



Mreža centara za obrazovne politike

Network of Education Policy Centers

Center for Innovations in Education

Case Study on National Testing Centers Azerbaijan

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1. The Policy Rationale for establishing the NTC

- *What was the situation like in your country regarding the three objectives before the implementation of the NTC?*

Institutionalization of fair and transparent student assessments: The admissions to universities were implemented by the admissions committees within each respective university or institution. Most of the exams were done orally and only some written. The admissions committees mainly consisted of the faculty members in that institution. Fairness was subjective to each member's opinion and transparency was a big issue. Besides, each committee member had its own "candidate(s)" among applicants and in many cases committee members supported each other's candidate as they were colleagues at the same faculty. There was not a single, independent institution overseeing student admissions.

Use of assessments for the improvement of quality of teaching: There was no mechanism of working with statistics and providing regular feedback about the results of the examinations. Students used private tutors to prepare for the exams, which is still a widespread practice. Furthermore, exams did not exactly reflect high school curriculum.

Achievement of equity: Assessment instruments were not free from bias as each examiner brought a different perspective and set of interests. It was convenient to reach out to individual committee members in different institutions as they were easy to bribe. The grades during the high school years and receiving a red diploma (honors diploma) allowed the high school graduates to take one test, get "5" (an "A") and enter a university. In case of getting "4" (a "B"), the student would be required to take two exams. Consequently, this led to bribery in high schools.

- *What institutions and what actors were responsible for assessment and examinations?*

Each higher education institution conducted its own entrance exams and announced the results.

- *How transparent and fair was the system?*

Public was very suspicious about the members of the admission committees and the criteria they used for assessment. However in general terms, people believed that if they study well, they can get admitted to universities. This also varied from one university to another and among different programs within one university. For instance, Medical University, Economic University and the programs of Baku State University, such as Law and Oriental Studies were considered quite prestigious and very difficult to enter.

- *Were there any corruptive practices in education and how they were manifested?*

Corruptive practices were present in admissions procedure and in examinations throughout the university years as the grades were important. Corruption would take place in conventional ways, as well as the acquaintances were used to affect the grades.

- *Which of them were linked to assessment and examinations? What were the reasons for those conditions and practices in the country?*

Being a member of admission committee at a university provided additional source of prestige and income for university teachers. Teachers also benefited from being tutors for the exam preparation. Higher education diploma (not education itself!) was considered as an intrinsic part of successful future.

- *What led to the decision to establish the National Testing Centre?*

Chaotic procedure for entrance exams and general mistrust about the system created the need for the establishment of a centralized testing system. Only centralized system could fight corruption, difference of procedures in different universities and create a transparent system for the country. Also, this could lead to equal assessment and give students more choice at the time of their admission.

- *Who were the actors that were involved in the establishment of the NTC?*

The NTC was established under the President of Azerbaijan Republic and Office of President's Education department was active in the creation and strengthening of the NTC. This is a state body, independent from Ministry of Education, which governs all the stages of entrance examinations to higher educational institutions. Ministry of Education had almost no participation in this process.

- *How involved were teachers in the formulation of the policy? What objectives did they hold for it?*

The teachers were rather involved in developing examination programs and test items used in entrance examinations. They did not participate directly in the formulation of the policy.

- *What actors actively resisted the establishment of the NTC? Why? To what effect?*

There was not a massive open opposition as the NTC was established by the President. But there was a very active and systematic hidden resistance from the administrative staff of Ministry of Education and universities as they were not involved in the establishment of the new institution. This meant a great loss of illegal earnings for them. Furthermore, the creation of a new institution would mean that Ministry of Education would have no control over admissions and its work would be assessed by an external organization. NTC tries to connect the low testing scores with the low level of high school education, which Ministry of Education does not accept. On the other hand, Ministry of Education criticizes the NTC for designing questions in a way that they do not reflect the high school curriculum, which NTC actively denies. As a result, this creates tension between two organizations. Currently, Ministry of Education unsuccessfully tries to design high school graduation exams that could substitute the entrance exams to BA degrees.

- *Please describe the process of establishing the NTC in your country.*

The NTC was established by a Presidential Decree in 1992. The NTC was established as an independent public institution which is required to report only to the President. The NTC has the right to conduct admission to all higher education institutions and degrees for both Azerbaijanis and International students. The first admission exam by NTC was conducted in 1992.

