



Co-funded by the  
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# ALIGN

ACHIEVING AND CHECKING THE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES AND  
QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

## ACHIEVEMENTS

2013-2017

ARMENIA RUSSIA UKRAINE

*"coming together is a beginning  
keeping together is progress  
working together is success"*

*- H. Ford*

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YEREVAN 2017



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## FOREWORD

Dear Colleagues,

ALIGN is one of the initiatives of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and a joint endeavor of thought leaders in the Armenian, Russian, Ukrainian and European Union higher education to move the reform agenda in a post-Soviet context to a new level of performance in line with the international trends. The team was guided by the accumulated experience of academic program development and operationalization in Europe while striving to come up with innovative techniques ensuring achievement of academic program alignment with the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) as well as measuring the quality of achieved alignment.



INQAAHE is a global (umbrella) network of quality assurance providers in higher education. It is the first ever network in the field established in 1991 to ensure a productive collaborative platform among the providers as well as promote research and innovation in quality assurance. Currently, INQAAHE has around 350 members, both external and internal quality assurance providers, coming from all over the world. The contribution of INQAAHE to the field of quality assurance in higher education is immense and it continues to successfully serve its noble mission.

The 4-year journey of the ALIGN project was full of learning into the post-Soviet system of academic program development and implementation, the accumulated experience of the EU HEIs as well as hard work of the whole consortium to develop

the most compatible and, in the meantime, legitimate techniques of assuring relevance of academic programs and the outcomes to the socio-economic needs of Armenia, Russia, and Ukraine.

It is our firm belief that the lessons learnt are invaluable, worthwhile, and useful for the academic community of partner countries and beyond. This is the contribution of the INQAAHE and the consortium of major stakeholders in concern. We do hope the experience accumulated within the frames of the project is useful for the higher education and quality assurance providers at large and guides them in their journey of enabling more efficient and diversified quality assurance provisions to meet a whole range of needs.

The INQAAHE team behind the initiation of the project were as follows: David Woodhouse, former president and one of the founders of INQAAHE, Carol Bobby, former president of INQAAHE, Iring Wasser, INQAAHE board member at the time of the project development. All the wise guidance received from INQAAHE during the project development and implementation was an invaluable input worth highest appreciation from all the stakeholders involved.

We also extend our highest possible appreciation to the European Commission and its Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, the National Erasmus + Offices in Armenia, Russia and Ukraine, the Ministries of Education, and the host institution YSULS, for the invaluable contribution to the project implementation and sustainable development of HE systems in Armenia, Russia and Ukraine.



Susanna Karakhanyan, PhD

*INQAAHE President, Project Author and Member of Coordination Team*

Dear Colleagues,



Achieving and Checking the Alignment between Academic Programmes and Qualifications Frameworks is a four-year project (2013-2017) made possible through generous contribution of the European Commission to the HE system development in Armenia, Russia and Ukraine through its Tempus initiative. For the last four years, Yerevan State University

of Linguistics and Social Sciences was honored to coordinate the project driven by the notion of enhancing the capacity of both higher education institutions and external quality assurance agencies to effectively manage the transformations in respective HE systems in line with the Bologna Principles.

The highlight of the project is development of mechanisms enabling achievement of alignment between the academic programmes and NQFs, which aims to guide the academic programme responsables in their developmental activities and the stakeholders at large in their process of ensuring relevance of HE provisions. It also endeavors to share the experience to employ quality assurance mechanisms measuring the extent of alignment per se. Unquestionably, the achievements of ALIGN are only the first steps into a major system level transformation phase. The HE leaders at all the levels would still need to take the new approaches to the next level of development and implementation to turn it into a culture of efficiency and relevance. The good sign is the first steps have been taken and the pilot evaluations within the frames of the ALIGN project demonstrate the first signs of success.

The project achievement would not have been possible without the invaluable support and help of the institutions and colleagues



from Armenia, Russia, Ukraine and European Union involved in the project consortium. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all for their valuable inputs, wise guidance, whole-hearted cooperation and constructive criticism throughout the project life-time.

I would also like to take this opportunity and convey my sincere gratitude to the European Commission and particularly the EACEA for the opportunity to make this project happen. The assistance provided by the teams from EACEA and national Erasmus + offices in Armenia, Russia and Ukraine have been fundamental for effective management and implementation of our project.

I do hope the experience we gained is useful for our peers and stakeholders and brings about sustainable development of HEIs in Armenia, Russia, Ukraine and beyond.

