
THE SUMMARY

of the “Abiturient” Journal: Issue 12

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Introduction

The State Examination Centre of the Republic of Azerbaijan (hereafter – the SEC or Centre) presents a summarized annual report for the academic year 2021-2022. The summary covers the SEC's activities throughout the year. It starts with a short description of the education system and levels in Azerbaijan and is followed by a detailed description of the undergraduate, graduate, residency, and vocational college admission, program requirements, and set of admission procedures. The report next highlights the Center's activity regarding the e-services, marking scheme, student and teacher support resources, transparency in testing and admission procedure, and regional outreach visits. The report is concluded with the SEC's international partnership coverage and administration of international examinations. Considering the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the requirements and recommendations of the operational headquarters under the Cabinet of Ministers were taken into account during the organization of examinations this year as well.

Overview of the Education System in Azerbaijan

The Azerbaijani education system consists of the following levels:

Preschool Education (age 5-6)

General Education:

- Primary education (4 years: Grades of 1-4)
- General secondary education (5 years: Grades of 5-9)
- Complete secondary education (2 years: Grades of 10-11)

General secondary education is compulsory in Azerbaijan. Graduates of general secondary and complete secondary education are issued a certificate of completion on the relevant level based on the results of the school-leaving exams (Grade 11 school-leaving exam is also the first round of the undergraduate admission).

Vocational College Education (from 2 to 4 years of education)

Vocational College Education provides training of specialists in various programs based on general secondary education and complete secondary education following the needs of the society and the labour market. Vocational College Education is provided in colleges and relevant educational institutions and ends with the award of a sub-bachelor's degree. Those admitted to vocational colleges based on general secondary education are also considered as graduates of complete secondary education.

Higher Education

- Undergraduate (4-5 years of education)
- Graduate (2 years of education)
- Ph.D.

Undergraduate Admission

Undergraduate Degree Programs

Candidates who have received a relevant state certificate on completion of complete secondary education, vocational education, or higher education are eligible for undergraduate admission. Admission to undergraduate education is conducted in five Groups of degree programs (Second round).

Groups of degree programs and areas of assessment accordingly:

- Mathematics, physics, and chemistry in Group 1;
- Mathematics, geography, and history in Group 2;
- Literature, history, and language of instruction in Group 3;
- Physics, chemistry, and biology in Group 4.

Admission to Group 5 involves school-leaving examinations (Grade 11) as the first round and the aptitude assessment as the second round.

Admission Process

Admission examinations for Groups of degree programs (1-4) consist of two rounds. The SEC conducts the unified school-leaving examinations to the complete secondary (11 years of schooling) education. Students sit an exam in three components-language of instruction, math, and foreign language. The students scoring the required points in the first round are eligible to attend the second round. In the second round, students take exams based on a group of degree programs they apply for. Applicants then proceed to the next stage to submit their applications to universities based on the total score of the first and second rounds. The SEC sets a minimum score for each round. The maximum accumulative score is 700 (300 for the first round and 400 for the second round).

Round 1 – School-leaving examination (Grade 11)

Students sit an exam in language of instruction, mathematics, and foreign language. Students' results in the school-leaving examination are evaluated on a 100-point scale in each component. In total, the maximum score is 300. The total duration of the school-leaving examinations is 3 hours. Students were presented with a total of 85 tasks in three components. Students who did not participate in the school-leaving examination were not certified and could not proceed to the next round. The eleventh graders who did not participate in the final exams got "2" which is the lowest score according to the Azerbaijani school grading system. All examinees were evaluated and presented with certificates regardless of the exam results.

Round 2 – Examination on Groups of degree programs

Students who apply to the degree programs sit an exam in three components in the second round. Students who participate in both rounds are able to apply to the program selection round.

Students have to answer 30 tasks (90 tasks in total) in each component of the test. Of these tasks, 22 are closed-ended and eight are open-ended. Five of the open-ended tasks include the type of calculation, selection, or matching. Students transfer the answers to the answer sheets. The other three open-ended questions are situational, text, or source-based questions that are assessed by markers based on a marking scheme.

Test Format and Content

The test books in Azerbaijani and Russian are compiled in 4 variants (A, B, C, D) for both rounds of the examinations to prevent cheating cases. The Centre uses three types of test questions in its exams.

1. Multiple-choice items

The State Students Admission Commission (SSAC) and its successor – the SEC have widely used multiple-choice items since 1992 on various examinations. These items consist of a stem and 5 answer options. The examinees are required to choose the correct one among the given options.

2. Open-ended or constructed-response items

The SEC has started to apply open-ended questions in admission examinations since 2011. These types of questions are presented without any answer choices, and the examinees have to find correct answers themselves. Such questions include questions requiring calculation, numeric entry, and matching the halves. Open-ended test items have been included in the three components of the test within each Group of degree programs.

3. Situational judgement items

These items have been included in the test for the first time in 2019. All three components within groups of degree programs contain such questions.

The SEC continues developing open-ended or constructed-response items in test development practice and maximizes their usage in the examination format. The open-ended test questions do not have answer choices, and it allows examinees to give more detailed and elaborate responses. The first issue of the "Abiturient" journal reports several open-ended test samples and their coding on the Answer Sheet.

Applying open-ended and situational judgement items to the tests allows distinguishing applicants with high analytical thinking and judgement ability and, remarkably, applicants with better preparation. It also helps assess applicants' knowledge on four levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, and skills. Thus,

through these tasks, the ability of applicants to apply the knowledge acquired at school in real life, in practice, is studied and evaluated.

Exam administration

The SEC conducts the unified admission examinations in Baku and regions of the country. In the year of the annual report covers, applicants were given the opportunity to take the exam twice and in different groups. Thus, the applicants who took part in both exams were able to get the desired score and participate in the selection process in several degree programs. The exams for each Group of degree programs were held in 22 regional centers to prevent crowds and contact during the exams. In total, 319 examination centers were used to conduct the second round of admission exams.

The SEC held admission examinations on the following dates:

- July 14 for the applicants of the Group 3;
- July 15 for the applicants of the Group 2;
- July 27 and 28 for the applicants of the Group 1;
- July 28 for the applicants of Group 4.

Those who finished the complete secondary education level in 2020 participated in the admission process based on the school-leaving examination results. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports assisted the SEC by providing 688 employees to ensure the security of exams and organize access to the buildings. Due to the pandemic conditions of the year and the special quarantine regime, some Group examinations were held on two days.

Exam Supervision

The SEC held seminars in January and February for new and inexperienced invigilators to instruct them on exam rules. During trainings, they watched informative video materials and got acquainted with a "Guide for Supervisors" booklet. The seminars were held simultaneously in all regional centers of the SEC. 6 743 invigilators and 895 exam supervisors attended the exams for Groups of degree programs (1-4). Each of them was evaluated afterwards to ensure the exam administration quality. The Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences representatives were involved as examination managers to increase the number of professional examination managers. Newly-involved examination managers go through the required steps:

- attend informative seminars;
- practice the examination regulations and standards in several trial examinations being monitored;
- participate in the actual examinations if successful.

Application Process

Applicants submitted an electronic application to participate in the undergraduate admission examinations from May 26 to June 9, 2021. They created a "Personal Account" on the website ekabinet.dim.gov.az. Then they were directed to the page – eservices.dim.gov.az/erizebak/erize using the username and password of their accounts to fill in the "Applicant's electronic application" form and submit their application (The SEC charges an application fee.). The second issue of the "Abiturient" journal in 2021 and the SEC's website provided the public with the application process and its details. The procedure for filling in the "Applicant's electronic application" form were repeatedly explained to applicants via television channels as it is annually done.

The SEC joined the state "Entry-Exit and Registration" interagency automated data-search system run by most state institutions which facilitated the application process.

Program Selection Round

The program selection round was held online between August 20 and 30. Applicants could choose up to 15 programs in alignment with a group of degree programs they applied for. According to the exam results, 62 132 applicants participated in the program selection round. At the initial stage, 44 861 applicants were admitted to universities. The admission plan was completed by 90.46%.

After the program selection round, the results of the admission and placement were announced. The SEC announced the results of the undergraduate admission and placement via its official website and mobile

operators – “Azercell”, “Bakcell” and “Nar Mobile” and “Naxtel” on September 4. The next day all results were published in the sixth issue of the "Abiturient" journal. The journal introduced each degree program's minimum passing scores (both paid and state-funded quotas) along with the list of admitted students.

Admission to Degree Programs with Aptitude Assessment (Group 5)

Applicants applying for Group 5 of degree programs had to take the school-leaving examination and aptitude test (if required) to participate in the admission process for higher education institutions. After achieving the required scores, applicants registered via eservices.dim.gov.az/erizebak/qabiliyyet. An aptitude assessment was conducted simultaneously for both the previous year and the current year graduates (around 20 000 applicants). They took the aptitude exam from June 16 to August 25.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, preventive measures were taken in the aptitude tests to avoid crowds. Aptitude tests for some degree programs requiring aptitude assessment were canceled (These programs are the following: “Coaching”, “Physical Education and Pre-Conscription Training”, “Fine Arts Teaching”, and “Music Teaching”). As a result, registration for these programs at Aptitude Examination Commissions was not required. Aptitude tests were held in the fields of Fine Arts, Music, Architecture and Theater, Cinema, and Choreography.

It is worth noting that the SEC continues to assist applicants applying for degree programs with aptitude tests through scientific and methodological assistance. For this purpose, the SEC published materials entitled "Fine Arts", "Music", "Architecture", "Theater, Cinema, and Choreography", "Physical Education and Sports".

In 2021-2022 academic year the SEC issued the publications such as “Fine Arts,” “Music Art,” “Architecture and Design,” “Theatre, Cinema, and Choreography,” “Physical Education and Sport” containing scientific-methodical assistance to support the applicants applying for the degree programs with aptitude assessment. The materials covered a brief description of these degree programs, aptitude test programs, assessment criteria, recommendations for exam preparation, tips, sample assignments, exercises, visual aids - reproductions, pictures, tables, standards. Online versions of these journals were also available.