- *What were the obstacles, if any, in establishing the centre?*

As already mentioned, the NTC was established with a Presidential Decree and therefore, this establishment did not face serious obstacles. But there were a number of problems during the first year of administering the centralized multiple-choice testing in country. The test announcement was made in late June and the test took place on November 18. There was only one test set, the questions of which were developed in an area well-protected by the security services. The students were allowed to choose up to 5 specialties, which were all tuition-free, and their answer sheets were sent to Turkey as there wasn't an optic scanner to scan the answer sheets in Azerbaijan. The optic scanners were introduced in Azerbaijan the next year.

The students had to sit for 6-7 hours to take the test, waiting at least 3 hours for the actual test to take place in cold classrooms. The scores, which were quite low in the first year, were announced in mid-December and the classes started very late in January of 1993, and the students entering during the first year of admissions had a shorter, 4.5 years of study. 1992 was also the last year that university studies lasted for 5 years. The following year, the two-tier system, which included a 4-year Bachelor and 2-year Master programs was introduced.

- *How was the initial impact of the NTC on the changes of the prior conditions and practices?*

At first, the public was unprepared to a new type of testing. Over the years, NTC has been transparent, responsive, and therefore gained significant popular support. This new system also creates equal opportunities for all. However, the high school students are very focused in private tutoring and teaching is shaped according to the entrance tests. Please see the forthcoming sections where these are discussed in more details.

2. Legal and institutional arrangements

- *What is the legal basis for the establishment of the assessment centre?*

NTC was established with the Presidential Decree in 1992. The Statute of the NTC was approved by the Presidential Decree dated October 27, 1992. There have been some changes to the Statute since then and the current Statute was approved by the Decree dated April 6, 2005.

- *What laws and bylaws govern the position and the work of NTC*

The Law on Education and various other laws of Azerbaijan , Presidential decrees and orders, orders and decrees of the Cabinet of Ministers, the Statute of the NTC.

- *When was NTC established and what assessment did it take since?*

The NTC of the Republic of Azerbaijan was founded in transition period (from Soviet to National political system) in 1992. The NTC is responsible for providing university entrance examinations and students admission for higher (public, private and military) schools and colleges. NTC conducts entrance exams for BA degrees in the country since 1992 and for MA degrees since 2005. The exams are conducted for Azerbaijani and Georgian citizens (who are mostly ethnic Azerbaijanis) only. International students' admission is mostly done by each individual higher education institution. Also, NTC is not currently regulating admission to PhD degrees in the country yet. The broad purpose of the NTC is to advance quality and help ensure equity in education by providing fair and valid assessments, research and related services.

- *What is the position of the NTC in the national education system?*

NTC is not under any executive branch of the Government. The head and deputy head of NTC are appointed by the President and the institution reports only to the President. Therefore, the institution is completely independent from the Ministry of Education, which is the main body of government responsible for education issues. However, NTC covers admission to all BA and MA degrees in the country. NTC works closely with university and high school teachers during the preparation of tests and checking the results.

- *What are, according to the law, responsibilities of the NTC?*

The main tasks of the NTC are the following:

- To carry out centralized students admission to all levels of higher education and vocational schools in the Republic of Azerbaijan regardless of their legal structure and property form;
- To facilitate admission of Azerbaijani citizens to higher education institutions abroad and the admission of foreign citizens and stateless people to higher education institutions in Azerbaijan according to the intergovernmental agreements;
- To create, develop and efficiently use the digital database of students and graduates;

