

References

1. European Consortium for Accreditation (2013) *Assessment framework for joint programmes.*
2. National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (2014) 'CAMPUS Asia' Monitoring Committee. 'CAMPUS Asia' Monitoring on Quality Assurance- Collaboration among Japan, China, and Korea -Overview of the First Monitoring in Japan
3. Sounghee, K. et al. (2012) *Survey on internationalization and quality assurance in higher education : Final Report.* National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation
4. Takayuki, H. et al. (2012) *Survey on joint education program with foreign higher education institutions : Final Report.* National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation
5. Thomas Blanc, d.l.C. and Mark, F. (2013) *JOQAR Observation Missions: Evaluation Report.* European Consortium for Accreditation

ACADEMIC PROGRAMME DESIGN AND QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES: TRANSFORMATION OF NCPA'S VISION AS A RESULT OF ALIGN TEMPUS PROJECT

Tatiana Akhmetzianova & Galina Motova
National Centre for Public Accreditation, Russia

Abstract

In 2013-2017 the National Centre for Public Accreditation (NCPA, Russia) participated in the international ALIGN Tempus project "Achieving and checking the alignment between the academic programmes and Qualifications Frameworks" funded by the European Commission. In cooperation with other Russian partner-institutions the National Centre for Public Accreditation developed the mechanisms ensuring achievement of alignment of academic programmes with the National Qualifications Framework as well as the mechanisms for checking this alignment. NCPA provided methodological support to Russian HEIs in aligning the academic programmes with three groups of standards: the European Standards, the Federal State Educational Standards, and the National Occupational Standards. Revision of academic programmes at three HEIs and pilot evaluation of the developed mechanisms was carried out. NCPA's vision of academic programme design and quality assurance processes has substantially changed as a result of ALIGN project. Academic programmes should be designed, reviewed and evaluated using outcome-based and student-centred approach. During site-visits NCPA combined two different models of external evaluation of academic programmes: the Eastern European model of external review and the Western European model of audit. ALIGN project proves it possible to correlate the National educational standards to the international ones when designing academic programmes.

Key words

Alignment, academic programme, qualifications framework, quality assurance, learning outcomes, assessment mechanisms, external evaluation.

1. Introduction

Rapid changes on the labour market facilitate the increased requirements to competences and professional skills of graduates. Therefore, the requirements to the quality of education and the criteria imposed to this quality are currently more demanding than ever. The alignment between the academic programmes and qualifications frameworks is bound to ensure training of highly qualified personnel, able to perform their functions properly and be competitive on the dynamic world labour market.

When conducting international or joint accreditation, quality assurance agencies often face the problem of harmonizing various standards, and agreeing on different approaches. With internationalization of higher education and enhancement of academic mobility, the necessity arises to use common approaches to HEI programme design and quality assurance processes in different countries. Russian HEIs are greatly interested in coming onto the international arena, facilitating international student academic mobility, awarding degrees that are recognized at the international level. This is not easy at the moment, as the standards and approaches used in Russia are still different from the international ones. In 2013-2017 NCPA participated in the international ALIGN Tempus project “Achieving and checking the alignment between academic programmes and qualifications frameworks”, funded by the European Commission. As a result of this project NCPA gained great experience in harmonizing academic programmes with the European standards.

2. Short Description of ALIGN project

The main objective of ALIGN project was to enhance intelligibility, consistency and transferability of qualifications through establishment of mechanisms for HEIs to achieve alignment of academic programmes with the National Qualifications Frameworks and for Quality Assurance agencies to check such alignment.