Admission of Sub-Bachelors to Undergraduate Degree Programs

Graduates of vocational colleges were entitled to a "sub-bachelor" qualification degree, allowing them to participate in the program selection round without taking university admission exams in 2021. The SEC in coordination with the Ministry of Education determined the eligibility of the degree programs. Sub-bachelors were only able to choose the degree programs corresponding to their language of instruction at vocational colleges. Applicants who won the state-funded scholarships previously could only apply for only the paid basis enrolment slots. The sub-bachelors applying for degree programs with aptitude assessment had to take an aptitude test. The SEC opened online applications from July 8 to August 10. Detailed information on the application was provided in the second issue of the "Abiturient" journal.

The sub-bachelors submitted their application from August 20 to 30. The number of sub-bachelors admitted to undergraduate programs was 5 255. 17.41% of them won state-funded scholarships, and 82.59% were placed on a paid basis. 67.97% (3 572 people) of the sub-bachelors were admitted to public and 32.03% (1 683 people) to private institutions. Most of the applicants chose "Economics" (617 people) major. In the current year, 15 030 sub-bachelors used their right to apply for undergraduate programs through the program selection round without taking the admission exam.

Descriptive Statistics

The number of students who graduated from general education schools in 2021 was 83 157. Compared to last year, the number of graduates increased by 3 315 people.

The quota of enrolment slots was 49 988 this year. The admission plan was increased by 2.36% compared to last year. In 2021 the state increased the number of slots allocated for the state-funded scholarships by about 1% times compared to 2020. Overall admission plan went up from 44% to 45%.

In 2021, 67 717 applicants (Groups 1-4) participated in the undergraduate admission examinations. (Figure 1 presents the data on students' scores in the undergraduate admission examinations in Groups of degree programs (Groups 1-4). The number of applicants representing Azerbaijani and Russian streams is given below in Figure 2).

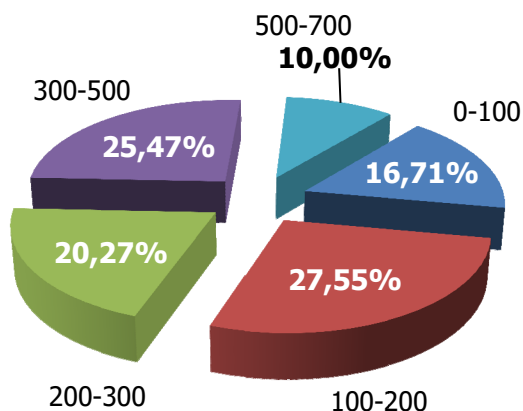


Figure 1: The percentage of the students' scores in Groups 1-4



Figure 2: The number of the applicants representing Azerbaijani and Russian streams

The number of applicants (84 773 including vocational colleges) taking undergraduate admission examinations for Group 5 was 55 635. (Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of the students' scores in percentage.)

The number of applicants who scored higher than 600 points was 1 836. Figure 4 presents the number of applications scoring higher than 600 points in examinations. The applicants with high scores represent almost all cities and regions including some rural schools of the Republic of Azerbaijan. As in the previous years, the SEC took several measures to introduce and spread the experience of high-performers.

“Bilik yarışının öncülləri” (Knowledge Competition Pioneers) (<http://abiturient.az/600/>) project was entirely dedicated to them. The website presents Presidential scholarship grantees, the schools they finished, their examination scores, and the degree programs they received admission to. The survey was also conducted among these students to present their feedback, suggestions, and recommendations for future applicants.

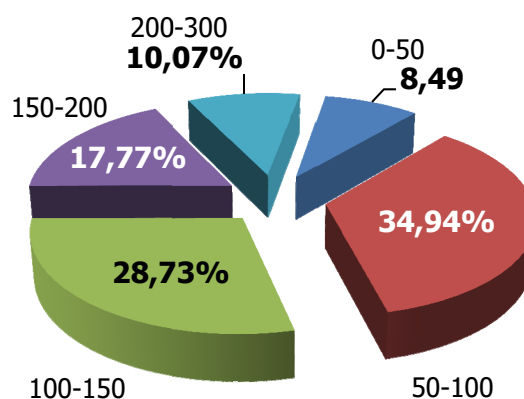


Figure 3: The percentage of the students' scores (Group 5)

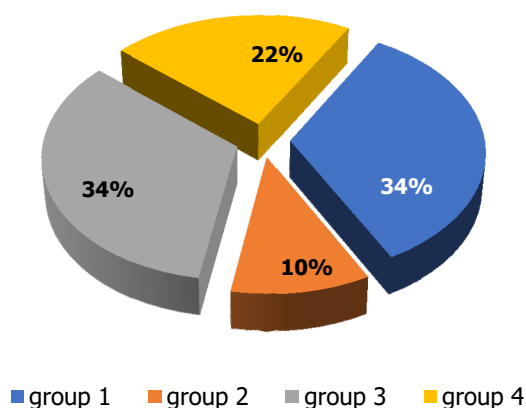


Figure 4: The number of the applicants scoring higher than 600 points

Gender distribution based on Groups of degree programs

Figure 5 presents the percentage of males and females who applied to Group 1 of degree programs. 24 771 (86.60%) applicants among all were this year's graduates of general education schools, 2 were citizens of foreign countries, 20 were individuals with higher education, and 342 were graduates of vocational colleges.

Figure 6 reports the percentage distribution by gender in Group 2. 13 419 (80.08%) applicants among all were this year's graduates of general education schools, 11 were citizens of foreign countries, 27 were individuals with higher education, and 466 were graduates of vocational colleges.

Figure 7 illustrates the gender distribution in Group 3. 17 474 (83.07%) of the applicants who applied to the Group were this year's graduates of general education schools, 10 were citizens of foreign countries, 51 were individuals with higher education, and 492 were graduates of vocational colleges.

Figure 8 presents the data on the gender distribution of applicants in Group 4 of the degree program. 4 225 applicants (84.42%) were this year's graduates of general education schools, 6 were citizens of foreign countries, 30 were individuals with higher education, and 99 were graduates of vocational colleges.

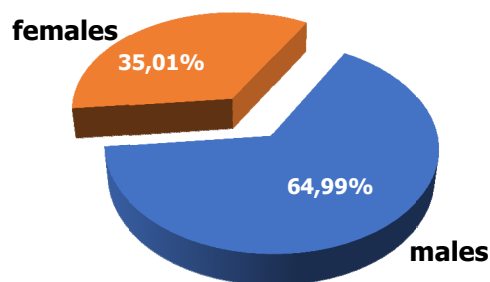


Figure 5: The percentage of males and females applied to Group 1

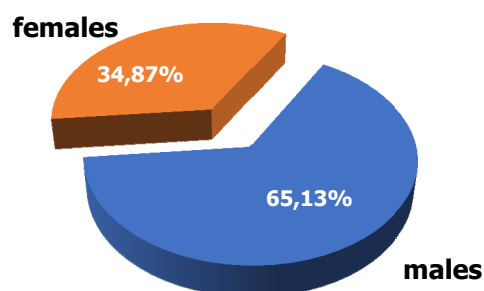


Figure 6: The percentage of males and females applied to Group 2

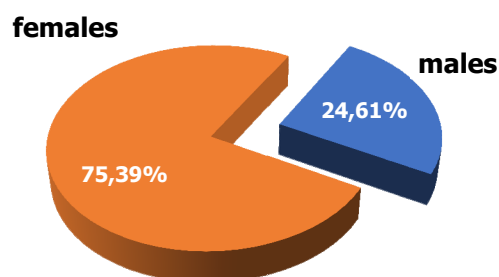


Figure 7: The percentage of males and females applied to Group 3

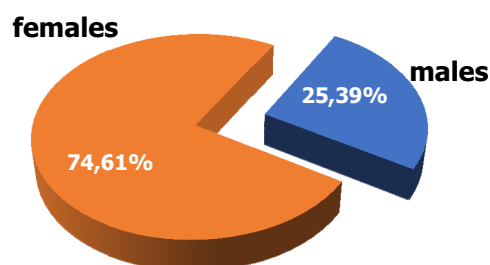


Figure 8: The percentage of males and females applied to Group 4

Graduate Admission

Graduate education is the second level of higher education. According to the presidential decree: “Graduate education in public and private universities in the Republic of Azerbaijan is financed either by state-funded scholarships or private funding of students.” In 2021-2022 academic year the graduate admission examinations were held in one round. For the first time this year, bachelors were given the opportunity to take the exam in two attempts.

Bachelors took a paper-based exam in the components of logical reasoning (quantitative, spatial, and verbal reasoning), foreign language, and computer science. The first attempt and the second attempt were held on February 23 and May 26 respectively. Bachelors applying to degree programs with aptitude assessment had to pass an aptitude test. Aptitude tests in some degree programs were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year 71 programs were offered in graduate degree education. For the third year in a row, bachelors have been given tasks on listening exercises in a foreign language component of the exam.

The analysis showed that bachelors’ results in the second attempt were relatively better than the results obtained in the first attempt. The SEC publishes admission programs, admission rules and calls for applications, recommendations and tables of degree programs, test items samples, results of the admission exam, and other essential materials in the issues of the “Magistr” journal. It guides prospective graduate students through the process of examination and admission. The results were announced on July 8 on the SEC’s website.

Application Process

Bachelors have created a "Personal Account" on the SEC's website (ekabinet.dim.gov.az) and submitted online applications for the first attempt from February 9 to 18, and for the second attempt from April 30 to May 8 respectively. In total, 22 283 bachelors submitted application forms.

Program Selection Round

The program selection round was held from June 29 to July 5. Applicants who met the minimum requirements set by the SEC were eligible to choose up to 20 degree programs. Bachelors submitted their applications on the website of the SEC. The results were announced on July 8 on the SEC’s website and published in the fifth issue of "Magistr" journal. In total, 22 007 bachelors took part in the exam and 68.07% of them passed to the program selection stage and 10 060 of them were admitted to the graduate programs.

Residency Admission

The SEC administered the unified admission to the residency. Admission to the residency was held in two rounds. Candidates scoring 40 or more points in the first round were eligible to participate in the second round. The first round of the examination tests the candidates' knowledge in the areas following the direction of basic higher medical education, whereas the second round assesses candidates’ knowledge aligned with degree program subjects they studied. For the first time this year candidates were given an opportunity to take the first round in two attempts. Candidates were given 100 test items at each round. The correct answer to each test item was evaluated by one point, incorrect answers did not affect the candidate's exam results. 2.5 hours were allocated for answering exam questions at each round as usual.