- To accomplish other tasks in compliance with the legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan.
- *What are relationships with other educational authorities and institutions (as appropriate, regarding transparency of assessment, improvement of teaching and access to education. Please explain):*
 - *Ministry, responsible for education:* Each year NTC publishes advanced statistics of admission examinations and sends them to all bodies and persons who are involved in high school education. These statistics are also available through the web (tqdk.gov.az and mekteb.edu.az). Following this publication NTC staff is appointed to provide regional seminars where they introduce and explain examination results of applicants representing that particular region to authorities who are involved in education. These seminars are provided with the participation of authorities from Ministry of Education and Regional Education Department. Each year NTC receives the plan determining the number of seats available for each specialty throughout the universities and vocational schools in the country. This plan is worked out together by the Ministry of Education and the Cabinet of Ministers. High school, BA and MA diplomas are issued by the Ministry of Education. Applicants without appropriate diploma or its equivalent are not allowed to take entrance examinations provided by NTC. On the other hand, NTC requires that nobody who has not passed through its exams is given a diploma as he or she is considered to be admitted illegally.
 - *Board of education/City/Rayon Education Departments:* NTC regularly has meetings in large cities before and after the exams to discuss the testing results. Each city/rayon education department gets an aggregate and school-by-school report cards following the examinations.
 - *Pedagogical institutes:* There isn't a separate formal relationship with pedagogical or pre-service teacher training institutions.
 - *Schools:* NTC organizes seminars for high school teachers in which they are trained to write high quality test items. In these seminars test items used in recent entrance examinations and newly introduced test item forms are also discussed from all aspects. Starting from 2010 teachers who live outside Baku and thus have no access to seminars provided by NTC are given an opportunity to participate in these seminars via video conference. NTC works with high school and university teachers during the test preparation for entrance exams. In order to provide transparency, involved teachers are kept at special facilities of NTC for several days before the exam. The exam results are assessed and detailed statistics are made publicly available after all the exams are over. These statistics are used to provide feedback to high school teachers. Feedback is given in several ways: the response rate of applicants to different question types in each subject is assessed; each region and each school is assessed separately. As a result, the rankings of the best high schools and universities in the country are given.

- *Regional and local authorities:* NTC started online application in the country for the first time in 2007. This could raise some concerns for equity as the applicants in the city and in the region did not have the same level of access to the Internet. In order to solve this issue, NTC worked with local and regional authorities. As a result, all post offices throughout the country offered free Internet access to all applicants who wanted to apply for countrywide examinations. Also, NTC administers the tests in some major cities of Azerbaijan, which are coordinated efficiently with the local authorities.
- *Higher education institutions:* NTC works with university teachers in preparation for the BA and MA entrance exams. The separate programs for the exams and questions are prepared and agreed with relevant faculty at universities. Currently the admission to MA programs in the country is conducted through 68 different specialty tests. NTC is working with higher education institutions in order to decrease the number of specialty tests. Also, under the Presidential decree earlier this year, the universities are required to enter the data on their students and graduates to the database to be facilitated by the NTC.

- *Are relations with those institutions formal or informal? Please explain*

Relations with Ministry of Education are formal and mostly carried out through official correspondence. Although NTC tries to work with schools to improve the quality of teaching, the schools are not always responsive towards the findings of NTC's exams. The reason could be that the schools are operating under the Ministry of Education and lack their independent initiative. The same problem occurs when NTC tries to work with universities on MA exams as the universities are reluctant to cooperate.

- *What are responsibilities of different educational authorities and institutions in the area of assessment?*

In addition to the NTC, the Ministry of Education is the only agency that carries out various assessments. These include international tests and studies (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS), national assessments, and school-based assessments. The MoE has a separate unit on Assessment and Monitoring, which has been established in 2006 and extended very recently.

- *What was the impact of the establishment of the NTC on:*
 - *Transparency and fairness of assessment*
 - *Improvement of teaching (and learning)*
 - *Equity*

Please see the sections below where the impact of establishing the NTC is explained.

- *Did external secondary school leaving examination (if implemented) replace entrance examinations at the HE institutions? To what extent?*

Before the application of testing system in 1992, the school-leaving examination affected the entrance examinations. If a student graduated from a high school with all excellent marks from school leaving exams, that student was required to take only one exam for the university. However, if this exam was not marked as excellent, then that student was required to take 3 exams together with the others. After the centralized testing was introduced, the secondary school leaving examination lost its importance in terms of university admissions. These two exams are totally different. Secondary school exam is taken by students for getting a diploma, which they need for graduating from a high school and applying to undergraduate entrance exams. The grades reflected in the secondary school transcript do not influence the result of entrance examination. It just proves that applicant has graduated from secondary school. However, there is one exception. If two applicants who apply for the same specialty score the same during a university entrance exam, then the high school leaving examination grades are used.

- *What is the relationship between internal, school based and external assessment?*

As it was mentioned above, they do not affect each other except when the scores are the same. Also, the final high school grades are used during the preparation of statistics. NTC determines the correlation between the high school grades and the level of success at university entrance exams.