Specific objectives were:

- to promote a better understanding in HEIs and European Quality Assurance agencies of the role of Qualifications Framework, its structure, as well as the differences between different kinds and levels of student achievements;
 - to build the capacity in HEIs of defining and assessing learning outcomes that determine various types of student achievement;
 - to employ the capacity of the HEIs to use the qualifications framework alignment to facilitate credit transfer, joint qualifications and benchmarking;
 - to enable the European Quality Assurance agencies to check whether the proposed learning outcomes and their assessment mechanisms match the Qualifications Framework descriptors at each level by establishing the mechanisms for ensuring consistency of judgments across institutions.
- Quality Assurance agencies and a few HEIs from Russia, Armenia and Ukraine worked for over three years with the support from the European partners to achieve the following outcomes:
- capacity building of HEI and Quality Assurance agencies to ensure achievement and checking alignment with the National Qualifications Frameworks;
 - development of mechanisms ensuring achievement of alignment with the National Qualifications Frameworks (for HEIs);
 - development of mechanisms for checking alignment with the National Qualifications Frameworks (for Quality Assurance agencies);
 - revision of 2 academic programmes at each HEI and pilot evaluation of the developed mechanisms;
 - adoption of the alignment tools at HEIs, Quality Assurance agencies and governmental bodies.

Twenty six partners (including Quality Assurance agencies, HEIs, Student Unions, Ministries of Education, Associations of Employers) participated in Align project from different European countries: Russia, Armenia, Ukraine, Great Britain, Germany, Ireland, Belgium, Poland.

The participants of ALIGN project in Russia were the National Centre for Public Accreditation, Northern (Arctic) Federal University (Case 1), Volga State University of Technology (Case 2), Moscow State University of Education (Case 3), Moscow State Humanitarian University, the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, the Russian Student Union, and Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation. The Russian National Qualifications Framework is currently underway. The draft National Qualifications Framework was developed by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation in cooperation with the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs in 2007. Since then the draft National Qualifications Framework has been a subject for a vivid public discussion between the government, academic community, and

businesses. At present Russian HEIs design the study programmes in accordance with the National Educational Standards and Occupational Standards, both being in the process of devising.

The National Centre for Public Accreditation did a large amount of work related to methodological provision of the process of alignment, and carried out the external evaluation of the Russian HEIs achievements in ALIGN project. The major task was to help Russian HEIs make the selected academic programmes consistent with three different standards:

- European standards (Dublin descriptors);
- National Educational Standards (Federal State Educational Standards);
- National Occupational Standards. In the way they would be valid, could be practically applied and wouldn't contradict each other.

3. Capacity building and development of mechanisms for achieving and checking the achievement of alignment

In order to promote to a better understanding of the role of Qualifications Framework and its structure, as well as of the differences between the various kinds and levels of student achievements, a lot of training was provided to staff members of Russian, Armenian and Ukrainian HEIs and quality assurance agencies for the purpose of capacity building. The European partners from Great Britain, Ireland, Belgium, Germany, and Poland shared their knowledge and experience in European Qualifications Framework, Dublin descriptors, student-centred learning, course and curriculum design, writing learning outcomes, developing assessment methods and tools, making students' handbooks, organizing peer-review, etc.

At the next stage of ALIGN project the National Centre for Public Accreditation developed the mechanisms for achieving and checking the achievement of alignment. Two documents were produced with the support from the European partners:

1. "National Guidelines to assist HEIs in aligning and checking the alignment of programme learning outcomes with the National Qualifications Frameworks"
2. "External quality assurance policies/procedures and evaluation criteria of checking the alignment between academic programmes and Qualifications Frameworks"

These documents laid out mechanisms and tools ensuring the alignment, set recommendations for developing programme learning outcomes which map the academic programme to the relevant occupational standards, described standards and criteria to be used in self-evaluation and during an external review.

The documents enabled Russian HEIs to set the requirements and procedures for the development of new and revising the existing academic programmes / modules; quality assurance agencies to check to what extent the alignment has been achieved between the programme learning outcomes, on the one hand, and the Dublin descriptors, the Federal State Educational Standards and the Occupational standards, on the other.

4. Piloting the developed mechanisms for alignment

The next stage of ALIGN project focused on piloting of the developed mechanisms for alignment. Each Russian HEI selected two Master's degree programmes to align their learning outcomes with the National Qualifications Framework (Table 1).