Luiza Militosyan, PhD

*YSULS, ALIGN Project Coordinator*

# ALIGN

ACHIEVING AND CHECKING THE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

## ALIGN: ACHIEVING AND CHECKING THE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

*543901-TEMPUS-1-2013-1-AM-TEMPUS-JPGR*

*TEMPUS ALIGN* is a multi-country project, under the Governance Reform, EACEA N 35/2012, 6th call National Priorities for Joint Projects action. The project runs from December, 2013 to 30 November, 2017 and is funded with the support of European Commission.

### *WIDER OBJECTIVE*

Enhance the intelligibility, consistency and transferability of qualifications through establishment of mechanisms for HEIs to achieve alignment of academic programs with NQFs and for QA agencies to check such alignment.

### *SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES INCLUDE:*

- To promote a better understanding of HEIs and EQA agencies of the role of QFs, their structure, as well as the differences between the different KINDS and LEVELS of student achievement,
- To build on the capacity of HEIs to write and assess learning outcomes that define the various types of student achieve-



ment,

- To build on the capacity of the HEIs to use the QF alignment to facilitate student transfer, joint qualifications and benchmarking,
- To enable the EQA agencies to check whether proposed learning outcomes and their assessment mechanisms match of QF descriptors at each level by establishing mechanisms for ensuring consistency of judgments across institutions.

### *THE PRINCIPLE OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS INCLUDE:*

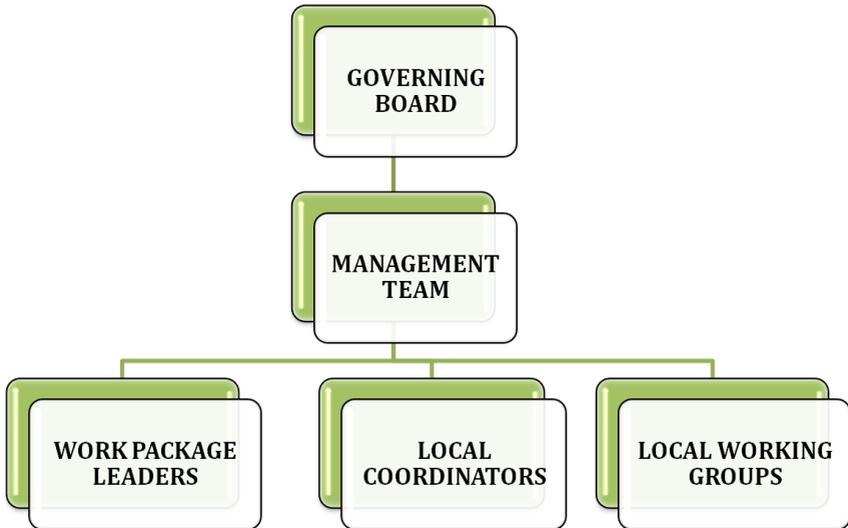
- Capacity building of HEIs and EQA Agencies to ensure achievement and checking alignment with NQFs;
- Development of mechanisms ensuring achievement of alignment with national qualifications frameworks (for HEIs);
- Development of mechanisms for checking alignment (for EQA);
- Revision of 2 study programs at each HEI and
- Pilot evaluation of the developed mechanisms;
- Adoption of the alignment tools at HEIs, QAA agency and governmental levels.
- The partner countries are from Eastern Neighboring Area–Armenia, Russia and Ukraine, which allows deeper understanding of the needs of developing systems and customization to specific institutions.

### *PROJECT MANAGEMENT*

The project management is conducted at two distinctive levels:

- operational and strategic management done by Governing Board and Management Team

- academic management conducted by lead partner for each work package.



## Governing Board

is to take care of the project implementation and is a decision-making body involving representatives from all partner institutions.

## Management team

including YSULS and YSAFA staff members manages day-to-day activities, technical, organizational and financial issues, takes care of keeping track records of all activities, financial records and prepares the reports to EACEA as well as carries out external audit for fact finding.



## ALIGN GOVERNING BOARD

Governing Board of TEMPUS ALIGN project is comprised of one representative from each partner institution. Governing board mainly deals with strategic issues and decision making during the project lifetime. Governing Board had several meetings during 2013-2017. Governing board (GB) and coordination meetings (CM) were organized at different partner institutions of ALIGN project.



## ALIGN PARTNERS

Overall 26 partners from three countries: Armenia, Russia and Ukraine were involved in the project including Higher Education Institutions, Quality Assurance Agencies, Students' Associations, Unions of Employers and Ministries of Education from each of the three countries. International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was a great support to the partnership of ALIGN for the developments of alignment approaches and concepts.