- *Did introduction of external assessment influence or change the school based assessment?*

The introduction of external assessment does not seem to have significantly influenced the internal assessment system at schools. During the last two years, the Ministry of Education has tried to reform the high school leaving examinations by introducing a unified system to all schools in the country. The Ministry is envisioning offering these exams as a substitute for university entrance exams in future.

- *Are there any old conditions and practices that continued after the establishment of the NTC?*

After the establishment of NTC, some old conditions and practices related to BA admissions continued for some years. For instance, some private universities also did their own admissions in addition to the NTC exams, and artificially increased the number of their students. Also, there were a number of non-transparent cases related to the MA admissions and as a result, the NTC was charged with conducting centralized exams for graduate programs in the country since 2005. Moreover, NTC still does not facilitate the admission of international students to local universities, a practice that is not transparent most of the time.

- *What are the anti-corruption measures implemented by NTC?*
 - Test questions are chosen from a large pool of questions several days before the exams under the supervision of State Security Service (SSS). Those who select

the questions are kept in NTC's closed facilities for several days before the exam and are released only after the exam takes place;

- Test books are offered in 4 different test sets;
- Buildings are rented for the exams. These facilities are closed to all visitors one day before the exams and only special security staff is present in those buildings;

Description of a regular examination day:

7.00 question booklets and answer cards are taken from the building of the NTC in sealed sacks and delivered to the examination venues under the supervision of SSS officers.

9.00 The examinees are let into the rooms after they are searched for having communication tools and assistant material. In the rooms they are instructed on rules of conduct.

11.00 Exam starts. Depending on the number of examinees, one or two persons carry out supervision in each room, which in their turn act under the control of examination officers.

14.00 The Exam ends. The examination officer makes sure completion of all formalities, signing of protocols by room supervisors and takes answer cards in sealed packs together with SSS officer to the NTC's building and submits to the responsible person. All answer cards are kept in sealed rooms under guard until processing starts.

- Everybody entering the exam building on the day of exam is checked at the entrance. No mobile phones, electronic equipment is allowed. Water bottles are required to have no label on them;
 - Students are allowed to take out their test books after the exams;
 - NTC staff members and subject experts are live on TV on the day of exam explaining the answers to questions and available to answer phone calls and e-mails from the public;
 - The scores are announced within 2-3 days after the exams;
 - There are two days after all exams are over for appeal;
 - Scores are read at NTC by optic readers, no human factor is involved.
- *Are there any aspects of the NTC and its work that unintentionally contributed to corruption?*

The university entrance exams have become a very important step in most people's life in the country. The OSI-funded private tutoring studies recently confirmed that an absolute majority of high school students prepare for these exams with special tutors. Therefore, they tend to miss their high school classes and spend most of their time with tutors preparing for the exams. This leads to corruption in high schools where students bribe school directors so that they can miss classes while staying enrolled at school.

- *Were there any situations when the work of the NTC was questioned for integrity (e.g. leaking of tests, information, and possible corruption)? How were those situations solved?*

There have been some scandals related to NTC's activities. Once, the test questions were stolen during printing and few students managed to take through the correct answers to questions printed on the label of a bottle. This fact was discovered by NTC and all people involved in it were severely punished. After this incident, the applicants are allowed only to take in to the exam

still water bottles with no label. On another incident, one person tried to use a false ID and take the exam for another person. This was also discovered and punished. Apart from these, there have been cases in which certain people tried to mislead parents of applicants by presenting themselves as NTC's employees and trying to get some money for placing their children at universities. NTC's official statements helped people to understand that it is not right to trust such people.

