

## **UZDOC 2.0**

### **Furthering Quality of Doctoral Education at Higher Education Institutions in Uzbekistan**

#### **Final External Quality Evaluation Report**

##### **Introduction**

The UZDOC 2.0 project was in a way continuation of the previous project UZDOC and it brought together partners from three European universities (ULB, University of Granada and ELTE) and 6 Uzbek Higher Education partners (TFI, NamSU, TKTI, UzSIAC, QQSU, KarSu, SIES ) plus the Ministry of Higher Education and Secondary Specialised Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The coordinator was UNICA – Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe. The main focus of the project was further development of doctoral education following European and global changes in doctoral education. It was conceptualised as a 3-year project and financed by the Erasmus + Higher Education capacity Building programme.

It is important to emphasize that the Project invited and embraced many more participants than the core of the consortium, in particular on Uzbek side, including the continuous support by ministries, accreditation committees and the Foundation This fact contributed a lot to the dissemination process and overall impact of the project.

##### **Effectiveness, Quality and Efficiency**

###### **An Overview of the Expected Deliverables and Outcomes**

The Project met all the planned expected deliverables and outcomes. Moreover, the eagerness to work on the identified topics and to support them with newly developed materials, resulted in a significant concentration of different documents and materials available to the partners, but also to much broader audience and academic community. In this process the role of various training courses and workshop played an important role. The red thread of development of doctoral education could be followed from the starting point of the first project, UZDOC, through the start of UZDOC 2.0, its kick-off meeting throughout all the activities till the end.

The change of legislation and development of new governmental structures as well as variable policies sometimes were hindering faster development, but nevertheless, facing the end of the project one has to notice a big and significant reform on the structural level, operational level, but also with a changed mind set related to doctoral education and its features.

Now, looking back, maybe it should be noted that the curve of development was not linear, the dynamic was changing over time, and a careful observer could easily notice that there was some kind of accumulation period and then a fast step forward.

Each activity was well planned, corresponded to the needs analysis, external experts (external to the consortium) were carefully selected and invited to contribute, all the materials, starting from programmes, to training material, summaries etc. were both issued in papers and put on the website. Website has been regularly updated and available, with the majority of information, to public. Visibility of the Project was

satisfactory. An issue that is still present is an issue of languages and translation of materials in both Uzbek and Russian.

Each activity was carried out with a special efforts put on discussion format and enabling all the participants to contribute in an open, friendly and collegial atmosphere. An added value, certainly, was a fact that broad scope of stakeholders had been participating in number of the activities, from students, both master and doctoral, to academic staff and academic leaders, administrative staff, and when possible and appropriate, relevant figures from governmental bodies and agencies had been present. They had been invited regularly and had different roles in the implemented activities. Special effort has been given to involve representatives from industry, but considering a relatively low development of that sector, this remained an area of work that needs further support.

Measurable indicators of progress prove that all the expected outcomes are present and that the project has been implemented adequately.

## **Impact**

The overall impact was very high and this was shared opinion by all the participants, and in particular by academic-research staff and doctoral candidates. Probably the best indicator of the achieved impact is the fact that regardless of change in government and some policies, doctoral education not only that stayed in the focus but gained more attention.

Having partners from almost all the Uzbekistan regions definitely contributed to better dissemination of new information and developments and faster and broader implementation. The impact factor has been also multiplied due to the fact some partners were the same one from the first project, while part of them were new partners. This facilitated faster development on one side, and embracing more people of different disciplines, different generations, different regions and different institutions the large audience will not be exposed only to the content and concepts, experience and research based evidence in the field, but indirectly, will contribute significantly in reaching a critical mass for implementing a good quality doctoral education.

It is important to say that many standards for good quality doctoral education as well as other aspects of regulations have been changed, in some cases even drastically, when compared to the previous documents and requirements.

Something that we might call a side effect is a noticeable change in communicational skills, readiness to participate in discussions, command of language and readiness to be engaged in English speaking communication to overall level of understanding the concept and the meritum.

The number of recommendations as well as suggestions for further improvement of the project management that resulted from the continuous participation in the majority of the Project activities have been regularly reflected and implemented within the Project management during the whole Project life-cycle, from the very beginning to the very end, including this post period of wrapping up some activities. The frequent presence, participation and possibility to observe the implementation of the Project

enabled on-site advices, comments, suggestions for the improvement. As much as it was rewarding to see continuous reflections and improvements in management of the project, it created a good positive climate among all the partners being able to notice a quick reactions with a shared aim to have a successful project with positive outcomes and deliverables that everyone would like to see and that are planned to have them from the very start. The written external reports as well as continuous on-site feed back has been taken very positively and became a motivating factor to have the best possible outcome in a given social and educational context.

Finally, the fact that Uzbek partners stressed number of times that they would like to continue the process of change of doctoral education and expressed interest to continue the Project by applying for the continuation is a more than a positive sign of the role and impact of UZDOC 2.0 project.

### **Sustainability**

This project can be rated as having a high probability to be sustainable. Regardless the number of challenges, it was a very powerful exercise in getting to better understand the European system of doctoral education, to understand different structures and policies and quality requirements. In particular, it has been impressive to observe how the ties among participants from Uzbek universities were becoming stronger. Their collaboration was expanding and they start sharing much more among themselves than that it has been traditionally the case. The virtual joined doctoral center played a very important role in this process because it brought all the partner universities together. Some forms of collaborations have been already developed and new activities, beyond the project content, have been initiated.

A further use of the Center as a shared structure will fortify and support new activities and new ways of collaboration, both on the structural and policy level, and research in the field that it could be translated back into practice related to different research disciplines. We can believe that the project will continue to grow, developing new initiatives, such as collaboration platforms and new projects. Enhancing research activities and supporting young researchers, it will create more opportunities in all forms of doctoral education, research, and career development.

### **Recommendations**

Uzbekistan is a fast developing country that has been challenged lately with a new government and country leadership, facts that definitely had an impact on educational reform as well. In a last couple of years the emphasis has been put on internationalisation process which is also an important perspective of doctoral education. In order to further develop the higher education system, in particular doctoral education, it would be very important to make the system more flexible and to support mobility of doctoral students. This would also over bridge an issue of research capacity, both in terms of human capacity as well as up-to-date equipment and enable to perform a research of better quality.

The system should look for different formats of doctoral education in order to increase doctoral students mobility and to support their research productivity.

Special care should be present in order to prepare students for different career paths, both within the educational sector, but in a real sector as well. To be prepared for such new tasks, higher education institutions need to pay more attention to train and provide new skills not only for academics, but also for a new generation of administrative staff.

In the framework of globalisation, one can expect that there will be more collaboration between Uzbekistan and European universities in a near future, and better understanding and acquaintance with both systems of HE will certainly make collaboration easier and more fruitful.

Further collaboration should also boost language proficiency and enable higher level of communication on all levels, and among all the stakeholders.

22 November 2019

Prof. Melita KOVACEVIC

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Melita Kovacevic', is written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned below the printed name.