

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC EVALUATION IN ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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Abstract

The paper analyses the quality assurance system of higher education in the Russian Federation. "Best Programs of Innovative Russia" project, implemented within this study, is an attempt to offer new approaches of assessment of quality of higher professional education. The authors propose the methodology for quality evaluation of the educational programmes.

Nowadays the quality assurance system in Russia implies three components which are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. These are licensing, state accreditation and public accreditation. Licensing is carried out to ensure that a HEI has sufficient facilities and resources (classrooms, equipment, teaching staff, information and library resources) to carry out educational activities. At present licensing of educational programmes is indefinite in term. It means that licensing is carried out only once.

State or national accreditation in Russia is the status, which shows that an educational institution has met and is maintaining the level set in the Federal State Educational Standards. As a result of state accreditation HEIs are eligible to award national diplomas. A HEI has to reconfirm its state accreditation status every 6 years.

In recent years public accreditation has been actively evolving in Russia. Public accreditation procedures are voluntary for HEIs. In accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation public accreditation of educational programmes can be provided by organizations established by public (non-governmental) or professional associations and unions. Unlike state accreditation public accreditation does not award higher education institutions with the rights and privileges, but it meets the expectations of public organizations and employers' regarding the educational programmes. This significantly contributes to the prestige of accredited programmes, thus making them more attractive for the prospective students and relevant for the employers.

Public accreditation is carried out by independent quality assurance agencies and therefore is not regulated by the governmental educational authorities, though public accreditation may be recognized by the state accreditation authorities.

Over the past twenty years Russian higher education system has gone through significant transformations which determined the necessity for evaluation.

According to ROSSTAT, as of January 1, 2017 there were 817 educational institutions delivering programmes of higher professional education and about 900 branches offering about 25,000 educational programmes to over 4.4 million students in the Russian Federation.

In recent years a few new categories of HEIs have emerged within the system of higher education: Federal Universities, National Research Universities and flagship universities which have been assigned a special mission of becoming the driving force of higher education development in modern Russia. They are expected to develop the best practices and models in management, methodology and contents of educational process and research, in order to ensure the most effective ways of integration into the global educational area.

Federal Universities – 9 universities were granted this status – train highly qualified professionals for priority fields of economy in the developing regions and federal districts of the Russian Federation in accordance with the long-term strategic plans of the social and economic development.

Research universities – twenty-nine Russian HEIs were granted this status – are to supply the priority fields of science, engineering and cutting edge technologies with highly qualified professionals.

Flagship universities –11 higher education institutions were granted this status – imply consolidation of several universities or institutes into one enlarged educational institution for the pur-

pose of their synergetic strengthening. This reform is aimed at promotion of social and economic development on the regional level in order to avoid brain drain.

Two Russian universities, Lomonosov Moscow State University and Saint Petersburg State University, were granted a special status within the Russian higher education system, as well as the right to issue their own diplomas.

On the one hand, higher education became more accessible and appealing to students, on the other, the excessive accessibility of education has led to low quality programmes, uncompetitiveness and loss of prospective students' interest to such programmes. Applicants for academic programmes, employers, national and international academic community need trustworthy information on the quality of the educational programmes rather than on the higher education institution itself.

Today the Quality Assurance System in Russia is represented by state procedures (mandatory) and non-state procedures (voluntary). State procedures include: licensing of HEIs and programs, state accreditation of HEIs, state control of the quality of education, state control of the compliance of education with the legislation, monitoring of the effectiveness of HEIs' activity. Non-state procedures are independent and include: public accreditation, public evaluation (e.g. rankings, contests, independent projects etc.), certification of professional qualifications, external review of the quality of higher education.

The main difference is that state accreditation is based on strict threshold standards. Public accreditation is more flexible. Public accreditation implies involving all the stakeholders to the accreditation procedure: academic experts, employers and students. Another significant difference is that in case of negative evaluation there are no legal consequences.

Public accreditation is more oriented to the detailed consideration and evaluation of the programmes, and relies on expert opinion.

Public accreditation does not duplicate state accreditation procedures and standards, rather complements them. Professional and public associations are eligible to establish their own standards for the evaluation of academic programmes. Russian accreditation agencies develop their own standards and criteria on the basis of the European and US Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance.

The name of the public accreditation itself is rooted in a 2-phase approach, including the analysis of public opinion and the evaluation of the professional community or the external review.

The project "*Best Programmes of the Innovative Russia*" refers to expert evaluation of the higher education programmes.

Expert survey is carried out using the Internet poll technology from the website www.best-edu.ru. Evaluation focuses on the quality of a certain educational programme delivery, therefore the project puts emphasis on the educational programs. The developed methodology and technological advances grant the representatives of the academic and professional communities an opportunity to manage the process of education.

The voting experts are appointed from the reputable academic community. They are eligible to select up to 10% from the total of approximately 25,000 educational programmes, and can vote only once. The survey is carried out in real time.

The survey is carried out nationwide. All the educational programmes delivered by higher education institutions of the Russian Federation are subject to evaluation. The respondents are regionally scattered. The methodology is applicable to many internet polls and is considered reliable.

