Azerbaijan Republic
Ministry of Culture and Tourism

AZERBAIJAN TOURISM INSTITUTE

STRATEGIC PLAN
for
E-LEARNING
2009 – 2016

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Attachment:

1- Time Plan for 2009
1- GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT ATI

According to a Presidential Order dated from August 25, 2005, the Cabinet of Ministers approved a decree to establish the Azerbaijan Tourism Institute and to provide all necessary commodities on February 13, 2006. The rector of ATI, Dr. Jafar Jafarov was directly appointed by the President of Azerbaijan, his Excellency Ilham Aliyev, July 5, 2006. ATI is connected with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan to meet the standards of qualified manpower resources, needed for science and industry and directly follows the standards of the state educational system. One of the aims of the Research and Development Center is to research various regions and cities of Azerbaijan for revealing tourism potential, problems, find possibilities, give proposals to government, sponsors and other interested sides following the guidelines of sustainable development. First field research in this direction was made e.g. in Lenkoran, Alti Agaij and in the Westregion of Azerbaijan. On the other hand ATI’s objective is to educate and train specialists to meet the demands of highly qualified experts in the field of hospitality, tourism, travel and leisure management that has been derived from its efforts in developing tourism in Azerbaijan.

ATI started to educate in the following fields of tourism management in September 2006:

- Tourism and Leisure management - experts on service, of tourist companies' management, hotels, restaurants and other fields;
- Hospitality and Tourism Management - experts on business, organizing tourism and hotel management;
- Hospitality and Tourism Marketing - experts on researching requirements and suggestions in the tourism market.

For the academic year 2007/2008 from September 2007 ATI started to train within 6 new areas of specialization which have been added to ATI's academic plan:

- Service and medical treatment administration in resorts
- Health, spa and wellness tourism
- Culture and nature tourism
- Travel and nature tourism guiding (bilingual)
- Sports tourism
- Ecotourism

Teaching methods in Azerbaijan Tourism Institute includes a combination of lectures, workshops, tutorials and field trips.
The curriculum is formed by current knowledge and practice:

- Duration 4 or 3 years for the bachelor (BA)
- Compulsory practical training
- External semesters
- Languages
- Scientific work & methods
- Personality training
- Specialisation subjects

From the first year, the Bologna Process started to be implemented at Azerbaijan Tourism Institute. In this frame the following activities have been done:

- Implementation of a credit system
- Overall term evaluation is based on quiz, mid-term and final examinations
- Study process is based on presentation- and discussion methods
- Advance distribution of course descriptions for the students
- Availability for students to choose subjects and lecturers
- Preparation of students to choose the subjects of “upper and lower” semesters
- Preparation of transcriptions of records individually for students
- Implementation of a tutorship process
- Active involvement of students into scientific research
- Conducting of scientific conferences and publishing selected students’ articles
- Active cooperation with other institutions and international partners in the field of tourism.

Our currently most important partners and partnerships are:

- **IMC University of Krems** (ATİ has double degree diploma agreement with İMC Krems University of Applied Sciences, Austria, this is the only double degree programme in case of Azerbaijan)
- **Bogazici University of Istanbul**
- **University of Applied Science of Ostfriesland (FHOOW)**
- **Yakindogu University of Cyprus**
- **Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation** (collaboration and student exchange with 16 European Universities)
- **GTZ Germany**
- **UNDP**
2- GENERAL ANALYSIS OF E-LEARNING

The IT- and E-learning strategy create an architecture which will promote the building of pedagogical innovation, increase the deployment of learning technologies and enable research into e-learning in a way that directly addresses business opportunities and imperatives. It provides for equivalent and enhanced learning and support experiences for all students and teachers at ATI. It offers a framework that not only develops and extends the range of services and approaches already in place but also looks to deepen understanding and deployment of learning technologies in the ATI.

Experience in and development of the skills of e-learning design and teaching online with and for remote students is not widespread at Universities in Azerbaijan including ATI. There is a need to enable more teams in Universities/institutes to understand and develop effective e-learning using the Virtual Learning Environments (VLE). All need support in designing for participation and intervening for learning. Many of the problems and benefits of using the VLEs can be dealt with by appropriate design before the students arrive. In addition, ATI plan that selected members of staff and relevant assistants are further trained to initiate and maintain quality online tutoring.