Table 1 Master's degree programmes selected by Russian HEIs for alignment

HEI	Academic Programmes
Case 1	Programme 1 Applied Linguistics: Teaching English as a Foreign Language Programme 2 Ecology and Environmental Management, Environmental Risk Management in the Arctic (ERMA)
Case 2	Programme 1 Quality Management in Agriculture and Food Industry Programme 2 International Cooperation in the Field of Protection of Environment and Nature Management
Case 3	Programme 1 Management of Research, Development, Innovation in the University

The universities reviewed the academic programmes they have chosen, developed learning outcomes in line with National qualifications framework descriptors, developed assessment methods for evaluating student achievement of learning outcomes, appropriate teaching and learning methods, curricula and other components of the academic programmes.

5. External evaluation of alignment of the academic programmes and their quality assurance

In order to check whether proposed learning outcomes and their assessment mechanisms match qualifications framework descriptors, an external evaluation of the alignment between programme learning outcomes and National Qualifications Framework was conducted at three Russian HEIs in 2016. The peer-review panel consisted of:

- two EU members from partner-universities (KU Leuven, Belgium; A. Mickiewicz University (Poznan), Poland),
- one EU member from Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education,
- one member from the National Centre for Public Accreditation,
- three host university staff members,
- one employer / external stakeholder,
- one student / recent graduate / alumni from one of the aligned academic programmes.

The alignment was checked with regard to two standards:

Standard 1. Alignment of academic programmes (in designing, delivering and monitoring an academic programme, the programme team (including its teachers and supporters of student learning) meet the appropriate European and national standards and requirements). Standard 2. Alignment of quality assurance processes (in setting and maintaining standards and assuring quality, the university operates clear and effective processes for the design, approval, delivery, monitoring, and support and development of its academic programmes in accordance with the European and national standards and requirements). Each standard comprised 10 indicators - criteria of “good practice” (Table 2).

Table 2. Indicators of checking the alignment

Indicators with regard to Standard 1	Indicators with regard to Standard 2
The academic programmes are properly titled and lead to awards at the appropriate level, consistent with European standards and NQF.	There are clear criteria against which academic programmes are assessed in the programme approval, monitoring and review processes.
The academic programmes are informed by and consistent with occupational/industry standards/requirements, where appropriate.	The roles and responsibilities for programme design, development, approval and monitoring are clearly articulated.
The aims of the programmes are appropriate for the student intake, and can be realized through students' attainment of the programme/module learning outcomes.	Students are involved in programme design and in the processes of programme development, approval, monitoring and review.
All learning outcomes at module level are at the appropriate level, and are assessed through fair, valid and reliable student assignments/tests.	There are effective policies which ensure that the academic standards for credits and awards are rigorously maintained at the appropriate level, and that student performance is judged against these standards.
Throughout their course of study, students are able to monitor their academic progress and development, and receive advice on how they can improve and enhance their work.	There are clear and effective policies and processes for assessing the recognition of prior learning and supporting student mobility between courses of study and institutions.
The teaching and learning activities employed within the modules are informed by reflection on professional practices, and designed to enable students to develop the knowledge, skills, abilities and professional competencies that will enable them to achieve the modules' learning outcomes.	Knowledge of professional standards/requirements and external expertise (e.g., from subject experts, employers and professional associations) is used to inform the design, development, approval and monitoring of academic programmes.
The structure of the programme ensures the progression of students' learning, and provides appropriate opportunities for student choice.	There are appropriate arrangements to train and support academic and professional/administrative staff who are involved in the design, delivery, approval and monitoring of academic programmes.
The credits ratings (national and ECTS) for modules are properly aligned with the designated student workloads for the modules.	There are clear policies and processes in place to ensure the integrity of student assessment (e.g., though marking schemes, moderation processes, examination board regulations), and the effectiveness of

	these policies is regularly reviewed.
Students are provided with clear and current information about the learning opportunities and support available to them.	The policies and processes of programme design, development, approval and monitoring are regularly reviewed in order to ensure the effectiveness and continuous enhancement of current practices.
The design, delivery and monitoring of the academic programmes is ‘student centred’, engaging students collectively and individually as partners in the development, assurance and enhancement of their educational experiences (e.g., through effective representation of the student voice, discussions about opportunities for course enhancement, involvement in quality assurance processes, and the monitoring and evaluation of student experiences).	There are effective policies in place to ensure that staff appointed to teach and support student learning on academic programmes are appropriately qualified, and that delivery of the programmes is supported by the appropriate learning resources.