We took territorial constituents of the Russian Federation as a unit of measurement. In order to make sure we have a balanced sample of data we set a survey quota for every constituent area depending on the number of students in the area. According to the data compiled by the Federal State Statistics Service the number of students is calculated and published for every constituent of RF, the results are normalized per 10,000 students. Based on these aggregate data we compiled a list of constituents and quotas of respondents eligible for every constituent.

Once the cap is reached the respondents are automatically screened out, thus ensuring fair chances of all the regions for leadership. In order to be included in the quota for the survey the respondents should meet the conditions of territorial eligibility and competence and qualification eligi-

bility. Provided the conditions are met, they get individual logins and passwords to access the system.

The data are collected separately for every cluster and every region. Should any gaps emerge, further actions might be taken depending on whether filling these gaps is possible. Once the competence level and geography of respondents are suitable for the poll, but for some reason the respondents are evading sharing their expert opinion, they are encouraged to participate in the poll by a variety of means including direct contact.

Respondents are divided into two types: the Federal level respondents and the Regional level respondents. The federal level respondents include the national employers' association "Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs", Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation, The Russian Union of Youth, The Russian Union of Young Researchers, various academic communities (different study fields) (54 units), leading Russian researchers, well-informed on the terms and quality of education in the field of their expertise. The regional level experts include the Regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry (76 organizations), Regional branches of the Russian Union of Youth (75 organizations), Regional branches of the Russian Union of Young Researchers (45 organizations), local associations of trade unions organizations-members of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (79 organizations), local bodies of the Federal Labor and Employment Service (88 branches), local education authorities (Ministries of Education of the Subjects of the Russian Federation (88 Ministries), federal experts in the sphere of education, heads of Russian HEIs.

Students' achievements are also taken into consideration, unlike the popular rankings, where the preference is given to teachers' achievements. Student's achievements include student contests and competitions of different levels, scholarships, student grants, certification of voluntary independent evaluation, etc.

Only those educational programmes which reach the threshold value can be top-ranked within the *Best educational programmes of innovative Russia* project. The list of these programmes is annually published in hard-copy and e-reference book. No more than 15% of educational programmes with the highest scores can be enlisted.

It is possible to rank higher education institutions depending on the results of the programme evaluation. This enables compiling different kinds of rankings, i.e. the ranking of the regions with top-ranked educational programmes, the ranking of institutions with top ranked educational programmes, etc.

According to the data provided by the Federal State Statistic Service, there are 817 educational institutions delivering the programmes of higher professional education and about 900 branches. All HEIs (state, non-state and branches) offer about 25,000 educational programmes to over 4.4 million students in the Russian Federation. Top 15% are ranked as the best. The Project aims to select the programmes for public accreditation.

Table 1 – Statistics of the project for 2017 by federal districts

Region	Total programs	Top-ranked programs	%
Russia	25,242	3,641	14.42%
St. Petersburg	1,322	385	29.12%
Moscow	3,045	751	24.66%
Volga Federal District	4,796	695	14.49%
Siberian Federal District	3,105	430	13.85%
Far Eastern federal District	1,330	175	13.16%
North Caucasian Federal District	1,326	169	12.75%
Northwestern Federal District	1,448	156	10.77%
Ural Federal District	2,135	230	10.77%
Southern Federal District	2,270	234	10.31%
Central Federal District	4,465	416	9.32%

The value of the top-ranked programmes is the highest in St. Petersburg. The Central Federal District has the lowest value. The results of the project are open to public and all the stakeholders. The reference books are disseminated among all the accreditation agencies, prospective students, parents and employers. The reference book is published in two languages – Russian and English to expand global outreach.

The educational programmes, included in the reference book *Best Educational Programmes of Innovative Russia* recognized by professional, academic and scientific community are apt for professional accreditation. This involves external review carried out by authoritative experts, representatives of professional, academic and student communities specialized in a certain field. The external review of a programme (or a cluster of programmes) is conducted by an external review panel. Accreditation agencies in cooperation with European and Asian Quality Assurance agencies nominate experts for the procedure of the external review. The status of public accreditation means that an educational programme was highly appreciated and recognized by the professional and academic community.

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THE USE OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT TO ENHANCE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract

Countries continue to invest in policies and practices to strengthen the capacities of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) characteristics at local and regional level, giving recognition to international and cross border education for the advancement of the sustainable development of higher education. Quality assurance on the other hand boosts its regional developments and drives the forces of economic, social development and quality of higher education. This paper briefly reviews how internal quality assurance of HEIs can enhance and complement the reorientation of the curriculum using ESD characteristics to make the programmes more sustainable. Engaging all levels of education requires changing the direction of education systems and structures as much as maintaining the quality of teaching and learning. The ESD is mandated not to just add on existing curriculum or educational practices to improve the quality of teaching and learning but encourage “transformation of education” that would contribute effectively to the future of society. Both concepts aim at the same baseline of implementation and ideas that is to produce quality graduates who are knowledgeable, skilled, can think critically, and adapt values and attributes. The similarities of these characteristics can result in comprehensive practices and continuous improvements of HEIs.