the procedure of recognition of refugees' qualifications will be developed.

4. Transparency Tools

Since 2013 the Republic of Belarus has been implementing the national credit units system based on ECTS. Taking that into consideration, by 2020 measures will be taken to implement this system in line with the revised "ECTS Users' Guide".

Special focus will be paid to learning outcomes, curriculum design and delivery as well as assessment and opportunities to implement academic mobility programmes. This process will be based on the outcomes of the Erasmus+ project "Fostering Competencies Development in Belarusian Higher Education (FOSTERC)", Project Ref. 574087-EPP-1-2016-1-ES-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP.

Legal framework will be developed for issuing a free of charge and multilingual Diploma Supplement in the format approved by the Council of Europe, the European Commission, UNESCO (also in the digital format) to all students.

International experts/consultants, including the ones from the World Bank, will be asked to advise on implementing transition to the digital Diploma Supplement.

5. Mobility of Higher Education Staff and Students, Internationalisation

The Republic of Belarus has been consistently extending international academic mobility of the teaching staff and students on the basis of respective agreements. It has been also extending the number of higher education specialties with the option of studying in English. Taking that into consideration, the following legal framework will be developed after the adoption of the new version of the Education Code:

- for implementing joint educational programmes and double diploma programmes;
- for providing international students with educational grants for studying in HEIs of the Republic of Belarus.

For this purpose in 2019 the practice of organizing academic mobility will be revised, with the participation of international experts/consultants. In 2019-2020 higher education institutions will develop their own internal procedures of recognition of academic mobility outcomes.

In addition new (3+ generation) educational standards will provide for HEIs to incorporate academic mobility semesters ("mobility windows") in the educational process.

6. Lifelong Learning and Social Dimension of Higher Education

By 2019 international experts/consultants, including the ones from the European Training Foundation, will be asked to advise on building up grounds for developing legal framework aimed at ensuring prior learning recognition with the purpose of developing the respective procedure in 2021.

In the Republic of Belarus the procedure of university graduates' job placement is carried out by an education institution for the purpose of their social support and meeting the economy's and social sector's needs for specialists, employees and workers. Taking that into consideration, starting from 2020 supplementary measures will be taken for social support of university graduates, including those who studied on tuition fee-paying basis. In addition measures will be taken to study international first job placement schemes with the purpose of developing proposals for the Government of the Republic of Belarus on revision of the current system of university graduates' first job placement.

7. Fundamental EHEA Values

Since 2011 there have been established and implemented the legal obligations on university staff and students participation in HEIs collegiate governing bodies (the composition of HEI Council must include at least 25% of students). Since 31.01.2015 the Public Republican Students Council has been functioning. It can submit proposals on improving the system of training, education and leisure students' activities to the Ministry of Education. Taking all the above-mentioned into consideration, in 2019-2020 additional measures will be taken to include students' representatives in commissions for educational programmes quality assessment and HEIs accreditation.

In 2018-2019 the HEIs will also develop additional measures for improving the mechanism of students and staff participation in HEI governance.

The procedure of the competition-based nomination of candidates for the position of the head of a higher education institution will be developed (according to Article 203 of the draft Education Code).

The work on further implementation of the provisions from the EHEA Ministerial Conferences Communiqué will be continued.

Further work on incorporating into the national education system of the principles of Magna Charta Universitatum and the recommendations of the Council of Europe (Rec/CV (2012)7) regarding public responsibility for academic freedom and institutional autonomy will be continued.

International experts/consultants will be asked to advise on implementing measures aimed at the development of academic culture in higher education institutions.

8. Implementation

The National Institute for Higher Education will be responsible for preparing and providing the necessary data on the EHEA tools implementation and carrying out measures of this Strategic Action Plan in the format and by the dates determined jointly by the Ministry of Education and BFUG.

9. Cooperation with the BFUG

A delegation of 2-3 members with the knowledge of English and required competencies will be appointed to take part in BFUG meetings and ensure the continuity of the Republic of Belarus representation throughout its entire work period.

Participation in relevant seminars and peer-learning events, nomination of candidates for working groups established within the programme of the EHEA work for the corresponding period will be ensured.

In case higher legislative and executive authorities of the Republic of Belarus introduce changes into programme policies of the development of the social sector, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus may change terms for implementing the activities mentioned in this Strategic Action Plan, which will find its reflection in the "Work Plan for Implementing EHEA Tools in the Education System". In this case the Ministry of Education will timely inform the BFUG about it to ensure transparency, mutual trust and understanding.