**Coordinator of the project:** *Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences*



### EU partners:

- ❖ Central and Eastern European Network of QA Agencies (CEENQA), Germany
- ❖ Bath Spa University (BSU), United Kingdom
- ❖ Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), Ireland
- ❖ KU Leuven (KU), Belgium
- ❖ Adam Mickiewicz University (AMU), Poland
- ❖ Koblenz-Landau University (UKOLD), Germany



### Armenian partners:

- ❖ State Academy of Fine Arts of Armenia (SAFAA)
- ❖ Yerevan State Medical University (YSMU)
- ❖ National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA)

- ❖ Armenian National Students' Association (ANSA)
- ❖ The Republican Union of Employers of Armenia (RUEA)
- ❖ Ministry of Education and Science of RA (MoES)



### Russian partners:

- ❖ Moscow State Pedagogical University (MSPU)
- ❖ Northern (Arctic) Federal University (NArFU)
- ❖ Volga State University of Technology (VolgaTech)
- ❖ The National Center of Public Professional Accreditation (NCPA)
- ❖ Russian Students Union (SUR)
- ❖ Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RUIE)
- ❖ Ministry of Education and Science in Russia (MESR)



### Ukrainian partners:

- ❖ T. Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (KNU)
- ❖ Khmelnytsky National University (KhNU)
- ❖ Sumy State University (SSU)
- ❖ Ukrainian Association of Students Self-Government (UASS)
- ❖ Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (UIIE)
- ❖ Ministry of Education and Science (MESU)

## MAIN ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The activities carried out in the reporting period contributed to the achievement of the project specific objectives in the following ways:

*Objective 1: Promoting a better understanding of HEIs and EQAs of the role of NQFs and SQFs, their structure as well as the differences between the different KINDS and LEVELS of student achievement*

To contribute to the achievement of the objective the following activities were undertaken:

✓ A core working group consisting of 13 members involving partner countries and EU partners was established. The major role of the WG was to achieve to a common understanding on the role of NQFs and SQFs as they are interpreted in different partner countries, achieve a common ground for developing a training package to meet the needs of different systems. As a result, the WG had a workshop in Dusseldorf from 5-7 May, 2014 to discuss the major issues related to capacity building of both HEIs and QA agencies with regards to alignment and measurement of alignment. The group agreed to produce a generic set of guidelines for HEIs and QA agencies based on which each country – Armenia, Russia and Ukraine – would develop their own, national level guidelines further to cascade it down to HEIs and QA agencies.

✓ The focus of the trainings was set on comparative studies of NQF operationalization, development of APs based on LOs, the role of NQFs and SQFs, their structure, differences between the kinds and levels of student achievement, writing and assessing LOs, student-centered teaching and learning, how to use the alignment to facilitate student mobility,

joint qualifications and benchmarking.

- As for the training for EQA agencies and external peers
- ✓ it focused on developing standards, evaluation tools and methods for checking alignment of LOs and their assessment methods with the QF descriptors at each level, development of mechanisms for ensuring consistency of judgments across institutions.

*Objective 2: Building on the capacity of HEIs to write and assess learning outcomes that define the various types of student achievement and promote student-centred teaching and learning;*

*Objective 3: Building on the capacity of the HEIs to use the QF alignment to facilitate student transfer, joint qualifications and benchmarking;*

Objectives 2 and 3 were tackled simultaneously. Thus, the following activities have been carried out:

- Training hosted by KU Leuven, 28 September- 4 October 2014. The topic of the training evolved around different concepts related to alignment and measurement of alignment;
- ✓ Training, hosted by IADT, 7-12 December 2014. The training targeted the actual implementation of the draft guidelines which were already available.
- ✓ Considering all the HEIs already had QA units/Effectiveness measurement units, a revision of the functions was made to include functions related to an on-going investigation of establishing alignment with the NQF and relevance with the market needs. With the aim development/revision of regulatory framework for the unit functioning, and identification of the necessary equipment was undertaken.
- ✓ In-house trainings of the university staff to integrate and implement the developed policies and procedures, standards and indicators were delivered in September-November 2015. EU partners and HEIs representatives conducted



the in-house trainings jointly. With this purpose 9 EU experts travelled to Armenian, Russian and Ukrainian universities respectively for sharing their expertise.

*Objective 4: Enabling the EQAs to check whether proposed learning outcomes and their assessment mechanisms match the QF descriptors at each level by establishing mechanisms for ensuring consistency of judgments across institutions.*

As a result of the two trainings two tier working groups were established in each country – 1 national and 4 institutional (QA Agency and 3 HEIs per country) - and each partner institution and QA agency was assigned an EU partner to support with further refinement of the generic guidelines to the national and local needs. Currently the groups are finalizing the development of methodology for alignment and measurement of alignment for institutional and external evaluation purposes. The groups are meeting twice per months at the national level and weekly at the institutional level to develop the methodology.

Further, working groups per each HEI carried out self-assessment of the 2 identified academic programs to be revised based on the guidelines (both BA and MA programs). The revised programs were externally evaluated by EU and local experts at the partner universities and accordingly recommendations were provided for assuring sustainability of alignment of the programs and learning.

