

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION IN RUSSIA**

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### ***Abstract***

*The article outlines the recent development of higher education quality processes in Russia with a special focus on different types of accreditation. It covers the changes and development of institutional, programme and professional accreditation. Analyzing the experience of the development of the accreditation system as a social phenomenon the article focuses on specific features of institutional, programme and professional accreditation, and also outlines prospects of its development in quality assurance of higher education in Russia.*

***Keywords:*** *quality assurance, institutional accreditation, professional accreditation.*

### **Introduction**

Many countries have gained enormous experience in areas relevant to accreditation, assessment and quality assurance of education in educational institutions by now. Quality assurance bodies carry on academic accreditation activities on different levels: institutional and programme accreditation as well as accreditation activities with the participation of labour market. In Russia professional accreditation is separate from institutional and programme accreditation. The goal of this paper is to differentiate types of accreditation and reveal their peculiarities in the Russian modern educational system.

### **Development of accreditation in Russia**

By 2012 Russia had gained a 15-year experience of institutional accreditation (1997-2012). Most of HEIs in the country underwent this form of accreditation if they wanted to change their accreditation status. The Law "On Education" (1992) set a specific task of preserving the common education area in the conditions of disintegration of the Soviet system of education. There was a real danger of demarcation of the educational system within the former Soviet Union and also between the federal republics. Therefore, it was necessary to develop an evaluation technology, common for all HEIs, regardless of their form of ownership (state or private HEI), location and specialization. Inexpensive evaluation technologies were being developed taking into consideration the size of the country and limited resources (financial, in the first place, in the conditions of socio-economic crisis). They were based more on statistics, rather than on expert evaluation, which was more costly. Technical progress facilitated the development of modern information technologies, in particular, the technologies of efficient collection and analysis of data on the performance of all HEIs in Russia.

Accreditation of a HEI in the institutional form involved collecting information in all directions of its activity in a specialized format. This information was compared with the performance indicators of other HEIs and accreditation criteria. Additionally, there was an external review of the HEI: educational and research activities, teaching staff, learning resources, availability of postgraduate and further education programmes.

The standards and criteria of accreditation were set with regard to the HEI's performance as a whole: the range and scope of educational activity, qualifications of the teaching staff, scope and effectiveness of research and methodological work. Alongside the cost-efficient expert and evaluation procedures the institutional form of accreditation tackled a number of important issues: it enhanced the Rector and Rector's office responsibility for the quality and effectiveness of the HEI, it also contributed to establishing internal quality monitoring and assurance units, which resulted in the formation of an efficient governance mechanism on the national and institutional levels.

The year of 2009 faced a cardinal transformation of state accreditation procedures, which was secured by the law in 2012. An educational programme becomes the subject of accreditation, which is evaluated against the requirements of the state educational standards. Statistical and expert data are collected for every programme and include teaching staff, material and technical resources, research and methodological work, internal documentation regulating the process of the programme implementation [1]. Under the banner of quality control the state governing body increased the pressure on HEIs manifold. The number of documents necessary for state accreditation skyrocketed. The number of involved experts multiplied.

At the same time, programme accreditation has found its place and has become demanded in the procedures of professional-public accreditation. Taking into consideration that the emphasis in such a procedure is put on the employers' opinion and labour market demands, it is very important to assess graduates' learning outcomes if not in every single study programme, then at least in a field of study. Independence of professional-public accreditation from the state body of control ensures the flexibility of its content and organization of its procedures.

In programme accreditation opinions and facts about the quality of programme implementation, involvement of a wide circle of respondents and experts – students and alumni, administration and teachers, representatives of public community and employers are more important than the review of documents. The experience of professional-public accreditation of study programmes has identified an efficient and cost-effective review procedure – review of a cluster of study programmes, which is evaluation of a group of programmes carried out by one review panel comprised of representatives of academic, professional and student communities [2, 3]. Many years of experience in accreditation confirmed that institutional and programme forms do not contradict but on the contrary, co-exist and complement each other in the conditions of a large scale and diverse educational system.