3. Organization Structure of test centers& Governance

- *What is the organizational structure of the NTC? Please provide a scheme*

a) Central Apparatus

- Leadership
- Information and technological support department
- Exam Administration department
- Department of work with test materials
- Department of test data bank and expertise
- Accounting and management department

b) Regional Offices

c) Scientific-methodological Subject Seminars and Expert Committees within NTC

- *What departments/units are in the organization? What is their role?*

a) Central Apparatus

Leadership:

- The Head
- The Deputy Head
- Head of Apparatus

Information and technology support department:

- Sector of technological support of exams
- Sector for the development of information databases
- Sector of information database maintenance and work with electronic archive

Exam Administration department:

- Sector of organizational and methodological support and training
- Sector of exams organization and management

Department of work with test materials:

- Sector of processing high school test materials
- Sector of processing higher education test materials
- Sector for the special skills examination
- Sector of statistical research, scientific planning and innovations

Department of test data bank and expertise

Accounting and organizational department

- Accounting
- Material and technical logistics sector
- HR and confidential regime support sector

Sector of work with documents and public relations

b) Regional Offices:

Nakhchivan regional office
Ganja regional office
Shaki regional office
Guba regional office
Lenkeran regional office

c) Scientific-methodological Subject Seminars and Expert Committees within NTC

- *Are there different departments for different assessments, e.g. primary education, secondary education?*

Department of work with test materials is divided into four sectors. Each of the first three sectors is responsible for test materials at different levels, i.e. high school materials, Higher Education materials and special skills examinations. But technological and administrative support is provided from the same departments for all exams. Since the NTC deals with undergraduate and graduate exams, it doesn't have departments on primary or secondary education.

- *What is the size of the organization and individual departments? Does number of experts meet the needs of that department?*

The organization works in cycles and during the exam period it gets really busy. The organization is understaffed and experts who are involved in test making are mostly external. They are from the local high schools, universities, and scientific centres. Some MA exams include essay writing. Shortage of experts is especially visible when these essays are checked. Essays are checked by 2 experts and sometimes the grades of two different experts differ very much. In these cases, the essay is given to a third expert.

- *Which aspects of structure have a direct effect on achievement of objectives?*

Implementation of latest information technologies professionally helps to fully automate examination process and eliminate human factor and thus, subjectivity and corruption. Advanced statistical research of entrance examinations gives feedback for teaching in each subject area. The subject based seminars supplied with this statistical material help to develop each area separately. Regional offices provide the equity for all applicants across the country.

- *Which aspects of structure are merely necessary to carry out the assessments?*

All departments have special role in the assessment process. However some are especially important. Most part of the process is computerised, therefore IT support is essential. The placement is also automated and a single mistake in technology can damage the reputation of the NTC. All of the software used to automate examination process has been developed in-house by NTC staff. Departments that work with test preparation and organizational matters are also essential as they provide for the core of the assessment process. Subject-based seminars also

have important role in the assessment process because these improve each subject area, helps to introduce new type of questions and assess the challenges.

- *Is there cooperation and coordination between different department units?*

The fact that the organization is understaffed makes the cooperation between departments necessary. Usually the promotion and registration for the exams, as well as their conduct and announcing the results go smooth. This also proves that there is successful cooperation between department units.

- *Is the number of staff of the NTC enough for activities that have to be carried out?*

The staff members manage the process smoothly; however this requires intensive work schedules during the main cycle.

- *Were the staffing procedures of the NTC transparent? Were there any special requirements for professional staff responsible for assessment?*

The staff members attend regular trainings before the exams according to the role they play in the process. There is cooperation with other similar organizations abroad and the experience is regularly shared. Also, NTC has hired new staff under the requirements of recently approved Public Service regulations, under which the staffing procedures are available publicly. Under these regulations, NTC hires people through rigorous selection procedures.

- *Where did employees of the NTC come from? Were they taken over from another institution?*

The employees of NTC mainly come from different universities, schools or from different educational organizations.

- *Were experience in assessment and examination a condition for employment?*

There is no equivalent institution in the country; therefore it is hard to find people in the country who have previous experience in a similar field.

- *What trainings did the professional staff of NTC get? How much training?*

NTC staff do not get professional development trainings, however, they have introduced Civil Service Pre-Selection Test (CSPT) to apply minimum proficiency requirement in recruitment of staff for public organization. Also NTC is an active member of International Association for Education Assessment (IAEA). On September 2007 and May 2009 NTC organized international conference of IAEA in Baku.

