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THE NOTION AND CONTENT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN UKRAINE

The article is dedicated to the study of the content of quality assurance of higher education. The basic principles of education quality assurance are defined in the article. The legal status of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is analyzed.

Key words: the quality of higher education; the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education; independent agencies; competence.

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ПОНЯТТЯ ТА ЗМІСТ ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ ЯКОСТІ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ В УКРАЇНІ

Стаття присвячена дослідженню змісту забезпечення якості вищої освіти. У статті визначено основні принципи забезпечення якості освіти. Проаналізовано правовий статус Національного агентства із забезпечення якості вищої освіти.

Ключові слова: якість вищої освіти; Національне агентство із забезпечення якості вищої освіти; незалежні агенції; компетентність.

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ПОНЯТИЕ И СОДЕРЖАНИЕ ОБЕСПЕЧЕНИЯ КАЧЕСТВА ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В УКРАИНЕ

Статья посвящена исследованию содержания качества высшего образования. В статье определены основные принципы обеспечения качества образования. Проанализированы правовой статус Национального агентства по обеспечению качества высшего образования.

Ключевые слова: качество высшего образования; Национальное агентство по обеспечению качества высшего образования; независимые агентства; компетентность.

Topicality of the topic. It is claimed throughout the world that the rise of role of higher education ensures stable economic development, increase of countries' competitiveness and strengthening of their positions on the world market and world economic space. The transition to market relations influences, first of all, the formation of the very person, hence the demands to his/her competence, professionalism and quality of work rise. It is impossible to have a strong, developed, competitive economy of a country

without strong, developed intellectual potential. Education is the basis of national security of a country and all its components. Nowadays, the assessment of education quality is becoming especially topical. The assessment of higher education quality aims not only to measure it according to some specific characteristics, but also to reveal the quality, demonstrate it, pay attention to abilities of a specialist him/herself, and the organisers of the educational process.

The present state of the research. Foreign and native authors actively study problems of education quality. Quality of education is the object of research of philosophers, pedagogues, economists, and lawyers. The following scholars dedicated their works to the problems of education quality: V. Shynkaruk (В. Шинкарук), V. Andrushchenko (В. Андрущенко), V. Astakhova (В. Астахова), L. Horbunova (Л. Горбунова), M. Lukashevych (М. Лукашевич), V. Lutai (В. Лутай), O. Velychko (О. Величко), T. Husen (Т. Гусен), D. Dzvinchuk (Д. Дзвінчук), M. Kysil (М. Кисіль).

The **aim** of the article is to define the content and role of higher education quality assurance and analyze the current state of higher education quality assurance in Ukraine.

Main body. The interest to the problem of definition of education quality in the system of higher education is topical for the whole Europe. The problem of higher education quality assurance is reflected as the key one in all strategic documents of the Bologna Process and is one of the development directions of the European Higher Education Area.

European approaches to the build-up of systems for quality assurance of higher education on the institutional, national and European levels are in the process of evolutionary development in interrelation with other key instruments of Bologna Process realization. European education system was forming in the conditions of natural choice when demands to quality of education were put forward by the very consumers of education services – industries, employers, students.

Conditions for successful development of education systems recognized in the world are: choice and competition, decentralization and autonomy, responsibility for the results. The creation of system for quality assurance of Ukrainian higher education has to comply with leading modern European practices.

European education quality assessment practice creates specialized accreditation agencies – civil organisations that deal with the development of instruments and methods of quality assessment, and also examine quality of education. These agencies are responsible for selection and education of experts who conduct inspections, as well as periodic publication of inspection materials, analysis of activity results, problems and prospects of quality systems in the education sphere [1].

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, the updated version of which was approved in May 2015 at the conference of Ministers responsible for the development of higher education, is a systematic basis for the development of systems for quality assurance of higher education on the institutional, national and European levels. The key role of higher education, research and innovations in the endorsement of social unity, economic growth and global competitiveness is highlighted in *Standards and Guidelines*. It is accentuated that education is an essential component of socio-economic and cultural development.

This document provides guidelines including key aspects of successful measures for quality assurance and academic environment development in higher education. *Standards and Guidelines* are used by higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies as a reference document for internal and external systems for higher education quality assurance.

