

INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS AS AN ELEMENT OF THE NATIONAL SYSTEM FOR EXTERNAL EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE

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Absract

The article describes the system of activities on independent education quality assessment within the framework of the education quality concept "system quality – processes quality – results quality". It describes objects and tools of independent education quality assessment. National legal trends in the independent education quality assessment – public accreditation of educational organizations, professional public accreditation of education programs, assessment of qualifications – are presented. The article reviews the procedure for independent qualification assessment as an element of the system for external education quality assurance and as part of the complex approach towards education quality assessment based on integration of procedures for assessment on the institutional, program and qualification levels

Keywords: *education quality, independent education quality assessment, qualification assessment, professional public accreditation of education programs, public accreditation of educational organizations.*

Within the framework of the education quality concept “system quality – processes quality – results quality” (fig. 1) quality of the educational organization graduates education depends on the quality of an education program and quality of other processes of an educational organization, and this, in turn, is ensured by operation of an effective quality system in the educational organization, the main purpose of which is elaboration and implementation of preventive measures for quality assurance with respect to education programs and training of experts in the interests of all stakeholders. The quality system as an internal mechanism of education quality assurance helps educational organizations manage their education programs on the system level using the process approach and risk-based thinking, and along with that consider the needs and expectations of all stakeholders, including requirements of the labor market, and consequently improve quality of education, competitiveness of an educational organization and exercised education programs, train highly qualified experts able to address real production objectives.

In this article we use the term “educational organization” instead of the terms more conventional for the academic and scientific community such as “university”, “institute”, “higher education institution” etc., because the term “educational organization” is regulated by the current national legislation in the scope of education of the Russian Federation.

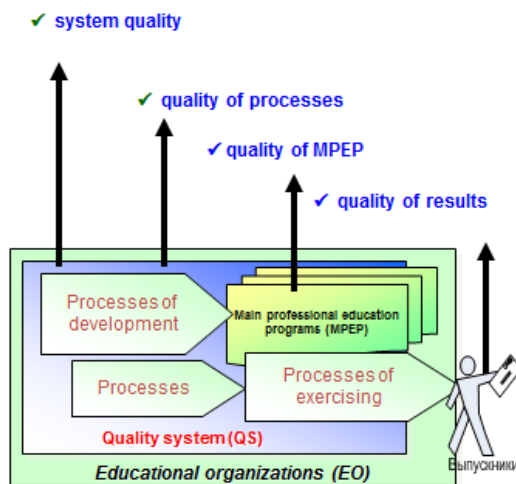


Figure 1. Concept of education quality

Beside the students, the parties interested in quality of education include their parents, educational organizations, states and societies, as well as employers which represent a target group interested in competitiveness of graduates, their conformity to the requirements set forth in professional standards and thus ability of an educational organization graduates to address real production objectives. So the target which educational organizations face consists in improving the quality and competitiveness of the provided education through development and implementation of education programs in accordance with the requirements of employers and the professional community and, consequently, in training of experts highly demanded on the labor market.

Currently in order to improve the education quality, and demonstrate the high quality level of educational programs, conditions for implementation of the education process and training of experts demanded on the labor market to the stakeholders, the educational organizations implement various mechanisms of internal education quality improvement both on the institutional and program levels [1-3], and undergo procedures of external independent education quality assessment [4-7].

Such independent education quality assessment allows educational organizations to boost the image of educational and scientific research services, enhance their competitiveness and competitiveness of their main education programs on the education services market, improve quality assurance and increase quality of the education results, enables them to receive certification of conformity of their graduates education level and conditions for education programs implementation to the modern demands of the labor market by the professional community and employers. Consequently, independent assessment of education quality adds value to an educational organization itself and to its customers and stakeholders, and represents a competitive advantage of an educational organization and a market mechanism of education quality recognition.

The system of activities on external education quality assurance (or independent education quality assessment) considering the concept “system quality – processes quality – results quality”, which was previously mentioned in the article, represents the following fields of activity: assessment and certification of qualifications, assessment of education organization quality systems (QS) for the purpose of quality management system certification and public accreditation of educational organizations (EO), professional public accreditation of the main professional education programs (MPEPs) (fig. 2) [5-7].