- *Does NTC have external collaborators? On what basis do they select them?*

NTC involves teachers from high schools, universities and other educational institutions as test item authors and experts to prepare the database of test items. It also works with relevant institutions during the preparation and conduct of skills examinations as these are done for arts, music, architecture, and PE. These external collaborators are selected on the base of expertise in relevant field. The list of these external experts is available to public. NTC also has a database of exam building officers (managers) (EBO) and exam room supervisors (ERS). These people are mainly from schools, universities and other education-related organizations. A day before the examination NTC leadership selects EBOs and ERSs from this database and hires them during examination. These collaborators are selected on the basis of their experience and performance in ruling of examination. ERSs are selected among candidates who are NOT the experts in subjects used in examination. Having a close relative taking examination is also considered during selection of EBOs and ERSs.

- *Does NTC have research and development unit? If so, what kind of research and development are they carrying out? Please provide some examples.*

NTC has an extensive research unit. The results of examinations are assessed and detailed statistics are worked out at the end of each cycle. These findings are made public. The statistics include the results of entrance examinations to vocational schools, BA degrees, and MA degrees. The report includes:

- Examination results (total and subject-based) by regions
- Comparison of examination results of urban and rural regions
- Comparison of examination results in different years
- Gender aspects of examination results
- Most popular universities and specialties
- Competition for different (in particular, oil-related) specialties, etc.

Based on these statistics NTC management also provides recommendations for urgent measures as well as long- term reforms.

- *Is the management of NTC also involved in expert work or is its role pure management?*

NTC management is not directly involved in test item expertise. This is done by external experts only. But these experts work under the coordinator who represents NTC.

- *What are the future plans for staffing the NTC?*
- *What is the governing body of the NTC?*

NTC is governed by an internal Board. Presidential decree approves the members of the Board. The head, deputy head and other heads of departments are normally members of the Board. The Board meets regularly to decide the issues on the agenda. The meetings are valid when at least half of the members are present. The decisions are made based on the simple majority voting. Depending on the topic, representatives of other state agencies may be invited to the meetings. NTC may also establish Advisory Council to decide on certain issues and may invite independent experts and representatives of other state agencies.

- *Who nominates their members?*
- *What are procedures for their nomination?*
- *Which are requirements for becoming a member of the governing board?*
- *To whom is the governing board responsible?*
- *What is term of members of governing board?*
- *What is the role of the governing board?*
- *What are the responsibilities of the governing board?*
- *What is the relationship between the governing board and the management of the NTC?*
- *Does the governing board depend on the daily politics?*

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan approves the members of the Board with a decree. The management of the NTC is usually part of the Board. There is no external governing board.

4. Operations (exams and tests)

- *What types of assessment does the NTC in your country carry out?*

NTC administers centralized entrance examinations to bachelor and master degree programs to all public and private schools, to vocational schools in the country, as well as entrance tests to selected government agencies.

- *How are the reliability and the validity of the assessment/examination assured?*

SSAC provides entrance examination to both Bachelor and Master degree programs, as well as to some government agencies. Applicants to Master degree programs are mainly one-time applicants to Bachelor degree programs. The significant part of applicants to government agencies are one-time applicants to Bachelor or Master Degree programs. Research shows that there is a high correlation between the examination results of the same applicant. This means that, for instance, a person who scores high in Bachelor degree entrance examination also studies well and scores high in Master degree entrance examination.

- *How transparent is assessment?*

The anti-corruption measures indicated in Part 2 show how transparent the system is set up. Overall, the public trusts the NTC's procedures and believes that it is a transparent institution.

- *Are materials and information regarding assessment easily available? How?*

1. Information is available in NTC's website. WebPages are updated regularly and include all necessary information about assessment procedures, application, FAQ, news, information about NTC, etc. During the exam period, specially designed pages operate that allows students to apply online, buy tickets to trial tests online, view maps of each facility where the exam will be conducted, calculate their scores, check their results, and contact the NTC. Also, information about the opportunities to study abroad is also available online.
2. Information is available through NTC's publications. Separate series for BA and MA exams and the results of statistical research are published throughout the year. These publications provide the program to prepare for the tests, test dates, samples of test and application forms, instructions for application, list of available universities and specialties, and the results of research done by the institution.
3. Applicants can also learn their exam scores via SMS. NTC cooperates with one of local phone companies that allows applicants to send their unique ID number via SMS and receive their results back.
4. After each BA exam, the representatives of NTC are live on one of the local TV channels with their subject experts. They go through the hardest or most controversial questions, explain the answers. Anybody may call or e-mail their questions and have live connection with NTC's representatives.
5. NTC representatives, especially the head of institution regularly gives press conferences to local media and reports about the results of its work.