The key aspects of review were: learning outcomes, curriculum, staff, students, quality system, results achieved. The scale of assessment parameters used a five grading evaluation of the academic programme:

- fully achieved;
- largely achieved;
- partly achieved;
- not achieved;
- not applicable in this stage of the alignment.

The results of external evaluation are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of external evaluation of the alignment between academic programmes and qualifications frameworks

HEI	Standard 1 Alignment of academic programmes	Standard 2 Alignment of quality assurance processes
Case 1	Programme 1 fully achieved Programme 2 fully achieved	Programme 1, Programme 2 fully achieved
Case 2	Programme 1 largely achieved Programme 2 not applicable in this stage of the alignment	Programme 1, Programme 2 largely achieved
Case 3	Programme 1 largely achieved	Programme 1, Programme 2 largely achieved

The alignment of two academic programmes (Standard 1) in Case 1 was assessed as “fully achieved”. The alignment of academic programme 1 in Case 2 and programme 1 in Case 3 was assessed as “largely achieved”, and of programme 2 in Case 2 was assessed as “not applicable in this stage of the alignment”. This is because the programme is currently virtual, and the review panel could not see the programme handbook, the alignment process is not completed yet. The alignment of quality assurance processes (Standard 2) was assessed as “fully achieved” in Case 1, and “largely achieved” in Case 2, Case 3.

The peer-review panel stated that in Case 1 a good and clear list of learning outcomes was made. Learning outcomes are up-to-date, aligned with the European Qualifications Framework and Federal State Educational Standards, and with the draft National qualifications framework, sufficiently programme specific, and fitting domain-specific demands. In Case 2 the peer-review panel emphasized that learning outcomes could be made more specific by including descriptors such as those included in the Dublin descriptors. The panel also made a comment that the learning outcomes didn’t include knowledge in a sufficient measure. Following the results of the external evaluation, three peer-review reports were produced that reviewed the documents submitted and the site visit outcomes, comments of the panel members on how to improve the programme and quality assurance alignment, assessment of the expectation for alignment of the academic programme and quality assurance, and recommendations for further improvement.

The results achieved by the National Centre for Public Accreditation and three Russian HEIs in ALIGN project were presented to the National Accreditation Board of Russia in January 2017.

Three academic programmes positively assessed at the peer review were accredited for a period of six years and received certificates of international accreditation. Thus, the outcomes of ALIGN project were recognized at the national level.

6. Transformation of NCPA's vision of academic programme design and quality assurance processes as a result of ALIGN project

NCPA's vision of academic programme design has substantially changed as a result of ALIGN project.

1. The National Centre for Public Accreditation and Russian HEIs came to a better understanding how academic programmes should be designed in the context of an outcome-based approach, described by some authors (Kennedy D., 2007). The traditional way of programme design, in which teachers decide on the content, plan how to teach it and then assess how well the students absorbed the material ("teacher-centred" approach) should be replaced by an outcome-based approach which focuses on what the students are expected to be able to do at the end of the module or programme.

2. "Student-centred" approach should be implemented more intensively, which means that students should actively participate in programme design, review and evaluation.

3. ALIGN project helped the Russian partner-institutions to learn how to write and access learning outcomes that define the various types of student achievement. Programme learning outcomes were aligned with three different standards: the Dublin descriptors, Federal State Educational Standards, Occupational Standards.

NCPA's vision of quality assurance processes has also changed.

1. With the support from the European partners the National Centre for Public Accreditation developed mechanisms for checking the alignment with NQFs.

2. NCPA is now able to check whether proposed learning outcomes and their assessment mechanisms match the Qualifications Framework descriptors.

3. NCPA came to a better understanding how academic programmes should be assessed from the perspective of an outcome-based approach.