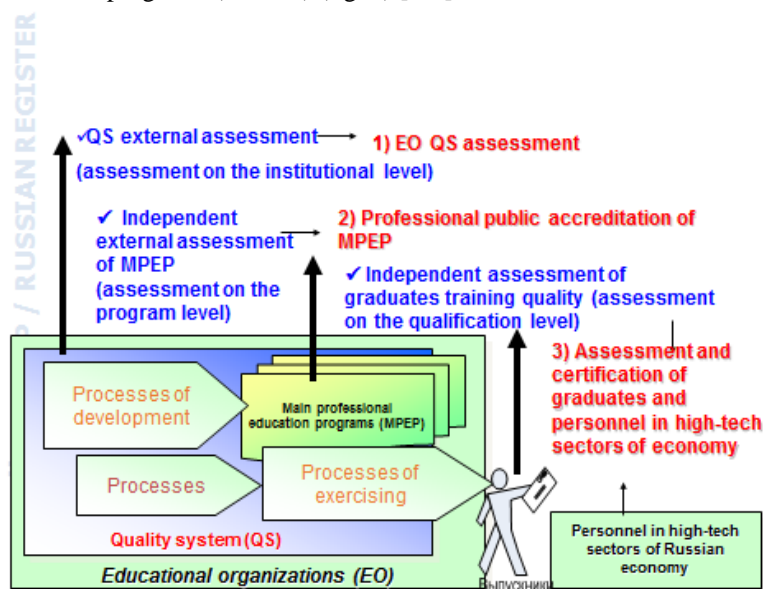


Figure 2. System of activities on independent education quality assessment

Subjects of independent education quality assessment, shown in fig. 2, are competencies of graduates, educational organizations and education programs. Tools which are used for assessment of these subjects may include:

- assessment and certification of qualifications: to assess competencies of graduates for conformity to professional standards or qualification requirements established by Federal laws and other regulatory enactments,
- public accreditation and/or certification of management systems: to assess educational organizations for conformity to the criteria and requirements of Russian, foreign and international organizations, requirements of national and international standards for management systems and education quality assurance systems,

- professional public accreditation: to assess education programs, i.e. recognize quality and level of training of the graduates which mastered such education programs in a particular organization performing educational activities as conformant to the requirements of professional standards, labor market requirements for professionals, workers and officers with relevant field of expertise.

The system of activities on external education quality assurance represented in figure 2 is currently relevant in terms of the system view and complex approach towards assessment of education quality on three levels – institutional, program and qualification [5-7].

Fields of activity and assessment tools within the presented system are nowadays exercised in the Russian Federation [7]. Certification Association “Russian Register” – an expert and certification organization included into the registrar of accreditation organizations of the Russian Federation, a member of foreign education quality assurance networks (INQAAHE, APQN, ENQA (affiliated status)), and in APQR (Register of Agencies of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network APQN), exercises these fields of external education quality assurance in its activity.

Within the framework of development of Russian Register international cooperation the above described system of activities on independent education quality assessment represents great interest for interaction with foreign education quality assurance networks and for conduction of activities on education quality assessment jointly with foreign partners of Russian Register – education quality assurance agencies, including Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating, Kazakhstan, FIBAA (Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation, Germany), Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education, Croatia).

Activity on independent education quality assessment performed by Russian Register is correlated with modern tendencies in this scope, which are defined by the Russian legislation [4-7]:

- professional public accreditation of education programs (education quality assessment on the program level) and public accreditation of educational organizations (education quality assessment on the institutional level) are defined in the Federal Law No.273 "On education in the Russian Federation",

- assessment of qualifications (education quality assessment on the qualification level) is defined in the Federal Law No.238 dated July 3, 2016 “On independent assessment of qualification”, effective as of January 1, 2017.

In accordance with the legislation public and professional public accreditation, and independent qualification assessment are performed on the voluntary basis. Data about public or professional public accreditation granted to an educational organization are taken into account for conduction of the state accreditation, which indicates that the results of education quality assessment are considered by independent organizations during its governmental assessment.

The main objective of this activity performed by the government is to regain prestige and relevancy of Russian education, training on applied qualifications, bind them to particular technologies represented on the market.

A significant role in arrangement and coordination of activities on independent education quality assessment, including professional public accreditation of education programs and independent assessment of qualifications, within the current Russian legislation is performed by the National Professional Qualifications Council under the Russian Federation President (NPQC) established in 2014 and chaired by the president of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. NPQC coordinates activities aimed at improvement of professional education quality: on alignment of federal state professional education standards

with professional standards; professional public accreditation of professional education programs; on development of the system for independent professional qualification assessment.

NPQC creates sectorial Professional qualification councils (PQC) on the basis of all-Russian and other associations of employers, unions and other organizations which represent and (or) unite professional communities. PQC, the total number of which is currently 27, are the continuously operating authorities of the national professional qualifications system established for development and improvement of professional qualification systems for particular kinds of professional activity.

Federal Law No.238 dated July 3, 2016 “On independent assessment of qualification” became effective on January 1, 2017; it defines legal and organizational framework and procedure for independent assessment of qualifications of employees or persons aiming to perform particular types of activity, as well as legal provisions, rights and responsibilities of participants of such independent qualification assessment.

In accordance with this law independent qualification assessment is the procedure for confirmation of a candidate’s qualification conformity to the provisions of a professional standard or qualification requirements established by federal laws and other normative legal enactments of the Russian Federation performed by a qualification assessment center.

Model of independent qualification assessment taken as the framework of the law is provided in fig. 3 [6].

