

The Notion and Content of Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Ukraine

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Abstract – 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 – higher education, Bologna Process, international education, European Higher Education Area.

I. Introduction

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.

II. State of the problem

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 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.

Conclusion

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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