The first and second attempts of the first round of the examination were held on June 20 and August 4, respectively. The second round was conducted on September 26. As soon as the program selection round finalized, the results were reported to the public online and via the fourth issue of the “Rezidentura” journal.

The first issue of the “Rezidentura” journal released in January 2021 reported the rules on residency admission, admission programs, an explanation of some test items found complicated by the candidates and samples of test items on the basic and core test components.

Application Process

The candidates submitted the electronic application for the first attempt of the first round from May 26 to June 4 for the second attempt July 16 to July 22. 1 673 candidates filled in applications to participate in the examination. 40.29 % of them were males, 59.71% of them were females. They created a "Personal Account" on the website ekabinet.dim.gov.az. Subsequently, they were directed to the page – eservices.dim.gov.az/erizebak/erize using the username and password of their accounts to fill in the "Applicant's electronic application" form and submit (The SEC charges an application fee.). Foreigners and stateless persons, citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan who have received higher education in foreign countries, after filling in the "Candidate's electronic application" form to take the exam, personally submitted the original documents and approved their electronic applications in the Admissions Commissions.

Program Selection Round

The final results were announced on September 28. 24.93 % of the applicants who submitted their application were admitted to the residency. The second issue of the “Rezidentura” journal presented information to the public about the second round of the examination and program selection round admission programs, the number of enrolment slots, and admission scores. Candidates meeting the requirements set by the SEC were entitled to participate in the program selection round.

Vocational College Admission

Admission based on Complete Secondary Education

Students could apply to vocational colleges for the 2021/2022 academic year based on complete secondary education with points scored in Group 5 of a degree program or the vocational college admission examination. Applicants graduating from high schools this year participated in the admission process based on their scores in the school-leaving examination. Graduates of previous years who received a certificate of education or who completed high school outside the Republic of Azerbaijan took an exam in Azerbaijani or Russian language, mathematics, and foreign languages to participate in the admission process.

Application Process

Applications to vocational colleges based on complete secondary education were held online from May 26 to June 9. In total, 61 654 applicants applied to vocational colleges. 18 300 applicants participated in the program selection round. 46.67% (28 731 applicants) of them were males, 53.33% (32 833 applicants) of them were females.

Admission results based on complete secondary education were posted on the website of the SEC on September 11 and published in the tenth issue of the "Abiturient" journal. After the registration of applicants, additional placement was announced and the results were reported on October 4. 11 308 applicants became students after the additional placement announcement.

Program Selection Round

The program selection round was held from September 6 to September 10. Applicants were allowed to participate in the admission process for both enrolment slots in vocational colleges and undergraduate programs. Applicants were able to indicate in their applications up to 20 program codes for both levels of education. The SEC announced an additional admission process for vacant enrolment slots in vocational colleges based on complete secondary education.

36.96% (6 764 applicants) of them were males and 63.04% (11 536 applicants) were females. 95.81% of the applications passed to the program selection round belonged to the Azerbaijani stream 4.19% of them to the Russian stream. Compared to last year, the number of applicants in the program selection round this year decreased by 16.69% (3 667 people).

Admission based on General Secondary Education

Applicants graduating from general secondary education (9 years) in the current year participated in the admission process with school-leaving examination results. The rules of admission and the announcement of admission were posted on the website of the SEC, and the list of programs and quota of enrolment slots were published in the third issue of the "Abiturient" journal. The admission plan (9449 slots) decreased by 4.41%

(436 slots) compared to last year. 4 166 (44.09%) of the planned places were state-funded, and 5283 (55.91%) were on a paid-basis. 93.68% of the admission plan was allocated for Azerbaijan, 2.07% for Russian streams, and 4.24% for the joint competition of applicants from both streams. 14.76% of the admission plan (1 395 places) was for programs requiring special skills.

Application Process

The submission of online applications opened to vocational colleges based on general secondary education from June 14 to June 29. Applicants registered through eservices.dim.gov.az/erizetex/qabiliyyet to apply to programs with aptitude assessments from August 13 to 17. Aptitude tests for certain programs requiring special skills in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic have been cancelled this year.

Program Selection Round

The program selection round was held from August 27 to September 7 online. The results were announced on September 8 on the website of the SEC and in a special issue of the "Abituriyet" journal. After that, from September 29 to October 3, an additional competition was announced for vacant places. It should be noted that those who are admitted to vocational colleges and graduate are awarded a "sub-bachelor" degree. Applicants with this degree enter the labor market as qualified personnel.

School-leaving Examinations

The school-leaving examination (Grade 11) is the admission examination to Group 5 of degree programs. It is also the first round of admission for Groups of degree programs (1-4). In the current year, the school-leaving examinations of Grades 9 and 11 were organized in 998 examination centers. The SEC organized trainings for invigilators to administer the exam. 20 367 teachers from general education institutions, 2 712 specialists from different state structures participated in the examination process as invigilators. In total, 211 278 students took part in school-leaving examinations. It should be noted that in 2021, the total number of grade 9 and 11 students in the country was 130 022 and 83 157, respectively. 1 901 of them (1 776 and 125 students for grades 9 and 11 respectively) did not take part in the school-leaving examinations for one reason or another.

The Format and Content of the School-leaving Examinations

Students sat an exam in the components of the language of instruction, mathematics, and foreign languages in the school-leaving examinations (both Grade 9 and 11).

School-leaving examinations for Grades 9 and 11 were in alignment with the new educational program's requirements (curriculum). The examination content and model tasks were identified in the professional development seminars with the teachers' participation from educational institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and specialists of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (ANAS). The total duration of the school-leaving examinations was 3 hours for both grades. Students answered multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions in the language of instruction, mathematics, and foreign language.

The SEC made the content of the school-leaving examinations and the difficulty of the test items as easy as possible in accordance with the purpose of the exam. Thus, test items on a number of difficult topics were not included in the curriculum for all exam subjects. Due to the decisions of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, certain topics were not tested, taking into account the suspension of the educational process at certain times of the school year and the lack of online classes for all students. The topics excluded from the exam programs for the current year were presented to the public.

The SEC continued conducting listening tasks in school-leaving examinations (Grades of 9 and 11). Listening passages were recorded and archived in the SEC's recording studio. During the school-leaving examinations, examinees were presented one listening passage in a foreign language. An audio device was distributed to all examination rooms. At the beginning of the examination, the audio device was turned on. Students were given 2 minutes to read the listening passage items. The text was sounded twice with a 2-minute break.

The gender composition of students participating in the school-leaving examinations for Grade 9 shows that 53.91% (69 143 applicants) of them were males and 46.09% (59 103 applicants) of the them were females. The situation was almost similar for the Grade 11 with 54.25% (45 045 applicants) of them being males and 45.75% (37 987 applicants) of them being females. In other words, the ratio of male and female students in both exams is close.

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

The SEC organized the examinations based on the instructions of the Administration of the Regional Medical Divisions (TABIB). Following special measures were taken in the exam administration during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- The exams were held both in the regional centers and remote rural schools to ensure the comfort of the examiners;
- the number of examination centers has more than doubled;
- Examination centers were disinfected two days in advance, sealed, and handed over to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for protection;
- applicants were invited to the buildings at different time intervals;
- stop lines were drawn in front of the buildings to ensure social distance;
- individuals providing access to the premises are provided with special uniforms, masks, shields, and gloves, and all exam participants are provided with medical masks;
- the temperatures of the applicants were measured at the entrance;
- students were seated at a distance of 2 meters, with one person at each desk;
- “Electronic appeal against the results of the exam” system and “Online queue” system were developed and put into operation in a short period.

The SEC organized some of the exams on consecutive days to ensure the comfort of applicants and parents and to prevent the crowd.

E-services

The SEC continued to take intensive actions on applying information and communication technologies (ICT) in 2021 and implemented new projects in this area. Hundreds of thousands of citizens were provided with electronic services in these fields. Thus, more than 8 million 950 thousand e-services were performed by the SEC in 2021, which is demonstrated below:

	E-services	Number of services used				
		I quarter	II quarter	III quarter	IV quarter	Total
1	Online admission of application forms (for undergraduate, graduate, and residency levels)	26 133	245 040	15 786	3 948	290 907
2	Online access to the “Examination Participation Sheet” (Exam Pass)	59 590	1 483 190	327 638	28 529	1 898 947
3	Online program selection for higher and vocational colleges	0	11 565	112 160	6 016	129 741
4	Announcement of trials and examination results online or via text message service	150 986	1 662 977	1 545 489	99 395	3 458 847
5	Placement of graphic images of applicants’ answer sheets on the applicants’ personal pages while reporting	31 273	626 561	212 408	10 668	880 910

	E-services	Number of services used				
		I quarter	II quarter	III quarter	IV quarter	Total
	their scores					
6	Online search of the number of codes of application form submitted for undergraduate admission	37 137	8 527	3 962	3 008	52 634
7	Online registration for trial examinations	80	0	0	5 443	5 523
8	Online trial examinations	0	0	0	0	0
9	Online "Video Lectures"	676 000	330 500	206 800	489 400	1 702 700
10	Purchase of the SEC "Payment cards" for registration for trial and admission examinations via text message and online	0	0	0	0	0
11	Online purchase of publications of the SEC	1 047	1 601	3 433	1 133	7 214
12	SMS – information regarding the news	0	0	0	0	0
13	Online registration of citizens for the meetings (receptions) held by the SEC Chairperson and other responsible staff members	0	0	0	0	0
14	Introduction of the service enabling the graduates to review information concerning their activity through the use of the SEC's "Student-Tracking" system	5 420	211 975	13 329	2 754	233 478
15	Information on examination and interview results for civil service admission					
16	Providing information from the Registry of Civil Servants					290 111
17	Receiving requests on civil servants' ethical conduct rules					
18	Civil service internship calculator					78
	Total	987 666	4 581 936	2 441 005	650 294	8 951 090

Marking Scheme

During the COVID-19 pandemic related special quarantine regime, the SEC's "E-marker" software system enabled the markers to code students' work online without coming to the SEC's building. All possible stages of the inspection process were automated and all security measures were taken. Open-ended test questions, which required written and detailed answers, were checked by markers on computers. The system cut a student's answer sheet into several tasks and sent it to different markers. Markers could not access any student's personal information. Applicant's data was kept confidential. In addition, the same task was checked by at least two markers. If the points of these markers did not coincide, the next marker was involved. This process continued until the two markers' points coincided. The process is designed so that the human factor has no effect on the assessment. This is confirmed by the small number of applications in the appeal process. Out of 3 067 applicants (4.53% of those who took the exam), 206 had their claims upheld and their writing scores adjusted.