4. NCPA tried to combine two models of external evaluation of academic programmes. Before participating in ALIGN project NCPA used the Eastern European model of external review. The evaluation procedures focused mainly on checking the conditions and outcomes of the learning process. Therefore standard practice for NCPA at site visits was holding meetings with HEI staff, students, alumni, and employers. Implementation of Standard 2 "Alignment of Quality Assurance Processes" required revision of NCPA's practice. The necessity to use the Western European model of audit arose in which Internal quality assurance is also reviewed. Meetings with the representatives of Internal Quality Assurance System and Academic Department were included into site visits. These meetings were aimed at obtaining general information about the mechanisms of internal quality assurance policy from the persons who are in charge of initiating, designing, implementing and monitoring Internal quality assurance.

7. Conclusions

ALIGN project helped NCPA and Russian HEIs develop a better understanding of the role of Qualifications Frameworks, their structure and differences between the different kinds and levels of student achievements. It also assisted in building on the capacity of HEIs to write and assess learning outcomes that define the various types of student achievements. Due to the activities performed, NCPA gained experience of checking the alignment between programme learning outcomes and National Qualifications Framework by appropriate quality assurance mechanisms and procedures.

NCPA gave significant methodological support to the Russian HEIs in aligning academic programmes with three standards: the European Standards, the Federal State Educational Standards, and the National Occupational Standards. Conclusions were drawn and recommendations were given in each case. The project proved the possibility of aligning the National Educational Standards of Russia with the international standards when designing academic programmes. This huge experience of methodological work can be used in future for aligning academic programmes with different standards both at the national and international levels.

References

1. *ALIGN Achieving and checking the alignment between academic programmes and qualifications frameworks* <http://align.brusov.am/>
2. Kennedy, D. (2007). *Writing and Using Learning Outcomes. A Practical Guide. Quality Promotion Unit: UCC*, pp. 18-19.
3. *National Centre for Public Accreditation* <http://ncpa.ru/>

THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' LEARNING CHALLENGE AND ITS COUNTERMEASURES

Fang Yuan, Lin Zhao, Yi Han, Hao Liu, Jun Sun, Yuechun Zhu
Kunming Medical University, China

Abstract

Objective: *With the increasing number of international students coming to our campus for their professional training, it is necessary to learn about the challenges they are facing in learning and adjusting to our strength enhancing and the quality of higher education improving, more and more international students are coming to China to receive their higher education (Gan and Zhou 2015). Over the recent years, most of medical colleges and universities in China have launched a special program MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine & Bachelor of Surgery Program) to recruit overseas students. Chinese teachers delivered lectures in English. After the graduation, these students return to their home countries or go to other countries to take Medical Licensing Examination and start their clinical medical work. The quality of teaching is very important for these students, as it ensures whether they pass the Medical Licensing Examination and take up a relevant occupation or not.*

Kunming Medical University launched the MBBS program in 2011. Up to now, there are 463 international students at the campus, most of whom are South-Asians (94.6%) (India, Nepal, Bangladesh), and the rest come from South-East Asia (3.9%), like Thailand and Burma, and other countries (1.5%) (as of May, 2016). These students have various cultural and educational backgrounds, and their learning needs, expectations and ideologies are diverse, too. In order to to guarantee the quality of MBBS program, it is necessary to understand the challenges these students are facing in learning and adopt appropriate teaching methods to facilitate their learning. For that reason, we conducted an interview to learn about their difficulties.

Methods

Interview questions

Referring to other scholar's studies (Malau-Aduli 2011; Gagliardi et al. 2009), We designed a set of interview questions focusing on four topics – cultural adaptation, language issues, academic adjustment, and personal strengths and weaknesses in autonomous learning.

Sample

The interviewees were 20 international students in Kunming Medical University (5 Indians, 3 Bangladeshis, 3 Nepalese, 3 Thais, 3 Burmese, 1 South African, 1 Kenyan, and 1 Tanzanian). Ten of them were freshmen, 5 sophomores, and 5 juniors. The seniors and the fifth-year students didn't take part in because they were off the campus in their internship at hospitals.

Ethical issue