In order that academic departments can focus on high quality e-learning design using the VLEs, services including student support services, the library and the Students Union will be developed and brought together through the VLE thus providing an excellent service to distance students and good access to all students when working remotely. This will enable the University to embed holistic support within departments and subject areas.

We do not intend to replace face-to-face teaching in the ATI for campus based students but instead extend and enhance their experience, and enable them to study in more flexible ways. Furthermore, there is increasing evidence of students presenting with wireless enabled laptops and/or the desire to use broadband from residences. We will promote and encourage blended learning on campus especially towards innovative e-teaching, learning or assessment approaches where we can offer improved quality in resources and/or delivery, enable effectiveness and efficiency and aid retention and completion of students. Some staff may be happier to gain experience in blended learning before considering distance.

Many agencies (people, departments, units) in ATI are keys to the success and achievement of the e-learning strategy through support, development and implementation. Resourcing is provided in two main ways:

1. through repositioning, focus and alignment of many plans and actions throughout the ATI
2. through recognition of the need for start up and booster resources of various kinds

Academic staff are naturally reluctant to change their methods of teaching and learning without a deep understanding of why and how, due to concern for quality and benefits. Furthermore, there is a belief that e-learning is about technical ‘solutions’ rather than pedagogical innovation. In practice, e-learning, whether combined with other forms of teaching and learning or not, is complex and involves shifts both in understanding and behaviour, well beyond the provision of technology. There are few direct reasons for academics to become involved in innovations in teaching as time for research competes on a daily basis, hence staff development, support and information is crucial to success. The e-learning strategy seeks to ensure that ownership, not only of content but also of pedagogy, continues to lie directly within academic departments but recognize that a wide variety of mechanisms must underpin the continued developments.
3- IMPORTANCE OF E-LEARNING

- Access regarding Long Life Learning
- Utilizing capabilities & capacities in new ways
- Market focus, quality & position
- Creating an architecture for future success
- Business development including positioning, publicity and ranking
- Time for academics - effectiveness & efficiency
- Flexibility, diversity, engagement

4- BENEFITS OF E-LEARNING

We can view e-learning and its associated innovative pedagogies as a continuum with entirely remote and distance at one end, through purposeful use for enhancing learning in blended or mixed modes to the integration of e-learning into all teaching and learning experiences at the other.

The key potential benefits of increasing the use of e-learning in the University are to:

- meet the compelling requirement to continue to develop distance learning in a way that includes sound pedagogical and business models to an increasingly receptive and demanding educational market, and provides high quality learning and support to distance learners equivalent to that provided to campus attendees
- increase the flexibility, accessibility and personalization of provision for campus and distance students and enhance the capacity for integration of study with home, leisure, social and working lives
- integrate e-learning and teaching with the growing provision of e-business, e-resources and e-support in the university so that each contributes to, and enhances, the others

5- PRINCIPLES & CORE CAPABILITIES OF E-LEARNING

The framework for the ATI e-learning strategy takes a ‘resource-based’ definition of the match that we can make between our internal resources and skills, and the opportunities and risks created by our external environment. Such a framework both implies identifying what core capabilities and existing strengths and how a strategy can take advantage of these in a competitive world. A strategy based on our strengths will be more durable.

For these purposes, we can identify our core capabilities as:

1. ATI’s status as a major provider of post graduate distance learning
2. strengths in sectors which may lend themselves to e-learning approaches including science and education in the field of tourism
3. teaching fully informed by research
4. networked within region
5. diverse and non-elitist
6. international
7. teaching excellence including acknowledgement of distance learning and e-learning plans
The core capabilities that are obvious or we most enjoy or admire, may not be strategically relevant. Instead they need to be those that our wide range of ‘stakeholders’ (students, clients, partners, funding bodies etc.) both perceive and value. Choices of where to be innovative, and where to increase the development of e-learning should not be based on a bland view of ‘market’ but a more complex view of the value of e-learning meeting mission and objectives.