## CAPACITY BUILDING



### *Workshop on Training kit development (May 2014, Dusseldorf)*

The General Working Group members met to work and refine the packages for the upcoming two trainings for HEIs and EQAs. The participants were divided into two working groups, during which discussed and presented some suggestions in order to design the guidelines.



### *Training for HEIs (September 2014, Ghent)*

The training mainly aimed at presenting the mechanisms of ensuring the alignment of academic programs with NQFs and enabling Armenian, Russian and Ukrainian partners to develop their understanding of key principles and good practices for program design.



### *Training for QA Agencies (December 2014, Dublin)*

The Armenian, Russian and Ukrainian partners actively participated in the training aimed at the development of skills and competences to write learning outcomes for a program and a module and to design assessment for learning outcomes.



### *In-house trainings in Ukraine (June, 2015), Russia (September, 2015), Armenia (November, 2015)*

A group of ALIGN EU experts conducted in-house trainings for the staff members of partner HEIs in Ukraine, Russia and Armenia aimed at the development of professional skills and competences among the university staff members.



### *Regular local in-house trainings by HEI ALIGN working groups*

ALIGN project working groups at each HEI in Armenia, Russian and Ukraine regularly conducted in-house trainings at their universities to share experience and regularly inform about the activities and achievements within the framework of the project.

# ALIGNMENT: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES FOR IMPROVEMENT

## AIM OF ALIGNMENT

Within the frames of ALIGN project, the consortium members joint their efforts to develop mechanisms enabling alignment of academic programmes with the National and, therefore, European Qualifications Frameworks.

Ensuring alignment and measurement of alignment with the NQFs, in principle, evolves around the following key elements: student-centred curricula based on learning outcomes; teaching, learning and assessment methods; credit accumulation and mobility, award of qualifications; internal and external quality assurance mechanisms for measuring achievement of the alignment. However, experience gained throughout the project has also revealed tacit aspects of alignment and its measurement approaches based on such challenges for HE and QA providers: technical changes (as the use of common nomenclature for awards); conceptual changes (as in understanding student- centered learning); and cultural changes (as in the developing a university community in which everyone has a role and responsibility for maintaining and improving the quality of courses). However, the exercise turned to be beneficial in many regards as elaborated below.

## THE BENEFITS OF ALIGNMENT PER PARTNER COUNTRY

### ARMENIA<sup>1</sup>

The benefits for HEIs include, but are not limited to the following:

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<sup>1</sup> The detailed information can be found in “THE NATIONAL REPORT FOR ARMENIA”

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*For students:*

- courses and qualifications that are relevant to the market needs and delivery and quality assurance ensure recognition of qualifications locally, regionally and internationally;
- the content of the academic programmes are aligned with the socio-economic needs;
- improvement of students' assessment;
- greater opportunities for national/international exchange and mobility;
- a stronger focus on increasing student learning opportunities, enriching student learning experiences, and raising the value of learning outcomes;
- a greater understanding and international recognition of achievements (in academia, professions and labor market);
- a central role in the design of their courses and learning environment.

*For staff:*

- confidence that their teaching activities are based upon educational principles and practices that are well founded in education research;
- cooperation of faculty members and employers to ensure relevance of the newly developed/revised programmes;
- quality assurance mechanisms ensuring achievement and measurement of alignment with the NQF;
- greater opportunity for international mobility and exchange;
- greater support for continuous professional development, and recognition of professionalism;
- opportunities to innovate in teaching and learning and assessment practices.

*For HEIs:*

- ability to internationalize the HEI community, through staff and student recruitment, internationalization of the curriculum, joint research projects, etc.;
- increased efficiency and effectiveness (educationally and economically) in the management and delivery of the core business of the HEI;
- greater ethical security in all teaching learning and student assessment processes, based upon transparency and colleague responsibility for quality;
- increased public and employer confidence in the work, value and credibility of the higher education provisions.

## RUSSIA<sup>2</sup>

The overarching benefit of ALIGN is the emphasis on student-centered learning (SCL) principles in the study process of Russian HEIs. Even though the concept of SCL was documented in 2015 (the European Standards and Guidelines, the Yerevan Communiqué, the ECTS Users' Guide), the results of ALIGN are actually the first steps in the implementation granting the institutions with a freedom in making their own policy adjustments and program implementation design.

Due to the project, orientation at achieving LOs enhanced the involvement of the representatives from the industry, and student unions to the teaching and curriculum design process. Students are included in expert review panels evaluating academic programmes.

The benefits for HEIs include, but are not limited to the following: \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>2</sup>The detailed information can be found in "THE NATIONAL REPORT FOR RUSSIA"