Before the marking process started, markers were involved in the training courses on coding open-ended questions. Teachers, methodologists, final-year undergraduate and graduate students registered and attended the course.

Student and Teacher Support Resources

The SEC carries out series of instructional activities throughout the year to support the applicants to prepare independently for the admission examinations. This year the SEC organized online consultations on the components of the tests to assist students. The experts explained difficult questions, analyzed students' common mistakes, and suggested relevant advice and recommendations. The project, "Video Lectures" comprised 154 videos and covered the topics of admission programs in all components.

Due to the lack of information in the textbooks on the topic "Patriotic War for Karabakh (Second Karabakh War)", the prepared material was posted on the website.

In connection with the pandemic, joint agreement was made between the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the SEC to take into account the difficulties encountered in teaching in the design of test items and examination program. Thus, test items were not compiled on topics not covered in the academic year, as well as the degree of complexity of other tasks was taken into account to some extent

Also, scientific-methodological monitoring of textbooks for grades 5-11 used in general education institutions of the country in the 2020/2021 academic year was conducted. As a result of the monitoring, controversial points in the textbooks, inconsistencies in content, translation shortcomings were identified and methodological recommendations (19 recommendations) were developed for all subjects for service use in improving the item bank, designing test booklets for exams. Taking into account the recommendations regarding the impact of special pandemic quarantine rules on the teaching process, the topics that fall into the second half of the academic year were removed from the curriculum. The recommendations were published in the form of a booklet and submitted to the relevant departments.

The SEC has significantly increased the collaborative work between the headquarter and regional branches operating in Nakhchivan, Ganja, Shaki, Lankaran, Khachmaz, Goychay, Shirvan, Shamkir, and Barda. Due to the SEC's regional branches' intensive involvement, teachers working in the regions could take part in organizational activities and, scientific and methodological work as well.

Training courses on Azerbaijani language, Russian language, mathematics, chemistry, physics, biology, history, geography and English language on designing, reviewing and marking of assessment materials based on the learning results of subject curricula for school-leaving and admission exams continued. During this period, courses were held twice: in May and October. The courses were attended by teachers, methodologists, last-year undergraduate and graduate students studying in Baku, Nakhchivan, Ganja, Goychay, Lankaran, Shirvan, Khachmaz, Sheki, and Barda.

Abiturient Journal

Every year the SEC publishes a set of consecutive issues of “Abiturient” journal providing the public with:

1. a detailed description of admission programs for undergraduate education of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
2. calls for applications, instructions on online registration for examinations and admission separately;
3. the list of undergraduate degree programs in public and private higher schools available in the country;
4. procedures and requirements of the standardized examinations and unified admissions including:
samples of test items (multiple-choice, open-ended, situational judgment tests) of all levels of difficulty used at the admission examinations;
5. a list of responses to frequently asked questions about the application, admission, and examinations, including:
 - correct answers, scoring tables, and reports on all applicants' scores;
 - reports on cut scores and the names of all the admitted applicants for the current academic year;
6. advice for applicants, consultative articles on career planning, including:
 - a platform for high scorers to share their experiences and success stories.

Transparency in Testing and Admission Procedure

The SEC pays reasonable importance to informing the public and providing transparency at all stages of the admission process. A short description of the measures carried out in this direction may be abstracted as follows:

- Availability of the examination content: admission programs on subjects, explanation of difficult test items, samples of test models, test booklets used in the trial examinations, collections of test items, their electronic versions, and other necessary methodical materials have been prepared and presented for the use of applicants;
- Regular coverage of all processes and difficult stages of the admission campaign online and through mass media;
- Press conferences and briefings held frequently for the representatives of mass media in the Centre;
- Regular coverage of issues interesting to the public in the press and on TV programs by the SEC management and representatives during the admission campaign;
- Observation and coverage of each conducted examination by mass media representatives;
- Coverage of the examination process in the SEC's website;
- Placement of special maps with indicators showing the addresses of examination buildings in the special issue of the “Abiturient” journal as well as on the Commission's website to help applicants to find examination buildings easily;
- Opportunity for the applicants to take the test books out of the examination building at the end of the admission examination with themselves to review their notes, check their answers, and calculate their approximate scores till the announcement of examination results;
- Placement of up-to-date information on all urgent issues of admission campaign regularly in the issues of the “Abiturient” journal and the SEC's website in Azerbaijani and English;
- Information exchange service in the Centre's website and on Facebook account to answer instantly to citizens' questions concerning admission examinations;
- Delivery of results of the admission and trial examinations to the applicants through the Centre's website and SMS service;
- Placement of graphic images of the answer sheets on the applicants' accounts;

International Partnerships

International partnership in the field of educational assessment:

1. On April 27, a webinar **entitled "Introduction to PTE Academic"** was organized by the SEC and Pearson VUE. The event was attended by English language teachers and 40 participants who want to learn English and assess their language skills.
2. On 20 May, a representative of the SEC participated in the 4th meeting of the **Joint Intergovernmental Commission** on economic cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In the Protocol, it was decided to establish cooperation between the SEC and the relevant government agencies of the United Kingdom in the following areas:

In the educational assessment:

- Improving the quality standards of assessment tools of the SEC through mutual exchange of experience;
- Study the experience of the United Kingdom in the administration of remote examinations and the application of digitalization in examinations;
- Exchange of experience in the drafting of rules and guidelines for the development and organization of assessment tools.

In the economy:

- Discuss ways to use international standards and qualifications as a tool to improve economic performance, reduce costs, manage and reduce risks, increase international trade, accelerate application of innovations, increase sustainability and quality, and build confidence in investors.
3. On May 24, a **webinar entitled "TOEFL iBT and TOEFL iBT Home Edition: Insights you need"** was organized jointly with the SEC and ETS Global to introduce the "TOEFL iBT® & Home Edition" exams. The event was attended by English teachers and 28 people who want to learn English and assess their language skills.
 4. On May 31, in cooperation with ETS Global, the SEC organized a webinar entitled **"GRE General Test: Insights You Need"** to introduce the "GRE General Test" exams. The event was attended by 53 people.
 5. On June 22, the SEC **together with ETS Global and EducationUSA** held an information session on TOEFL iBT and GRE: General Test exams. The event was attended by 57 people.
 6. On June 25, the SEC together with "Cambridge Assessment English" held an online information session on the TKT exam entitled **"Prove Your Teaching Knowledge with TKT"**. The event was attended by 57 people.
 7. On 30 June, the **UK Home Office** audited the SEC for compliance with all regulations for the PTE Academic (PTE A), PTE A UKVI, and PTE Home examinations, as well as for ensuring quality and safety. The SEC passed an audit and obtained the final opinion and validation to continue examinations.
 8. On August 5, opportunities for cooperation were discussed between the **SEC and Ofqual** - The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation of the UK. Views were exchanged on assessment policies and innovative approaches in education of both countries.
 9. On August 24, the SEC's representatives participated in a practical training entitled **"The Propell® Workshop for Teachers"** organized by ETS Global.
 10. On September 1, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the **SEC and ACCA (The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants)**. The MoU signed between the parties aims to formalize the following existing relations:
 - Investigate learning and development opportunities in the field of professional competence, skills, and technical knowledge;
 - Work together and take measures to raise awareness of ACCA qualifications and certifications;
 - Develop joint strategy and marketing campaigns to promote cooperation between the SEC and ACCA;

- Organize joint programs to support students' training and development to build successful careers in accounting and finance.

Under the agreement between the institutions, the SEC will be provided with access to relevant resources of ACCA for professional research, and both institutions will explore potential opportunities for learning and development initiatives in the areas of professional skills, competencies, and technical knowledge.

