

ACTIVITIES OF THE “ABITURIENT” JOURNAL

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Evaluation of knowledge and skills through test method was introduced in Azerbaijan 15 years ago in the second year of state independence. The test method is recognized all over the world as scientifically grounded, and its objectivity and efficiency have been proven in practice. This method has completely justified itself in our country in admission of students to higher education institutions and gained support of the government and society, including educational and scientific communities. Now test methods are applied for recruitment of staff for public organizations and admission of students for master degree education in universities.

The main duty of the SSAC as an agency organizing and regulating admission process is assessment of knowledge and skills of test-takers through application of computer technologies and based on scientific and methodological principles. But taking into account that this duty serves for more strategic objective – rising the quality of education in the country to the level of world standards, and that the centralized admission campaign is a mass process, the State Commission also manages to inform and enlighten the society. In other words, the above-mentioned factors stipulate that consistent and purposeful activities in this direction must be carried out.

The SSAC uses various ways and means to inform and enlighten the society:

- Mass media and the SSAC’s own print;
- Internet;
- Scientific and practical conferences;
- Appeal and other mass arrangements.

Here we will dwell on the works done through the “Abiturient” journal, which is the official print of the SSAC. Of course, activities of the journal should be considered within the context of activities of the founder – the SSAC.

The mission of the “Abiturient” journal, which was founded in 1995 year, includes provision of scientific and methodological and information services related to preparation for admission examinations, content, methodological aspects, organization, technology, progress and results of examinations to the society as a whole, and university applicants, senior pupils and education professionals in particular.

The SSAC attaches a special importance to transparency of the examination process, and for this purpose uses the capacity of the “Abiturient” journal along with other means. Thus the journal serves for the society as a source of comprehensive, exact and reliable information on progress of the admission campaign, its directions and stages.

The main topical directions of the journal are

1. Official documentation of the SSAC;
2. Scientific and methodological materials;
3. Materials on specialty (professional) directions;
4. Materials related to the technology of examinations;
5. Scientific and statistical analysis and propagation of innovative experience;
6. Information and announcements on current activities of the SSAC.

All these materials are delivered to the society regularly both by the journal and some electronic means.

1. Official papers of the SSAC: The main documents of the SSAC addressed to the society through the “Abiturient” journal are

- Admission regulations for bachelor and master degree levels of local and foreign higher education institutions and for secondary special schools of the republic from main and complete secondary education basis;
- Announcements on admission for different education levels, specialties involved in admission campaign, planned vacancies;
- News on organization and administration of examinations;
- List of admitted students and pass scores set for different specialties;
- Other decisions, information and announcements from the SSAC.

2. Scientific and methodological materials: The SSAC attaches a special importance to provision of assistance to young people preparing for admission examinations. The list of materials published in various regular and special issues of the journal in this direction are as follows:

- Programs of admission examinations for different subjects;
- Tools and expert comments related to preparation for admission examinations;
- Methodological instructions and recommendations;
- Sample tests;
- Tools for assessment of pupils’ knowledge (electronic and paper versions);
- Programs of specific skill examinations and methodological instructions;
- Advices of psychologist.

The content of the admission examinations consists of admission programs on different subjects. That’s why the admission program is presented to the applicants in early stages of the admission campaign. These programs are developed by the scientific and methodological workshops attached to the SSAC and based on school curriculums and manuals. At the same time the programs are modified, if necessary, in accordance with innovations and modifications introduced in schools manuals. The list of main and supplementary literature are provided at the end of each program.

Training tools for all subjects are developed and published aiming at meeting needs of senior pupils and applicants preparing for the admission examinations. These tools are developed on the basis of content and requirements of admission examination programs, and provide compact and organic explanations of a whole material of the course on proper subjects using understandable language. The aim of the publication of these specific training tools is to assist senior pupils and university applicants in preparation (without using tutoring services) for admission examinations.

The journal publishes articles, comments and recommendations of authoritative scientists, methodologists and experienced teachers on difficult topics in education programs, problems insufficiently clarified in textbooks, correction of errors in textbooks, explanation of difficult tests and methods for learning various topics.

Sample tests on topics and problems representing the content of admission program are also provided for applicants. These sample tests are developed in accordance with the model of admission examinations and enable the applicants to examine preparedness level of themselves.