5a- Core- & Peripheral Technologies

We can distinguish between core technologies and peripheral technologies. The core forms the basis of current activities that must be maintained, and since effort and investment have been put into them, they do not present a high risk. For the purposes of this strategy we consider the use of commercial Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), and the e-resources provided by the ITD to be core technologies. Nearly all universities are currently adapting to using VLEs, so in the medium term these core capabilities will no longer be innovative. Peripheral technology offers more choice. However some peripherals will become mainstream over time so the strategy needs ways of including potential new technologies and preparing for new capabilities. Hence, it is also important to focus on building increased capacity and capability for e-learning innovation and on looking ahead to potential and new learning technologies and their applications in our context.

6- CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES OF E-LEARNING

ATI recognize the challenges mentioned below and implement our strategy very specifically to address them.

➢ Research into the technology is now robust enough for attention to turn to business development, pedagogical innovation and away from technical ‘solutions’ and ‘fixes’.
➢ Research into distance learning over years identified what works, what does not, what constitutes excellence and what adds real value to student experiences. Most is relevant to distributed e-learning. Such knowledge is of no value if it cannot be used in a flexible and contextualized manner and in particular if it is not embedded into the everyday teaching processes of the ATI.
➢ There are two main ways in which e-learning can be introduced into traditional teaching, whether on campus or at a distance. One is through large scale centralization and provision of professional services. The second is more incremental, perhaps a little slower and more challenging, but gradually involving all members of staff to make their contribution. This involves the choice of easy to use technologies and investment in personal, course and departmental learning. The latter has the advantages of developing capabilities for the longer term and keeping ‘ownership’ with the academic departments.
➢ Distance and e-learning require more up-front investment (compared to campus based teaching) but offer a low cost and sustainable model over several years if large numbers of students continue to register. Any pedagogical innovation has start up costs, especially if associated with sharing and reusability of resources and processes. Costs associated with e-learning of course include capital and direct costs of the technology itself but also the development of resources involving a number of professionals and considerable academic and technical staff development. In the medium term the costs, and opportunity costs associated with the human resources are likely to be highest and offer the faster payback, than the technology provision. In addition, effective and efficient support systems need to be in place. Once set up, the cost effectiveness of online support systems will be realized speedily.
7- STAFF DEVELOPMENT

ATI provides continuing professional development (CPD), rather than an academic hurdle. Shorter interventions in both pedagogy and e-learning meet the needs of more experienced staff. The Training Department together with ITD will create a plan to deliver the new knowledge in E-learning and educate the staff at ATI.

8- INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT

The Information Technology Department (ITD) is responsible for the provision of core academic systems and services, including the VLE, the network infrastructure and Internet access. It will support and share the aims and objectives of the e-learning strategy in terms of the development of IT systems for both teaching and research throughout the ATI.

In order to achieve facilitation of the strategy with relatively modest resources (especially manpower) it will be necessary to standardize on a limited set of software and hardware types. In addition, resources will need to be found to research technological developments and implement new services in an efficient way whilst at the same time maintaining existing core services for campus based learning and teaching.

The e-learning strategy increases the reliance on the University’s IT infrastructure. The ITD will consider the resilience of services, disaster recovery planning and support cover. In each of these areas we will need to balance additional cost against risk and perceived value of the service. The ITD is continuing to develop and improve service resilience in the selection of server hardware and with recent Storage Area Network (SAN) developments. It also has a commitment to review and document Disaster Recovery plans by the end of 2009. Consideration of e-learning servers and file storage will be incorporated within this review. Any recommended improvements will be observed for further consideration and budgeting.

The services are essentially running on a 24x7 basis, but availability of human support like Help Desk support is available around the Azerbaijan 'working day'. The acceptability of these support hours and associated staffing requirements will be reviewed with respect to increasing use of our e-services by Distance Learners.

9- DIGITAL LIBRARY

There is close alignment between the e-learning strategy and the direction of the Traditional Library or a new Digital Library (DL) at ATI. Library is the hub of an exciting hybrid service, encompassing both print and digital materials.