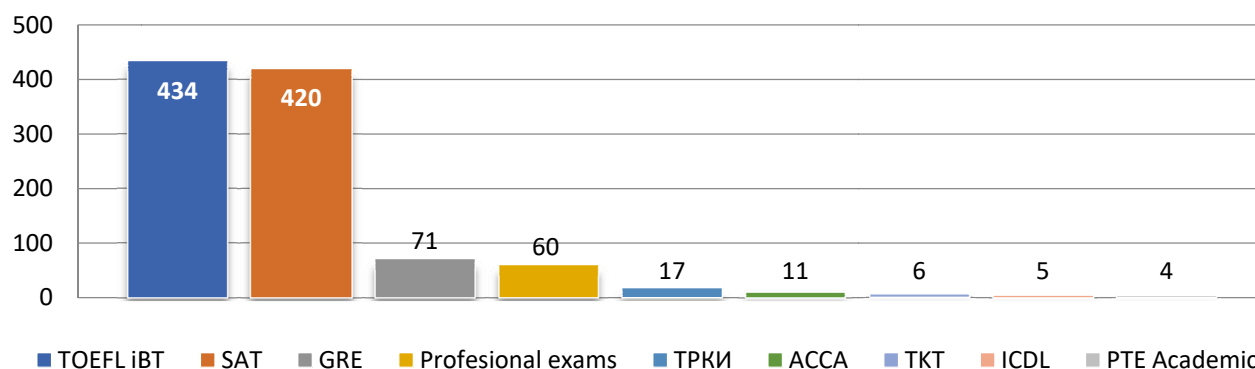
11. On 3 September, the Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the SEC met with **Samr Shah, the Head of the British Council Azerbaijan**. The parties discussed prospects for future cooperation, as well as issues covered at the 4th meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on economic cooperation between the Government of Azerbaijan and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
12. On September 29, a meeting was held between the SEC and the management of the **Centre for Assessment, Selection and Placement of Turkey**. Opportunities for mutual cooperation between the institutions were discussed at the meeting.
13. On October 15-17, representatives of the SEC took part in the **“VII Eurasian Forum of Accountants and Auditors”** held in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.
14. On November 3-4 and December 1-2, the SEC's representatives participated in the 10th Annual Conference 2021 on Test Security.
15. On November 24, the Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the SEC met with Orkhan Zakirov, one of the winners of the **“Yukselish”** competition, within the framework of the mentoring program of the “Yukselish” competition.
16. On November 24, a MoU was signed between the SEC and the **State Testing Center under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan (STC)**. According to the MoU, the SEC and the STC agreed to exchange experience in the following areas:
 - Test preparation process;
 - Training of markers and development of assessment criteria;
 - Development of methodical aids for pupils, students, and teachers;
 - Examination procedures (local and international exams);
 - IT infrastructure and data protection for exams;
 - Publication of research articles;
 - Admission and selection process;
 - Carry out reforms to develop curricula, textbooks, and assessment.
17. On November 10, 17, and 24, a representative of the SEC participated in online training on item response theory (IRT) by the **Cambridge Assessment Network (CAN)**.
18. On November 27, a meeting with a delegation led by President of the **Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation** Alexander Sergeyev was held at the SEC.
19. On November 28, **an exam was held for the candidates wishing to participate in “Data, Economy and Development Policy” micromaster program** by the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)**. This program was funded by “SOCAR Midstream Operations Limited Liability Company” and 64 individuals took part in the exam.
20. On December 7 and 22, a meeting was held with the participation of rectors of a number of higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan **on mutual cooperation between the SEC and higher education institutions**. Staff of the SEC made presentations on the following services provided by the Center:
 - Support the organization of the teaching process based on best international and local practices;
 - Support for the development of assessment tools;
 - Support the transition to computer-based assessment in higher education institutions;
 - Electrification - application of digital platforms;
 - Support for data-driven decision-making;
 - Experiential and psychological support to students;
 - Carrying out promotion activities based on cooperation of the SEC and higher education institutions.

21. On December 14, a meeting was held at the SEC with the heads of the **Baku office of the Russian Information and Cultural Center**.
22. On December 15, the Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the SEC met with the representatives of the **U.S. Embassy in Azerbaijan**.
23. On December 16, 18, and 19, the SEC together with ETS Global organized a **TOEFL iBT Propell practical training** for ESL (English as a second language) teachers. 110 people who participated in the three days of the training were awarded certificates.

International assessment programs and out-of-competition student admission to universities:

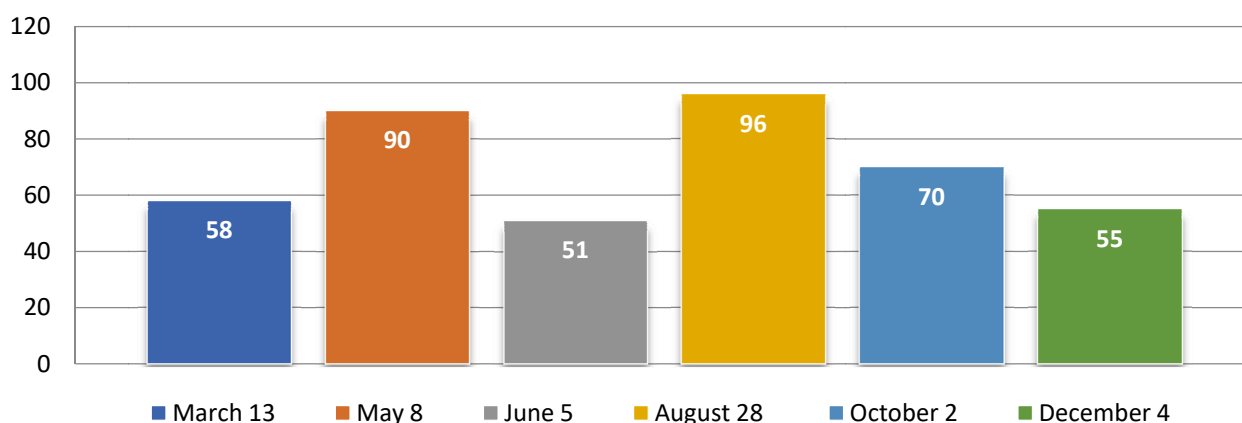
1. In 2021, to support **Azerbaijani citizens' educational opportunities abroad**, the SEC administered international examinations based on international experience during the pandemic. The examinations were conducted in the exam premises (halls) in accordance with the guidelines and relevant sanitary-hygienic guidelines of the Administration of the Regional Medical Divisions (TABIB). Each exam hall consisted of 5-10 people and social distance was kept. In 2021, a total of 8 different international examinations were held at the SEC.
2. **Statistics** on international examinations held in 2021:

Number of participants in international exams

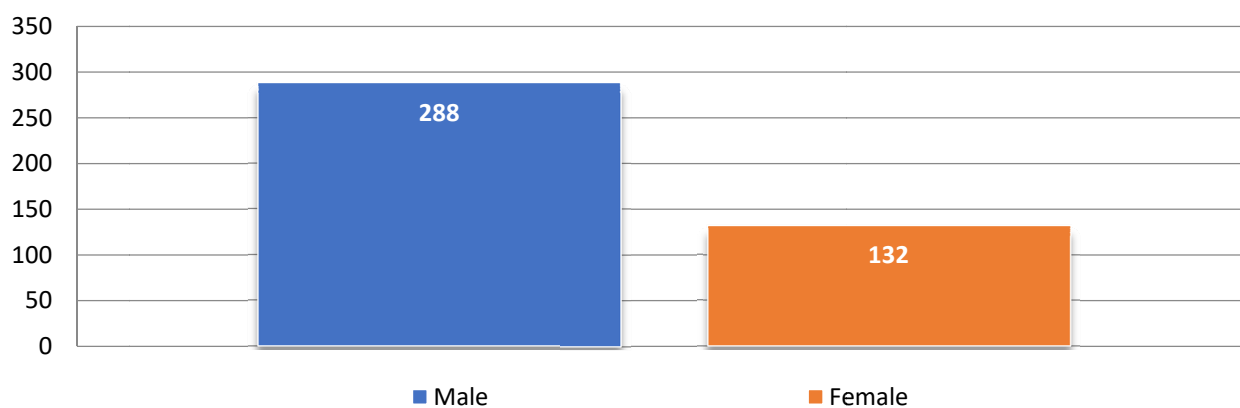


Note: Foreigners from Turkey, Georgia, Iran, Korea, Colombia, Japan, the United States, and Russia also participated in the international exams held by the Center.

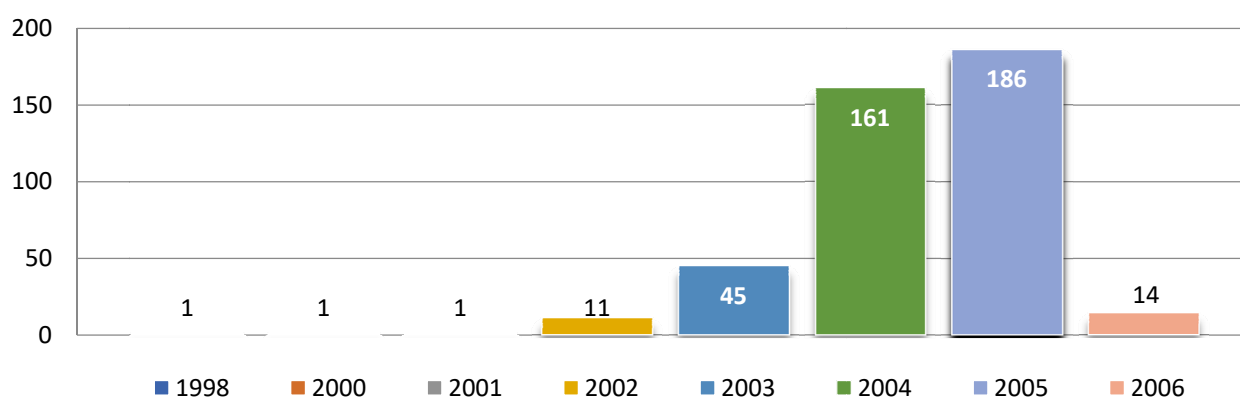
**Number of participants in SAT exams
(by exam dates)**



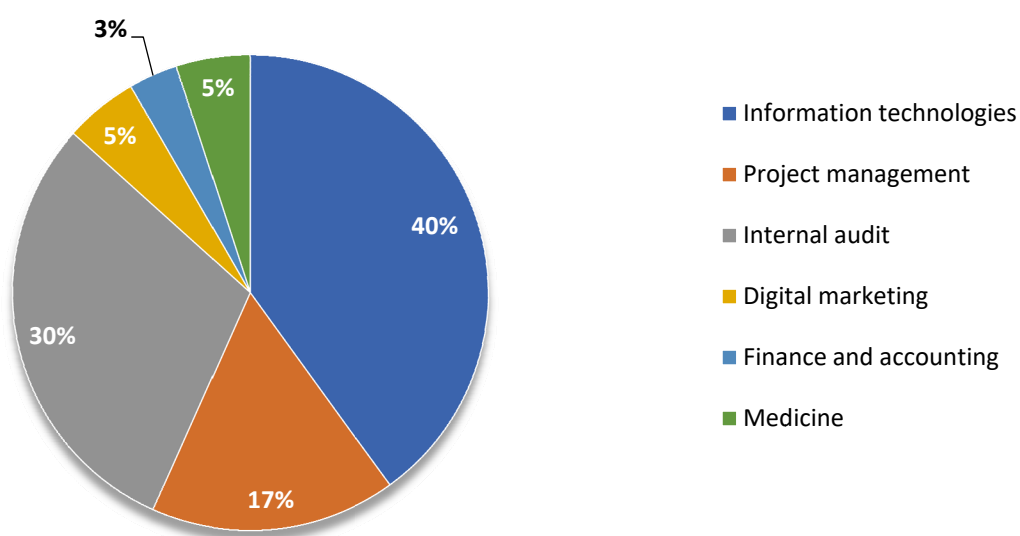
**Number of participants in SAT exams
(by gender)**