- *Are NTC documents (regulations and other acts) publicly available?*

All documents of NTC are available to public online or from the publications.

- *Is information regarding assessment results public (aggregate data)?*

The public is informed about the total results of the exams. Overall scores, the number of people scoring on certain levels, the numbers of admitted and failed people in numbers and percentages are announced.

- *Are results for individual students available to individuals? Do they have the right for seeing their scripts and checking marking for possible errors?*

Each student can learn his or her results via SMS, online, or through publications by using the unique ID number. After all exams are over for certain level of education (BA or MA), usually 2-3 days are given for appeals where students may see their scripts and answer sheets.

- *Do appeal procedures exist?*

Yes as was mentioned above the student is given time for appeal procedure after exam.

- *Are reports at the end of assessment periods/sessions available?*

The reports are published and are available online.

- *What are subjects that are assessed on different levels of education?*

Bachelor: Azerbaijani Language, Literature, Azerbaijani history, World history, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Foreign language (English, German, French, Russian, Arabic, Farsi). The BA exams are conducted in 4 groups and students applying to each group are tested on certain subjects.

Master: Logic, Foreign Language and IT (in some places math) skills are tested in the first round. The second round is different for 68 different programs and each program has individual specialty program.

Government agencies: Depending on the type of the government agency, the question types and subjects vary.

- *Describe the impact of the testing methods on teachers and teaching.*

Since preparation programs are published at the beginning of each academic year, the students use those programs to prepare for the tests. Students mostly prepare using private tutors. Teachings by these tutors are directly related to test programs and test question types. During the last 2-3 years of high school students mainly focus on test preparation. As a result, the attendance becomes very poor in high schools. High school teachers do private tutoring and spend most of

their time and energy for their private students. This affects the quality of teaching at high schools. University teachers also prepare students for BA and MA exams.

- *Do teachers teach to the test? Is there any evidence available?*

The high school teachers do private tutoring and prepare students for the tests. There is unofficially agreed way of teaching for the tests that most of the teachers use. University teachers do tutoring for MA exams.

- *What is the influence of assessment on the curriculum?*

Although it is one of the purposes of NTC to improve the quality of teaching in Azerbaijani high schools, the Ministry of Education most of the time ignores recommendations given by NTC and becomes defensive in return to its criticism.

- *What levels of knowledge are assessed in the assessments/examinations that NTC is running?*

The NTC entrance test assesses an average level of the students' knowledge in certain subject areas that are taught at high school or university. The test questions include easy, medium, and difficult questions.

- *Are there instruments that are assessing higher levels of knowledge?*

The exams include difficult questions as well. But there is no proficiency exam for specific specialties (like lawyers, doctors, etc.)

- *Are the data NTC generates available and used by other agencies in the system or research organizations?*

The data of NTC is available on its web site or publications. Mostly NGO or media uses this data. The level of usage by the Ministry of Education is very low.

- *How is access to NTC data regulated?*

Certain information is public and widely available. However, the confidential information about applicants, test questions, etc. is not available. Certain institutions may request the scores of certain people, but this requires special permission.

- *What are the effects of NTC on improving learning outcomes?*

NTC tries to introduce new type of questions each year. The main purpose is to avoid questions that require learning data by heart and do not need analytical thinking. Although these changes in questions sometimes are met by public with criticism, it affects the learning outcomes positively.

- *Does NTC have an effect on teaching practices, which might contribute to improved learning outcomes?*

NTC conducts seminars with teachers, but cannot affect the curriculum. It also publishes supplementary tutorials to schoolbooks.

- *What kind of support for teachers does NTC provide?*

As mentioned above, NTC organizes subject seminars throughout the year which are open to everybody. In these seminars outstanding teachers from high schools and universities share their knowledge in particular subject area. These seminars are also good platforms for interchange of new ideas and approaches in teaching. In seminars test items used in entrance examinations are discussed in the light of statistical data obtained for that test item, which is very useful for the development of high quality test items. Newly introduced test items are also put on the table. This gives a great opportunity for seminar attendants to prepare their students for entrance examinations. NTC also assists teachers with its publications.

- *Does NTC organize trainings on assessment for teachers?*

Please, see above answer.