This document defines a very important principle of higher education quality assurance which is responsibility of higher education institutions for the quality of their educational services. Meanwhile, the increase of demand for skills and competences calls for new steps from higher education. [2].

The problem of the Ukrainian higher education integration into European and international education environment is versatile. However, it is connected to a great extent with the need and readiness to the transition to creation of an absolutely new system for quality of education assessment criteria which complies with international standards.

Higher education quality assurance rests upon a system basis that implies distinct, clear and mutually agreed legislative regulations, institutional forms, organisational mechanisms and procedures aimed at the build-up and realization of open and trustful relations between a state and higher education institutions for the realisation of their common responsibility for providing high-quality education and its development according to the demands of society.

Build-up of a powerful and responsible national system for higher education quality assurance according to European guidelines presupposes:

- increase of competence of specialists who work in the sphere of higher education according to current models, mechanisms and instruments of quality assurance (including studies of the leading international and national experience);
- design and realisation of institutional systems for quality assurance on the level of every higher education institution according to European standards, their approbation and improvement for ensuring full adaptation to local conditions;
- open professional discussion of the problem of higher education quality assurance among education community for ensuring objective evaluation of the current state and optimal development of this process in Ukraine.

The Law of Ukraine *On Higher Education* (2014) standardised national system for quality assurance, which complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, for the first time in the practice of Ukrainian higher education. Introduction of fundamentally new model of assessable, comparable, credible and competitive quality of higher education on the basis of competence approach and relevant culture of continuous improvement of higher education quality on the principles of independence, objectiveness and transparency, trustworthiness and subsidiarity, partnership and collegial responsibility is foreseen. Conceptually new instruments and notions are introduced in the practical activity of higher education. The following instruments are introduced: the National Framework of Qualifications, European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, classification of levels, fields of knowledge and higher education specialities, standards of educational activity and standards of higher education, licensing (of educational activity) and accreditation (of educational programmes), systems for internal and external quality assurance and quality assurance of the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance and independent institutions for higher education quality assessment and assurance. New notions are the following: educational programmes, degrees (as qualifications), competences, results of studying, credits.

The Law defines main notions and approaches to the creation of the system for quality assurance of higher education in Ukraine.

Quality of higher education is defined as a level of knowledge, abilities, skills and other competences gained by a person, which reflects his/her competence according to the standards of higher education, while the quality of educational activity is defined as a level of organisation of the educational process in the higher education institution that complies with the standards of higher education, provides high quality education for a person and contributes to the creation of new knowledge [3].

The Law implies the development of a range of standards and criteria for defining main principles of evaluation of higher education institution activity and student's education level.

In particular, according to the Law:

- quality of education is the level of knowledge, abilities, skills, etc. gained by a person, which reflects his/her competence according to the standards of higher education;
- quality of educational activity is the level of organisation of the educational process in higher education institution that complies with the standards of higher education, provides high quality education for a person and contributes to the creation of new knowledge [3].

The National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance and the statute of the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance were established according to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine № 244 as of April 15, 2015. The National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance is a permanent collegial body authorized by the Law of Ukraine *On Higher Education* for state policy realisation in the sphere of higher education quality assurance [4].

The very idea of the establishment of the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance which is independent from the Ministry of Education and Science and independent agencies for higher education quality assurance is quite simple: to separate the subject (independent agency), which makes some conclusions regarding higher education institutions, from the subjects (the Ministry of Education and Science, National Agency), which take decisions regarding higher education institutions. Meanwhile, the subject that takes decisions is lead by the conclusions of the subject that is independent from him, and the former cannot replace the conclusions of the latter. The Ministry of Education and Science has to retain the functions of the nominal ownership of state higher education institutions and the function of financial flows distribution, being guided, to a great extent, by the decisions of the National Agency, which are lead, in their turn, by the conclusions of independent agencies. The Ministry of Education and Science has to ensure unity and coordination of higher education system. Main functions of the National Agency have to include accreditation of independent agencies for higher education quality assurance, higher education institution accreditation, arbitration, preparation of decisions for the Ministry of Education and Science regarding higher education institutions. The National Agency has to ensure, through independent agencies, new practice of a full-scale higher education institution monitoring, primary evaluation of higher education institutions, creation of recommendations for higher education institutions, final evaluation and conclusions regarding higher education institutions. The National Agency has to ensure an independent examination of higher education institutions through recognised independent agencies.