**Number of participants in SAT exams
(by date of birth of participants)**



% distribution of professional exams exams by type



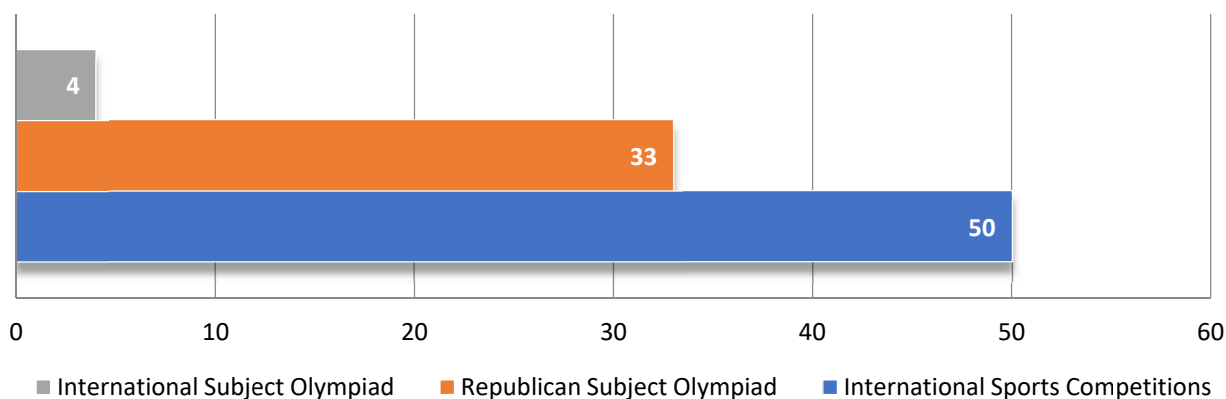
List of institutions to which the Pearson professional exams conducted through the Pearson VUE platform belong:

Nº	Institutions (by directions)
Information Technologies	
1.	Cisco Systems, Inc.
2.	Fortinet
3.	IBM Corporation
4.	Microsoft
5.	Oracle Certification Program
Digital Marketing	
6.	Digital Marketing Institute
Internal Audit	
7.	Institute of Internal Auditors
Project Management	
8.	PMI - Project Management Institute
Medical	
9.	Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
Finance & Accounting	
10.	ACAMS
11.	CAIA Association

3. Out-of-competition admission:

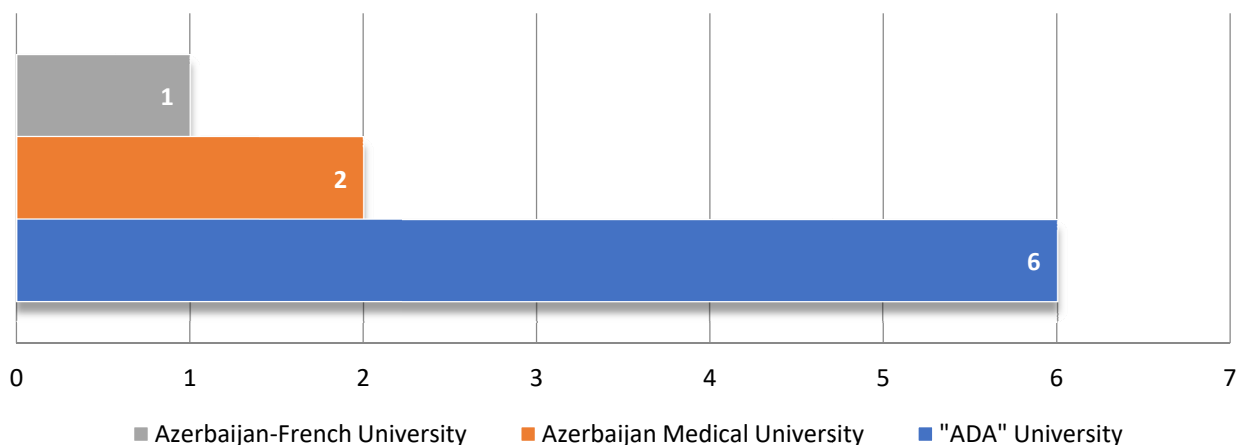
According to the rules of admission, *winners of international and national subject Olympiads, international competitions and contests*, as well as *students studying in internationally accredited educational programs* - International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IB Diploma Program), Advanced Level of General Certificate of Education, Advanced Placement have the right to be admitted to higher education institutions out of competition.

Indicators of out-of-competition admission for the 2021/2022 academic year



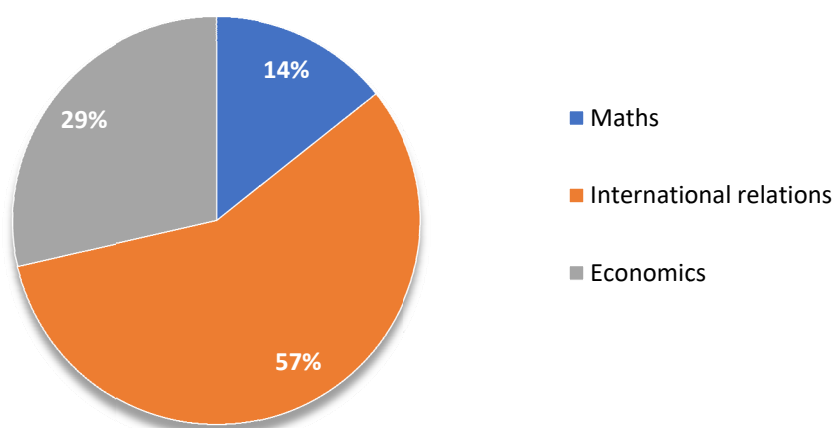
13 winners of the Republican Subject Olympiad refused to be admitted out of competition to the admission programs they could choose in the relevant subject and participated in the competition on the basis of their scores in the admission examination.

Number of IB Diploma Program graduates admitted to higher education institutions (by higher education institutions)



In addition, based on the results of the SAT exam, 14 applicants were admitted to “ADA” University.

% distribution of students admitted according to the results of SAT exam (by specialties)



- On June 16, an **information booklet** was prepared and presented to the public for students studying at internationally accredited educational programs.
- On September 23, the SEC launched the **Unified Registration Platform** for registration for international exams. Currently, the platform provides an opportunity to register or obtain information from a single platform for 8 different international exams held at the SEC. During the reporting year, 24 candidates registered for various types of international exams through the new platform.

International and local strategic projects in the field of educational assessment:

- The quality of examinations organized by the SEC is successfully audited by **RCEC (Research Center for Examination and Certification)**, a leading expert center for exam quality assessment in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. A certificate reflecting the relevant quality mark was submitted to the SEC. The audit is based on ISO 9001, ISO 17024, ISO 17065, and international quality standards for education assessment.
- In order to align foreign language assessment and teaching with international language standards, namely CEFR (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and to contribute to the

ongoing reforms in designing language exams, the SEC together with the Institute of Education implemented the project "**Support to the improvement of foreign language subject curriculum, textbooks and assessment tools (English)**" within the framework the ELS program of the US Embassy. The project consists of four stages and the first stage was implemented from August 24 to October 6, 2020. The stages of the project have the following objectives:

- Stage 1 – revision of local foreign language curriculum, textbooks, assessment tools (English) and preparation of recommendations for their improvement;
 - Stage 2 (January-March, 2021) – preparation of supplementary materials for the English language textbooks based on the levels of CEFR to support communicative language teaching.
 - Stage 3 (August-September, 2021) – the new **6th grade English textbook** was reviewed by Nathan Carr, an international expert and professor at the University of California, Fullerton as a part of the stage 3 of the project. As a result of the process, recommendations were prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Education to align the textbook with CEFR and support developing communicative language skills in students.
3. On February 2, the SEC began cooperating with the Council of Europe and the Azerbaijan State Translation Center to **translate the CEFR into Azerbaijani**. The main purpose of the project of translating the latest edition of CEFR into Azerbaijani is to support the reforms on teaching, learning and assessment of foreign languages in the country.
 4. From February 24 to April 1, the SEC implemented the project "Improvement of assessment tools in German" with the support of the DAAD office in Azerbaijan. The trainings within the project were conducted by Anna Soltyska, a language assessment specialist and lecturer at Ruhr University in Germany.
 5. On February 26, an online meeting was held between the Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the SEC and the Director of the **Georgian National Assessment and Examination Center (NAEC)**, the representatives of both institutions also took part at the e-meeting, and the MoU signed in 2020 was renewed. In 2020, the SEC and NAEC cooperated in the following areas:
 - review and development of the SEC's Georgian language item bank for school-leaving exams;
 - development of an item bank for Teachers' Professional Qualifying Examination for Azerbaijani language and literature teachers working in Georgian schools;
 - improvement of the NAEC's mathematical and verbal logic tests translated into Azerbaijani;
 - SEC's assistance in hiring translators for the Azerbaijani language. The renewed Memorandum for 2021 includes the following areas of mutual cooperation:
 - Review and improvement of the SEC's Georgian language items bank;
 - Items bank development on the Teachers Certification Exams for teachers of the Azerbaijani language and literature working in Georgian schools.