- *How does the assessment contribute to the three objectives:*
 - *Transparency and fairness of assessment*
 - *Improvement of teaching (and learning)*
 - *Equity*
- *Is there beside a positive impact also any negative impact? Please explain.*

The main negative impact of having centralized exams is that the students focus on private classes, as a result of which their attendance at schools becomes poor and they don't study well at high schools.

- *Could you please provide statistics for last 3 years regarding number of candidates that took different forms of assessment by NTC?*

Please see attached file.

5. Financing

In addition to describing the amount of money budgeted for the NTC, the case studies should examine actual expenditures in terms of amount and category. The finance model of the NTC should be analyzed in terms of its contribution to, or negative impact on, realization of the objectives.

- *What is the budget of the NTC?*

The budget of NTC is public and provided from the state budget. In 2010, it was 1,074,000 AZN from the State budget (about 10.7% increase from the previous year).

- *How is annually budget defined?*

Annual budget is defined every year and forecasted for the next three years. At the beginning of each year, the budget discussions are conducted by relevant government agencies and compared to proposed budget from each agency. The expectations of each agency are adjusted to the priorities for that year and the available funds in the state budget. Final draft is usually ready by September and approved by Parliament before the end of the year.

- *Is budgeting of the NTC provided in the acts of the NTC?*
- *Is the budget appropriate to cover all activities of the centre?*

Since examination is an important process for the country, the budget normally covers all activities of NTC. The scope of work increases from one year to the other, therefore the annual increase of budget is observed.

- *Where do financial resources of the NTC come from:*
 - State budget- most part of the budget comes from the state budget.
 - Students' fees- application fee is collected from all who apply to BA and MA exams.
 - Trial tests
 - Sale of paper-based and online journals and other publications
 - Ads in their journals
- *Is there a separate budget line for the NTC in the state budget?*

State budget has a separate budget line for the NTC.

- *What are the budget categories and amount of budget spent for them:*
 - Salaries of staff
 - Centre running costs

- Assessments:
 - Primary
 - Secondary
 - Other assessments
 - Marking
 - Training
- *Do resources available provide for implementation of the transparency, quality and equity?*

Resources are essential for the work of NTC. For example, having a separate publishing house is essential in order to secure confidentiality of printed test books and other materials.

6. Lessons learnt

- *What were the lessons learnt in your country? What was good, what was less good and what are the areas where special attention should be paid. What are the things that should have been done differently?*

The NTC has already been operating in Azerbaijan for about 18 years. Over this period, NTC has significantly improved its technological and operational capacity. The first exams in 1992 to BA programs in the country had a very limited scope. The answer sheets were printed in Turkey and were sent back to Turkey after the exams as NTC itself did not have optic scanners. Today, this institution has more staff members, conducts entrance exams not just to BA, but also MA programs, vocational schools and some state agencies, regularly publishes journals, has its own publishing facilities and operates completely independent. NTC also has established a good reputation among general public. People believe that by entering any of the exams conducted by NTC, they will be part of a transparent and fair process. NTC also conducts detailed research of results and provides statistics in all areas of its expertise. Every year, the public observes some improvements in the examination procedures. NTC tries hard to make all important information available to public through its website, publications, and regular press conferences. NTC's website is regularly updated and is user-friendly. Also, the NTC has become a respected institution internationally with various major events organized by them in Baku in the past few years.

Despite all these successes, NTC has also faced some challenges and is criticized for some aspects. First of all, NTC does not have its own experts and relies on high school and university teachers for the preparation of exam questions, which is the case in UK, as well. For transparency reasons, NTC puts the list of these experts on its website. Once the names are known to public, these experts are on priority list for private tutoring. This is another highly criticized aspect that is created by NTC's examinations, although this is highly related to poor quality of high school education. All high school students shift their focus during the last years of their studies from studying at high school to attending private classes and preparing for university entrance exams. The attendance becomes very poor and this leads to corruption at schools.

Another area where things can be done differently is the relationship between NTC's research results and teaching at schools. Currently, NTC's feedback is not widely used as schools are managed by a different governmental organization- Ministry of Education. The inter-agency cooperation is weak and the poor results are visible.

Despite the challenges with experts, private tutoring, and memorization in schools, NTC's work is positively recognized in the country as a tool that provides equity and transparency for university entrance procedures.