The work of the National Agency has to be mostly aimed at ensuring the activity of independent agencies. The National Agency, as a collegial body, has to base its decisions exclusively on the conclusions of independent agencies and experts.

These institutions, as a matter of fact, have to be an absolutely new phenomenon in the system of higher education quality management. Main declared functions of the above mentioned institutions are the following:

- qualified external assessment of higher education quality with corresponding conclusions regarding possibility/impossibility of opening, licensing, accreditation of educational programmes;
- design, usage and continuous improvement of methods and techniques that are ideal for the Ukrainian situation and oriented at western models;
- ensuring systematic communication between different stakeholders on the “bottom” level with the aim of improving higher education quality;
- design and revision of education standards in Ukraine, their compliance with European and world standards, taking into account need, demand and informal approach;
- improvement of the general atmosphere of higher education institution performance, assistance in its clearer awareness of its mission, tasks, abilities of self-analysis, internal assessment of education quality;
- monitoring of higher education situation and participation in the development of proposals regarding the improvement of education legislation;
- education analytics and providing all interested parties with the information about the quality and uniqueness of education programmes and institutions.

Independent agencies will allow the creation of a flexible external higher education quality assessment model aimed not so much at state control, but as at the assistance to higher education institutions in the formation of quality culture. On condition that the approach to their organisation is sensible, they can substantially contribute to the questions connected with the improvement of education quality in direct interaction with higher education institutions. They can conduct systematic external quality assessment, including evaluation of education programmes and processes, education institution management evaluation, audit. In particular, independent agencies that are created according to a sectoral principle can successfully substitute sectoral commissions of the National Agency. In our opinion, contribution to various groups – professional associations, experts communities, employers – in the creation of independent agencies for education quality assurance has to become one of the strategic directions of the National Agency and the Ministry of Education and Science in the nearest future.

One should understand that an independent institution for education quality assessment is not a recent invention. Such institutions have been existing in the countries with high level of education for a long time (the USA, Germany, the UK, etc.), and they successfully support the competitiveness of their education institutions.

At the moment, full and consistent system for education quality assurance, according to the European perspective, is absent in the Ukrainian higher education. Higher education institutions partially implement it in the form of quality monitoring procedures that are done at the basis which are identical for all universities, established by and released from the “top” criteria, without taking into consideration the diversity of education institutions. There are no procedures for strategic university development planning and, also, there is no real goal for the increase of the education level.

The system for quality assurance encompasses the design of transparent quality assurance procedures for higher education institution evolution according to the chosen system of values. The procedures can and should be different for different higher education institutions, especially, if the institutions are of different types. The only thing that has to be the same for all education institutions is that the procedures have to be accessible and open for the society, and also they have to contribute to the improvement, maintenance or increase of higher education quality, being based on the following conditions-postulates:

- high level of qualification of the teaching staff;
- motivation of all participants for taking part in the education quality improvement;
- transparency on all levels of higher education system;
- sufficient resources and their fair distribution on the basis of achieved quality;
- flexibility of educational content;
- mobility of higher education teaching personnel and students;
- academic freedom, self-sufficiency and independence.

Conclusions. The contribution to creation of a common education field, stimulation of education institutions and programmes development, full and high-quality integration of education system with society has to remain the main function of a state in the modern education environment.

Education quality, i.e. quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions, reflects the extent to which education activity and means help students reach their studying goals, defined by the programme.

National system for higher education quality assurance has to include both global trends of the modern world, and national peculiarities, caused by unique historical, social and cultural circumstances. Future higher education development will substantially depend on the ability of higher education institutions to realise their interests in the evaluation and improvement of education quality, and also elaborate effective strategies for the protection of these interests. Raising the quality is the thing that can strengthen the trust to higher education institutions in the society.

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