The renewed MoU for 2021 also reflects the following areas of cooperation:

- Review and improvement of the item bank used by the NAEC experts in the school-leaving exams on the Georgian language (for 9th and 11th grade level) of the SEC;
 - Preparation of an item bank on the Teachers' Professional Examination for teachers of Azerbaijani language and literature working in Georgian schools with the assistance of the SEC.
6. Projects in the following categories have been established and launched as a result of negotiations between the SEC and **St. Petersburg State University (SPSU)**, which began in early 2020:
 - Examination and improvement of test and measurement materials used in the final exams of the SEC (9th and 11th grades) on the subject of "Russian language" using the experience of SPSU:
 - On April 12-30, the project "Improvement of assessment tools in the Russian language" was launched;
 - Establishment of a test center for conducting TORFL (Test of Russian as a Foreign Language) exams in Azerbaijan:
 - Curricula of a number of higher education institutions have been reviewed by SPSU and a relevant opinion has been submitted;
 - Organization of professional development trainings for teachers teaching in the Russian streams of Azerbaijani schools:

- On March 30, a webinar entitled "**TORFL - International Russian Language Exam**" was organized by the SEC and SPSU. The event was attended by 25 Russian language teachers, students who want to enter Russian universities and those who want to learn and assess their Russian knowledge and skills;
 - On April 5, in connection with the TORFL exam, the SEC organized another webinar entitled "TORFL - How to prepare for the Russian language exams." The event was attended by 52 Russian language teachers and those who want to learn Russian and assess their skills;
 - Increasing interest in Russian language knowledge competitions and events:
 - On April 6, the Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the SEC awarded 24 winners out of 293 people representing Azerbaijan at the II International Online Olympiad "Russian as a Foreign Language" organized by SPSU. The winners received special coupons, certificates, souvenirs, textbooks in Russian and free vouchers for the TORFL exam.
7. In April, the SEC began cooperating with **the French Institute (IFA)** to improve the assessment of knowledge and skills in French. According to the agreement between the institutions, the experts of the SEC on the French language participated in a 5-day training on French language assessment organized by IFA.
 8. In April-May, the SEC, together with higher education and secondary special education institutions, held online meetings regarding International Computer Driving License (ICDL) in education and discussed areas for future cooperation.
 9. On 12 July, the SEC signed a MoU with Cito, Netherlands(National Institute for Educational Measurement) Educational testing service to renew its cooperation. According to the memorandum, the SEC and Cito agreed to cooperate in the following areas:
 - Implement learning and development initiatives in areas such as educational assessment, computer-based examinations, psychometric testing, competency-based assessment, and student tracking systems;
 - Implement joint partnership programs that support the training, development, and testing of quality assurance mechanisms in educational assessment specialists and trainers;
 - Increase joint regional initiatives in the field of educational assessment in Azerbaijan and the Eurasian region;
 - Regularly share information on new initiatives that are relevant and add value to collaboration in educational evaluation.
 10. Starting in April, the SEC, together with higher education institutions, held online meetings on **the consideration of international qualifications in finance and accounting** in teaching and discussed areas for future cooperation.
 11. For the first time, candidates possessing one of international qualifications* in finance and accounting were exempted from the first round of the **Certificate in Professional Accounting (CPA)** test in 2021. The staff members of the Strategic Development Department verified the authenticity of the candidates' qualifications and approved them for the exam.

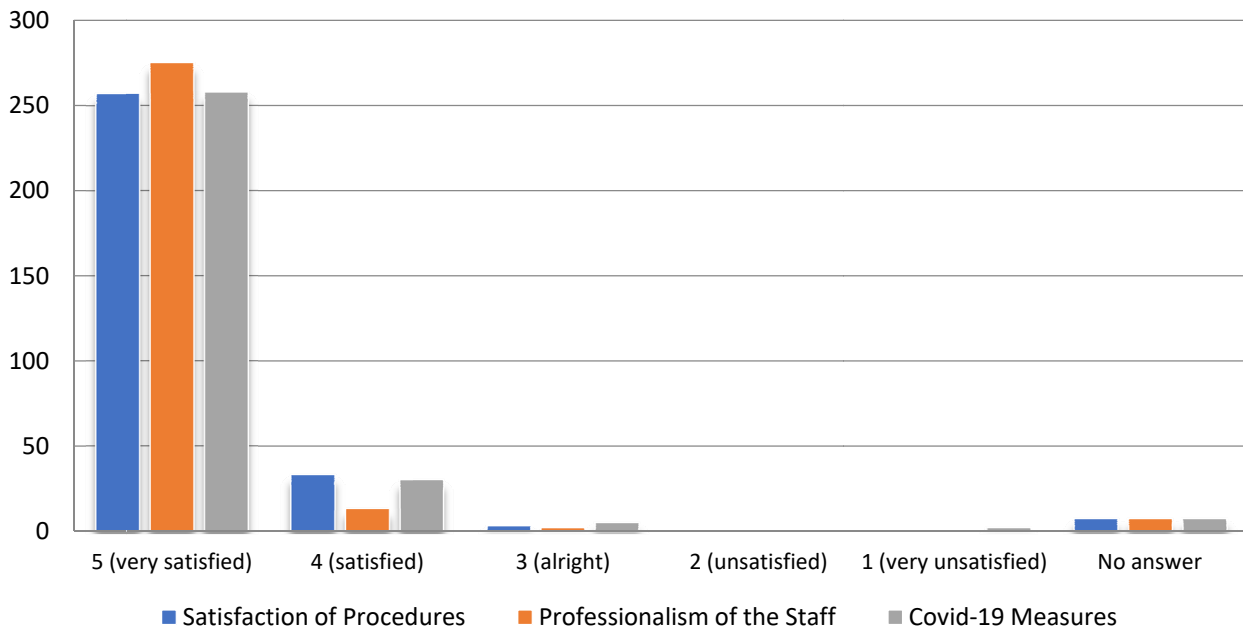
* *List of international certifications:*

Nº	Institution	Examination
1.	The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)	FR - Financial Reporting
		DiplIFR – Diploma in International Financial Reporting
2.	Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA)	F2 – Advanced Financial Reporting
3.	CPA – A certified public accountant	
4.	The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales ICAEW	ACA – Associate Chartered Accountant Program
5.	Institute of Certified Financial Managers ICFM	Diploma in International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS)
6.	Chartered Institute Of Public Finance & Accountancy CIPFA	

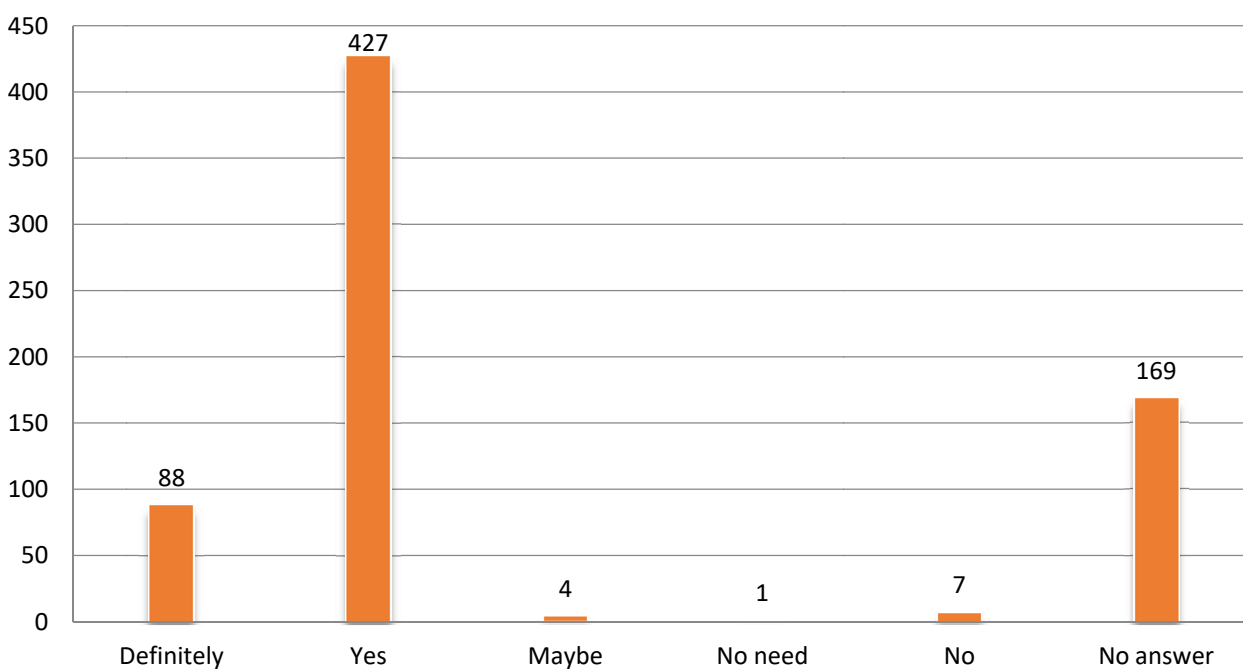
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12. On October 8, the SEC's representatives attended the opening ceremony of the Agency for Sustainable and Operational Social Security's (DOST Agency) initiative **"Everyone Became a Hero"**. To assist in the education of the children of the Second Karabakh War martyrs, the representatives of the SEC's Strategic Development Department distributed questionnaires to the children of the martyrs who attended the event and recorded their requirements and aspirations.
13. On the eve of November 8 – Victory Day, on November 4, the SEC co-organized an event with the YASHAT Fund with the participation of schoolchildren of the martyrs of 44-day war for the integrity of the homeland, and signed a MoU on partnership with the fund. The fundamental goal of the memorandum is to give moral support to the families of the martyrs and veterans of the war for the defence of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, as well as practical aid in their education, future career planning, and growth. The following are the key areas of collaboration between the SEC and the YASHAT Fund;
- Investigate learning and professional development opportunities of the children of martyrs and veterans;
 - Assist in the involvement of relevant specialists in the preparation and execution of events to be organised by the SEC to care for martyrs' children and veterans;
 - Exploring and creating new ways to increase the knowledge and skills of martyrs' children and veterans, as well as to advance their careers;
 - Hold scientific conferences to evaluate the academic achievement of children of martyrs and veterans.
 - Through capacity-building programmes, increase the employment of children of martyrs who are schoolchildren and students.
- The event attendees were also presented the SEC's activities and history, opportunities of the websites – e-psixoloq.az and otk.az provide. Participants were given otk.az coupons to attend to the SEC's online examinations.
- 13.1 On December 18, the SEC, in collaboration with the "YASHAT" Fund, held an event in Barda and Nakhchivan with the participation of children of martyrs' of the 44-day Patriotic War. Taking into mind the COVID-19 pandemic's limits, 50 and 25 pupils and their parents were invited to the events in Barda and Nakhchivan, respectively. Participants at the event were presented a variety of student support materials published by the SEC (a total of 704 copies). |Coupons were also distributed to attend to mock tests on the otk.az website.
- 13.2 On December 25, the SEC organized events in **Ganja, Tovuz and Shirvan** with the participation of children of martyrs' of the 44-day Patriotic War. Taking into account the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, 33, 18, 16 schoolchildren and their parents were invited to the events held in Ganja, Tovuz, and Shirvan, respectively. Participants of the event were presented with various student support materials (total of 689 copies) published by the SEC. Free coupons were also provided for the mock exams held through the otk.az website.
14. In April-August, the results of the students wishing to be enrolled to ADA students out-of-competition via SAT exam were sent to the SEC through **"the College Board's Higher Education Reporting** portal. Final list was processed by the the staff of the Strategic Development Department and was sent to the relevant department for consideration.
15. In June, the credentials of individuals who submitted an international language certificate (IELTS) for out-of-competition admission to the PhD were validated via the **IELTS Test Report Form (TRF) Verification Service** platform of the IELTS official website.
16. **Corporate Profile Book** (62 pages) covering all areas of the SEC's activity was prepared to give a more comprehensive presentation of the SEC's activities in Azerbaijani and English in the preliminary talks with foreign and local partners.
17. Throughout the reporting year, the SEC's official **LinkedIn page** constantly updated the organization's actions for the social media followers (the number of followers reached 800 in 2020 and 1,600 in 2021).
18. Negotiations with **Riiid Labs** continued on the application of artificial intelligence in predicting exam results.
19. In July, SEC staff participated in trainings on client counseling services provided by **"Vermillion Groups"**, a consulting service for UK university applicants.
20. In January-March, SEC specialists improved **the unique software named "ProctorDIM"** for administering online tests, and a number of higher education institutions were involved in the process.
-