The Digital Library can add value to e-learning by:

- providing access to high quality information to ATI students which is integrated with the curriculum
- ensuring that ATI learners are information literate and able to discover, evaluate and manage information
providing advice and assistance to learners through a range of services, ensuring that these services are effectively communicated to students

To create the DL the existing Library need to invest in digital resources, particularly in terms of e-books, e-journals, abstracting and indexing services and large datasets. These developments have been particularly strong in the science, technology and medicine fields, but there is also considerable progress in tourism, arts and social sciences. Investment in e-books is increasingly important for students with specific learning difficulties and disabilities. Access to print resources remains essential and the DL may work to ensure that these resources are known to learners at a distance and accessible to them through efficient document supply services of various types.

The DL provides a range of services and tools which provide enhanced access to information resources. The DL is in the forefront in developing e-learning resources to teach information retrieval and information management skills and the use of bibliographic software. A growing range of interactive online tutorials, multimedia tutorials and text based web tutorials is available. As well as standalone tutorials the DL can also offer ways of embedding information retrieval skills into the curriculum so that they integrate, for example, into PDPs, course objectives and assessment.

Increased investment in information in all formats is already a key component of the ATI’s strategy and it will be essential that the DL’s materials budget is able to accommodate new developments such as e-books.

E-learning and distance learning is a 24/7 activity and it will be necessary to investigate increasing the hours in which reference desks are available and to explore innovative ways of supporting learners and academic colleagues, working alongside via for example ‘chat’ software. Digital Library in cooperation with the Information Technology Department will keep abreast of new software to support e-learning.

10- STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

The strategy for e-learning is for all students, as it looks to greatly improve the quality of e-learning resources and provision throughout the University. Distance learners may benefit the most.

The Student Union (SU) view is that for campus-based courses, e-learning and VLEs should be utilized by the University appropriately, in the sense that they should support and enhance the overall learning experience, rather than simply replace existing core methods of learning and teaching.

The SU is interested in being involved in the VLE’s concept and expressing considerable interest in e-learning facilities and collaborative e-work space.
11- FINANCE/COST

E-Learning is not necessarily a money saver. Especially in the initial project phases, eLearning may produce additional cost. How to cover the cost is the big question for most organizations wanting to implement eLearning. There are different possibilities to cover different cost types as:

- Infrastructure Cost
- IT Cost
- Content Development Cost
- Support Cost
- Management Cost
- Related Cost (office space, phone/fax…)

12- COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The e-learning strategy is, of necessity, complex. ATI marketing department has agreed to put together a professional communication plan and use new channels to ensure all staff are informed and involved.

13- ACTIONS PLAN

To realize the E-learning strategy ATI will cooperate/work with INWENT project "Institution Building and Human Resource Development in the South Caucasus" for Azerbaijan.

Through this project ATI will:

- to strengthen and broaden its existing communication technology in order to allow students to perform various kinds of project activities, studies and networking in and outside of Baku.
- to set up basic statistical instruments and project management tools to be needed for scientifically substantiated assessments and results in the field of tourism.

Both activities will foster project-based learning experiences for the students and faster and smoother results to the related projects themselves. All hard- and software will be selected in such a way that ATI and its regional partners will be able to use it easily and reliably, even when local conditions restrict access to very basic internet applications.

As a first milestone, the following basic requirements should be met /are already available:

1. Centralized data processing (e.g. with the help of a small server), serving for mail, meeting- and document management, allowing use of basic office tools like WORD or EXCEL.

2. Basic statistical tools to be installed and first short-hand trainings to be delivered by external experts.
3. A direct communication line with other partners on the local, regional and international level to be started, allowing mutual use of server capacity for data exchange and security requirements.

4. Evaluation of regional suppliers and crucial deals covering operational supply and maintenance.

Once the technical network is in place, the further activities should be focussed on interdisciplinary, project-based learning experiences in Azerbaijan and abroad and on services to other ATI classes as the occasions arise.

With support of INWENT special know-how in tourism software like reservation systems, designing of interactive websites, platforms on regional collaboration, information transfer and exchange as well as in logistics, econometrics, statistics, law, university - management and developing study programs and curricula will be introduced.

An annually Project Plan based on the ATI’s Strategy Plan 2008-2016 and this E-learning Strategy will show the realization of the actions plan.