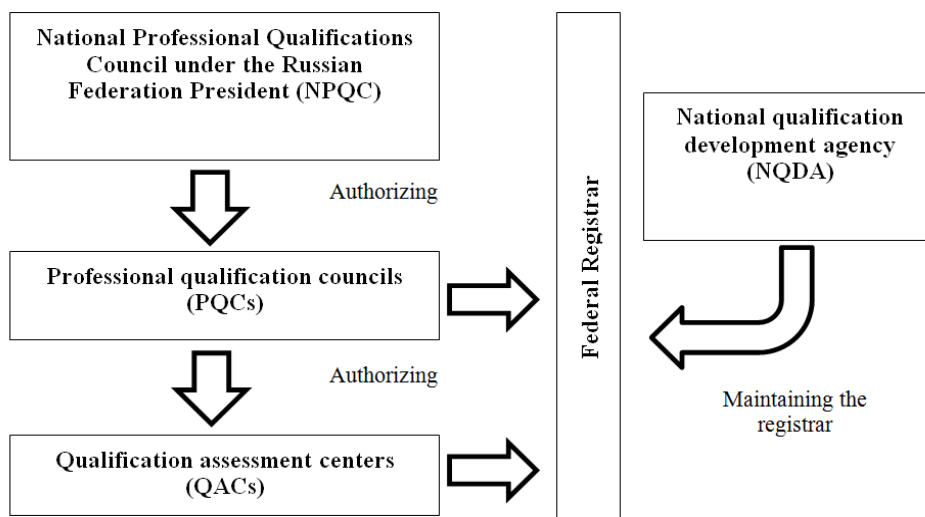


Figure 3. Model of the national independent qualification assessment system

In accordance with the provided model the independent qualification assessment system includes the following elements:

- National Professional Qualifications Council under the Russian Federation President (NPQC);
- Sectorial PQC, authorized by NPQC for arrangement of independent qualification assessment for a particular type of professional activity;
- Qualification assessment centers (QACs) authorized by PQCs to perform independent qualification assessment, i.e. conduction of professional examination of a candidate;
- National qualification development agency (NQDA) established in order to ensure activities on development of qualifications in the Russian Federation.

NQDA ensures organization, methodological, expert and analytical support of NPQC, PQCs and QACs activities, maintains the Federal registrar – an information resource for assurance of independent qualification assessment.

When it comes to the complex approach to the independent education quality assessment, and in order for an educational organization to receive a complex service on education quality assessment on the institutional, program and qualification levels, it is reasonable to integrate the procedures of public accreditation, professional public accreditation and qualification assessment.

Such complex approach to independent education quality assessment which takes into account both ENQA standards and guidelines, requirements of professional standards and the Russian legislation, and best practices of education quality assurance is used in Russian Register and described in various scientific publications [4-7].

When considering activities of Russian Register on qualification assessment within the system of activities on external education quality assurance, it seems appropriate to consider interaction with public organizations as well. Russian Register became a member of the all-Russian public organization – Independent partnership “ASMBEE of Russia”. One of the main fields of activity of Russian Register stated within the organization which unites a significant number of representatives of small and medium business is establishment of the Committee on certification of qualifications and personnel – an advisory and consultancy body of “ASMBEE of Russia” on the issues of independent qualification assessment in the scope of small and medium entrepreneurship.

The purpose of establishing the Committee is support of small and medium business interests during their interaction with federal agencies, Russian national/regional sectorial unions of employers, professional community, professional qualification councils when developing and improving the national qualification system of the Russian Federation.

Targets for this Committee:

- Research of small and medium business problems which occur in the course of implementation of professional standards and development of independent education quality assessment practice, including independent qualification assessment in Russia;
- Analysis of opportunities for improvement of legal, normative and methodological framework used for development of the national qualifications system for the interests of small and medium business;
- Preparation of draft legal enactments on the issues of development of the independent education quality assessment system and the national qualifications system, and initiation of their approval by public authorities;
- Establishment of regional committees on certification of qualifications and personnel;
- Establishment of contacts on the issues of independent education quality assessment, including independent assessment of qualifications and certification of personnel with Russian governmental authorities, governmental authorities of the Russian Federation entities and municipal authorities, legal entities and individuals in Russia, as well as abroad; with youth organizations (All-Russian public organization “For high quality education” etc.), interaction with student self-governance authorities within educational organizations;
- Arrangement of events of various formats with specialized federal executive authorities;
- Fulfillment of commissions of “ASMBEE of Russia” management authorities;
- Cooperation on the issues of independent education quality assessment, including independent assessment of qualifications and certification of personnel with the Federal agency for the issues of CIS countries, fellow citizens living abroad, and on international humanitarian cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo); with committees of the

Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation; with the Committee of “ASMBEE of Russia” on personnel for small and medium entrepreneurship and on education; with organizations performing research in the scope of education (Eurasian education quality assessment association etc.);

- Media representation of the Committee activities: provision of relevant and complete information for publication on the website of “ASMBEE of Russia”, mentioning the Committee members as experts of “ASMBEE of Russia” etc.
- Promotion of best practices of independent education quality assessment, including independent qualifications assessment and certification of personnel on the basis of international standards.

Significance of establishing the Committee on certification of qualifications and personnel arises from the need to research the issues of small and medium business in the scope of training of personnel on vocations and professions demanded and focused on employment in small and medium entrepreneurship. Significance of establishing the Committee is also confirmed by the need to search methods for settlement of the identified problems based on the experience of Russian Register, including cooperation with the Federal Accreditation Service (Rosaccreditation), National Qualifications Development Agency, National Personnel Training Foundation, Russian Quality Organization and other authorities.

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