21. On July 10, the second stage of the student selection competition (test exam) for SABAH groups was held by the SEC.
22. The SEC administered a trial exam for individuals seeking admission to the diplomatic service at **the Ministry of Foreign Affairs** on December 26. The trial exam was attended by 185 participants.
23. The process of collecting and processing the feedback of test-takers continued through **surveys**. It measures the quality of international exams.

23.1 Statistics on surveys conducted in 2021:



Would you recommend your acquaintances to take the exam at the SEC?



24. During the year, **346 citizen enquiries** for international tests were responded to.

Coverage of the SEC activities in the world:

1. From September 30 to October 2, an SEC representative spoke at **the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers' online international conference on automation and informatics**. At the international online conference, the SEC's representative gave a presentation on "The role of information systems in the activities of the State Examination Center" in the field of "E-learning" and the Center's "Student-Graduate" systems, as well as Talent Pool "gave detailed information about the information systems."
2. On October 22-23, representatives of the SEC participated in the **10th annual international conference of the Eurasian Association on Educational Assessment (EAOKO) online**. At the conference, a representative of the SEC made a presentation entitled "Decade of development of the centralized final exam system in the Republic of Azerbaijan: key results", covering issues such as the development of the final exam over 10 years, the main features, rules, as well as general and statistical results of the unified admission exam.
3. On April 14, the journal entitled "Higher Education in Russia and Neighboring Countries" of the National Research University – Higher School of Economics (HSE University) published an article on the activities of the SEC entitled "Admission system to higher education institutions in Azerbaijan" in its 26th issue.
4. In May, **the International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA)**, one of the SEC's international partners, presented on its official website the experiences of assessment bodies in this area, which are facing difficulties in conducting large-scale examinations due to the pandemic in most countries. The SEC was also among the assessment bodies which shared its experience in organizing exams.
5. On July 16, UNESCO's report "A Global Framework of Reference on Digital Literacy Skills for Indicator 4.4.2 (Global Framework for Digital Literacy Skills for Indicator 4.4.2)" provided information on the ICDL international examinations organized by the SEC and the comparison of the exam with international standards on ICT literacy and other international exams in this field.

International cooperation in the field of civil service:

1. During the reporting period, the SEC continued its work on the Public Administration Reform Panel under the European Union's (EU) Eastern Partnership (EP) Program I Platform on Democracy, Good Governance and Stability. Within this framework:



- On August 30, the SEC staff participated in an online planning meeting on the "Professional Civil Service, as well as Vocational Education and Training" project with the participation of EP countries, co-organized by the EP Regional Management Reform Foundation and the GIZ (German Agency for International Cooperation) Regional Foundation. The participants exchanged views on various potential areas of cooperation. As a next step in the project, it is planned to analyze the proposals developed by the organizers as a result of group discussions and submit proposals for development projects for the participating countries.
- From September 27 to October 1, the representative of the SEC made a presentation on "Good Practices in Implementing Anti-Corruption Policy in Azerbaijan" at the online training "Fighting Corruption" within the EaP Academy of Public Administration Program.
- On November 15-19, a representative of the SEC made a presentation on "Civil Service Reforms" at the online training "Strengthening Human Resource Management in the Civil Service System of the Eastern Partnership Countries" within the EaP Academy of Public Administration Program.

2. During 2021, the SEC continued its cooperation with the Astana Civil Service Hub (ACSH) located in Astana, Kazakhstan. Within the framework of cooperation with the ACSH in 2021:



- On January 26, the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Belarus organized a panel session of the ACSH entitled "Human Resources in Public Administration: Challenges and Prospects" within the framework of the international scientific-practical conference "Modern Public Administration: Education, Science, Practice". At the event, the Deputy Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the SEC informed the participants about the activities of the SEC in carrying out reforms in the personnel policy of the civil service of the Republic of Azerbaijan and responded raised questions. The event was attended by a number of employees of the SEC, who got acquainted with the reforms on the organization and improvement of the HR management process in the civil service of the member countries of the Regional Hub and joined the discussions.
- On April 4, at the invitation of the Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University in Turkestan, Kazakhstan, the Deputy Chairperson of the SEC gave an open online lecture on "Public Administration Professionalization: The Case of Azerbaijan".
- On August 18, at the invitation of the ACSH and the Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University in Turkestan, Kazakhstan, the Executive Director of the SEC gave an online lecture on "Motivation and Meritocracy in the Civil Service" at the Turkestan Summer School of Public Administration.
- On September 14, 2021, an online conference on "Current Civil Service Reforms: Challenges and Prospects" was organized by the SEC and the ACSH. The event was attended by more than 200 delegates from 20 countries. The event focused on certain aspects of the development of government agencies, capacity building of public administration, the latest research in public administration, and cooperation in the field of civil service. The annual conference, held in a mixed format, was attended by civil servants, experts, and scientists from more than 40 countries.
- On December 7, the Deputy Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the SEC spoke at an online panel session of the ACSH on "Governance in Post-Soviet Countries: Development and Challenges" within the 10th Conference of the Middle East Public Policy and Governance Association (AMEPPA) in Doha, Qatar.

3. On May 20, the SEC representative attended the 4th meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In the protocol of the meeting, it was decided to establish cooperation between the SEC and the relevant government agencies of the United Kingdom in the following areas of civil service:



- Admission to the Civil Service in the United Kingdom - the stages of application, selection, and interview for employment and their online management;
- Management in the Civil Service - a broad approach to the Civil Service of the United Kingdom and its individual application in the civil service institutions of the United Kingdom;
- Talent management approaches and ways to use them in the UK Civil Service to ensure career promotion.



1. "Validation of Competency Model" project

The SEC continued the pilot project entitled "Validation of Competency Model" project with the support of the EU and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) under the SIGMA (Support to Management and Governance Improvement) program based on the article "5.4. In order to support the implementation of the "Civil Service Competence Model". The following work was done during the reporting year:

- On February 26, an online meeting was held between the staff of the SEC and international experts of the SIGMA program to discuss practical activities for the application of the competency model for the civil service system;
- On May 18-19, international experts of the SIGMA program met with the working group of the pilot project (Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, The State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations, Food Safety Agency and Baku Court of Appeal) and conducted online training for working groups to develop their skills in job analysis, competency development and their knowledge of situational-based interview methods through hands-on activities;
- A steering committee meeting was held on June 22 to discuss the current status of the pilot project, challenges and achievements;
- On October 13, SIGMA experts conducted an online training on "Competency-based Interviews" rules for employees of the interview commission who regularly participate in the interview commission in order to fill vacancies in the civil service bodies;
- On October 18-19, the next training for pilot organizations on situational interview methods was held.

2. "Improvement of internal control mechanisms in government agencies" project

The SEC, in cooperation with the EU and the OECD, continued the project "Improving Internal Control Mechanisms in Government Agencies" in the framework of the SIGMA program.

The purpose of the project is to present the necessary methods and tools for internal control in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the structural units performing internal control functions and the development of governance in public institutions based on the article "5.1. Organization of activities in the direction of "Implementation of institutional reforms in the civil service". The following work was done during the reporting year:

- On February 11, the project started with an online workshop on "Introduction to Internal Control Mechanisms in Public Administration" at the initial stage and lasted for two days. The event was attended by 52 representatives from structural units performing internal control functions in government agencies.
- An online working meeting of the pilot project was held on June 4. The main purpose of the meeting was to acquaint SIGMA experts with the internal control and audit mechanisms of the participating agencies and to determine the role of the working group.
- A presentation of the pilot project was held on June 25.

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- The first online training of the pilot project was held on July 16. The participants were informed on the main components, principles and risk assessment methodology of the “COSO” internal control system and exchanged views by the experienced SIGMA expert.
 - On July 22, the next online training was organized by the SEC. The training included a presentation by an experienced internal audit expert on the standards, objectives, principles, as well as documents (charter, ethical rules, etc.) related to the basic concepts of internal audit for auditors of pilot government agencies.
 - On December 2, an online training was organized by the SEC. The training covered the main components of the risk management phase after the risk identification phase by an experienced SIGMA expert and explained their application in the SEC.

3. Support to civil service reform in Azerbaijan (Technical Assistance Project)

In order to contribute to the implementation of the "Strategy for Civil Service Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2025", the SEC wrote a draft technical assistance project entitled "Support to Civil Service Reform in Azerbaijan" 2022-2023 and was approved by the European Union.



Conclusion

In conclusion, the SEC has successfully managed to run undergraduate (including school-leaving exams), graduate, residency, and vocational college admissions in the Republic of Azerbaijan, regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic limitations of 2021. The use of SEC's e-services increased while student and teacher support resources were provided online regularly to decrease the delay caused in education. The provision of international partnerships increased with some more international testing programs added to the SEC's profile.

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