Existence of various forms of accreditation in different countries of the world depends on political and economic reasons. It is generally thought that the most effective tool of education system management is a combination of institutional and programme accreditation.

At present there are no institutional forms of education quality evaluation in Russia. It would be reasonable to conduct state accreditation in an institutional form, which could make the system of education more manageable, would increase the Rector's responsibility for the quality of the HEI's activity on the whole, would restore the importance of the HEI's internal management and quality assurance systems. Programme accreditation can stay in the domain of professional-public accreditation and focus on the evaluation of education quality in a field of study. Such structure of evaluation of the quality of higher education would be more effective and plausible.

Only Russian legislation allows for a broad variety of accreditation forms: alongside the obligatory state accreditation there is also public accreditation, which can be conducted by public bodies and associations; and professional-public accreditation, which can be conducted by employers and their associations. The enactment of the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation” provoked a lot of controversy, which is still going on: there have been a few deliberations in the State Duma Committee on Education, coordination of certain provisions of the law with the relevant ministries. And this is because the situation opened a Pandora’s box.

Some of the unanswered questions have been already mentioned: whether the professional-public accreditation is voluntary for HEIs; whether it can be regarded as independent even if it is conducted by one of the stakeholders – the employer; whether it could become another, even a stricter controlling procedure, initiated by employers. Overdependence of evaluation on the opinion of professional associations may result in artificial constraints for admission to profession and recommendations of student drawdown, because of tough competition on the labour market and excess of supply over demand and, therefore, may cause the fall in the prestige and pay in the field.

At first sight, it stands to reason that the labour market is the major customer in the system of education. And what about those students who pay their own tuition? If the state allocates budget places for training specialists to the benefit of socio-economic and technical development of the country, it has a right to control how effectively the funds are used by means of the oversight of education quality and the supervision of compliance with the legislation. If employers or an association of employers claim the right for control and accreditation of educational programmes, then, following this logic, they should finance training of specialists in those programmes, or at least, to conduct evaluation procedures at their own expense, and also ensure employability of all the graduates of accredited programmes.

Evaluation of study programmes involves external review procedures with regard to legal persons (HEIs), and should take into consideration specific features of their activity. Implementation of professional study programmes is an integral part of the educational system as a process of education and training for the benefit of a personality, society and state. The state or a region initiate the opening of a programme, which is financed from the federal, regional, municipal or household budget. The quality of their implementation is regulated by the state through the state educational standards. Consequently, the accreditation of study programmes (whatever it is called), should not ignore the interests of the society, state and individual. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that since 2011 the higher education system has ceased being professional and on a mass scale has started to train bachelors (specialists are trained only in a limited number of programmes). There’s no point in expecting from bachelors strict compliance with professional standards.

The right to conduct professional-public accreditation stipulated by the law for the sphere of education and supported by the administrative resource of the national Council for Professional Qualifications under the Government of the Russian Federation opens up broad possibilities for emergence of new structures and organizations in this field. According to the official data of the Russian monitoring system there are currently over 100 of them. However, their experience, reliability, professionalism and availability of resources give some reasons for concern. Loud name and ambitions cannot replace specific knowledge and competencies in the sphere of quality assurance.

**Conclusion.** Unsupported by the common sense, knowledge of the subject and expertise the attempts of creating independent voluntary accreditation would only lead to blowing up the “accreditation bubble” and discredit the very idea. The new Law “On Education in the Russian Federation” is an important step towards developing independent accreditation mechanisms; this is an opportunity and an impetus to involve academic and professional community in education quality evaluation. But in fact it could bring about negative consequences: if only employers have a right to conduct such accreditation and only for compliance with professional standards and labour market demands, then it is going to be a barrier rather than an impetus to the development. The labour market demands are dictated by the present day, and sometimes by yesterday. Higher education occupies a special place in the modern world. It should not serve economy, but create it.

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