Testing, examination and evaluation through application of test methods in schools also should be scientifically grounded and based on uniform standards and principles. But despite the fact that general education schools frequently apply test methods in training process, the above-mentioned requirements are not satisfied by all of them. Many people demonstrate amateurish approach in this issue. That's why the SSAC, based on its 15 year-long experience in testology and test methodology, has published in special issues of the "Abiturient" journal test collections for all subjects and grades on the basis of school curriculums and textbooks. The electronic version of them – the "Electronic test tools" has also been developed and provided for use of teachers and students. These tools enable students to check their own knowledge and skills, independently, teachers to evaluate pupils' knowledge and skills promptly and objectively, and parents to control training of their children.

Assistance to applicants to specialties demanding specific skills. The SSAC keeps this issue at the center of attention. Every year a special issue of the "Abiturient" is dedicated to the admission to specialties demanding specific skills. Here are included regulations for administering specific skill examinations, content of these examinations, program requirements, assessment criteria, recommendations and etc.

The applicants should take into consideration psychological factors during deciding their preferences for specialties, and also prepare for examinations not only intellectually but also psychologically. That's why the journal periodically includes in its issues advices of psychologist.

3. Materials helpful for specialty selection. The journal uses its information and education capacity to assist young people preparing for admission to universities in selection of specialty and professional directions. The materials provided with this purpose are

- Information on pass scores set for admission to various specialties of higher schools;
- Electronic and paper versions of materials presenting information about public and private higher schools in the country;
- Comments on nature of higher education specialties and demand for them;
- Information on education opportunities abroad and materials about experiences of leading scientific and educational centers of the world in preparation of specialists in various areas.

4. Materials about technology of examinations. The better the applicants aware of technology of examinations, regulations and rights and obligations of themselves, the more free and comfortable they feel in the examination process, avoid mental stress, technical mistakes and loss of time, and thus optimally demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Taking into consideration the above-mentioned factors, the SSAC publishes the "applicant's guide" providing clear explanation of rules of behaviour. But the content of this tool is not limited to the examination process. The main issues reflected in the "applicant's guide" are

- Acquaintance with the admission regulations;
- How to select the right specialty?;

- Recommendations on preparation for examinations;
- Regulations for reception of documents;
- Pre-examination preparations and rules of behaviour during examinations;
- Post-examination activities.

5. Scientific and statistical study and propagation of advanced experience. Application of up-to-date information technologies in the students admission system enables to maintain comprehensive database reflecting the educational climate in the country. Analysing this data, sharing derived materials with teaching community, disseminating advanced experience, and drawing attention of appropriate entities to shortcomings are of a great importance for strategical decision-making on development of educational sphere. The SSAC, based on the results of admission examinations, holds scientific and statistical analysis of the status of general education in the country, and makes these materials available for the society. At the same time, such specialized analytical materials like “Gender aspects of the admission examinations” and “Statistics on oil-related specialties” are published as parts of the overall material. Brochures reflecting indicators of alumni of each district are also published and sent to appropriate educational departments. Such comprehensive study of the results of admission examinations can be considered as a monitoring of status of the educational sphere.

The study include following materials:

- Comments on competition situation;
- Ratings of higher education schools;
- Indicators with regard to examination subjects;
- Districts and schools with high and low indicators;
- Dynamics of education indicators in various years;
- Study of gender aspect of the admission examinations and interest of young people to various areas.

Experiences of high-scorers in admission examinations are examples of an excellent mastering of training materials. That’s why the high-scorers’ experience in preparation for admission examinations are broadly covered by one special issue of the journal which include interviews with and articles about them. The special issue also include information about their scores, specialties they have been admitted to and schools they graduated from, families and social status of their parents.

6. Information and announcements about current activities of the SSAC. The editorial staff of the journal closely watches and covers the events, important news, international relations and other important activities taken place as a part of current functioning of the SSAC. The summary of annual activities of the SSAC is published and presented to the society under the title “chronology of facts” at the end of each year.

The journal also maintains the web site which enables it to make available summaries of special issues of the journal and necessary official information for Internet users, to hold virtual information exchange with them and to gain access to the broader information space.