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European standards of higher education quality assurance: peculiarities and perspectives of introduction in Ukraine

In the era of globalization and informatization when the need in knowledge is intensively developed, their quality is especially appreciated. The interest in knowledge quality is developing rapidly from the side of consumers – those who study and acquire vocational education, from the side of the interested in qualified specialists – employers and those who sell and provide educational services – higher educational establishments. It is impossible to manage without quality education in the modern world [5]. That is why Europe that seeks to build the most dynamic and knowledge-based economy in the world aims to make European higher education and provided qualifications of the highest quality. This objective is reflected in all shared documents of the signatory countries of the Bologna Declaration.

European standard of higher education is rather a new phenomenon. The urgent need for their development emerged at the end of XX century, practically with the beginning of the formation of European Higher Education Area. Each meeting of the Ministers of Education of the participating countries of the Bologna Process touched the ways of solving common problems of higher education quality. In fact, already in the first unifying documents that developed strategic perspectives of Europe of Knowledge, it was specified the ways of quality assurance of higher education. Quality education is high quality education that enables providing of successful vital activity of the society. A personality acquires education, and its quality directly affects progressive transformations of the society. That is why the government, taking care of the highest quality of education for its citizens, indirectly affects its own economic and social progress. Before the emergence of common European interests on ensuring the quality of higher education, in each country it was formed their own approaches to understanding of this phenomenon. At the time of signing the Bologna Declaration in June 1999, each of the 29 countries that sought to create European Educational Area had its own mechanisms and models of quality assurance. Development of a common strategy and practical steps became an essential thing, because European partnership is impossible without this.

That is why already in the Bologna Declaration, along with other important tasks; it was set a task "to promote European cooperation in the scope of evaluating the quality of education in the perspective of development of compared criteria and methodologies" [6, 26].

Quality assurance is rather a complex and multi-vector cause in a large and diverse European area. Approval of opinions about what should be the quality of higher education is a long and difficult process. Already at the Ministerial Conference of the Bologna Process participating countries in Prague (2001) in the communiqué it was stressed the need in closer cooperation between the structures of recognition and quality assurance of higher education. It was emphasized the need for close European cooperation and mutual trust and recognition of different assessment systems.

The Ministers appealed to universities and other educational institutions to disseminate good practice and develop scenarios for mutual acceptance of mechanisms for accreditation / certification and evaluation. It was also appealed to national agencies and European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) to collaborate with the relevant organizations of countries that are not ENQA members, to establish common norms of adoption of recommendations and dissemination of the best practice in implementing the objectives of higher education [6, p. 32-33].

So, the ENQA launched a vigorous activity of finding the methodological foundations of development of generally accepted standards that would contribute to creation in Europe of common ideas about indicators of quality of higher education. For this it was examined the best practices in quality assurance of education.

At that time ENQA didn't have a long history of its activity. The idea of necessity of existence of European non-profit organization that would constantly monitor current issues of quality of higher education in Europe and searched for the ways of its rise occurred in the mid-90's of 20th century and was checked by a pilot project. And in 2000 it was established as the European network (2004 - Association) for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The members of the organization were the quality assurance agencies of the countries that signed the Bologna Declaration.

Responsible tasks, given to ENQA by the Ministers of Education the countries that signed the Bologna Declaration, determined the necessity of search and consolidation of partners who would be interested in effective ensuring of higher education. Thus began its fellowship with European organizations which represented the interests of higher educational institutions and students as participants of implementation of tasks of higher education.

ENQA received clear guidelines of activity for further development of quality assurance of higher education during the Berlin Communiqué from the Ministers of higher education (2003). Generally positively estimating the work, the Ministers stressed the need to develop criteria and methodologies for public use in the field of education quality. Actually there were outlined three levels of education quality assurance: institutional, national, European. In this regard the ministers agreed that national quality assurance systems should include:

– Determination of responsibility of authorities and educational establishments that participate in educational activity;

– Evaluation of institutions, which includes internal control, external review, participation of students and publication of results;

– The system of accreditation, certification or similar procedures;

– International participation, cooperation and the creation of unions [6, p. 38].

Having defined the main directions and amounts of activity of agents of institutional and national levels, the Ministers tasked ENQA and its members at the European level with the participation of the European University Association (EUA), the European association of higher education institutions (EURASHE), the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB, 2007 – ESU) to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and recommendations for quality assurance. At the same time the second important task was to find ways of ensuring adequate system of external expert examination of quality assurance of accreditation agencies and organizations [6, p. 38].

All organizations that under the guidance of ENQA started to develop standards and recommendations were called Group 4 E. Each organization member of the group is a non-governmental international organization, actually non-profit public formation and presents its goals and interests to find common standards of quality of higher education.

Group 4 E successfully performed the tasks the Berlin Conference. The result of their joint activities became an important document on quality assurance of higher education entitled "Standards and recommendations for quality assurance in the scope of European Higher Education" [7]. Within two years until the next conference in Bergen (2005). the document was developed and in the joint communiqué - approved and recommended by the Ministers of Education for implementation in national quality assurance system.

It was extremely difficult to develop this volumetric and responsible document in such a short time.

European Higher Education Area, which at that time held 40 countries, was characterized by a variety of political, socio-cultural and educational traditions, languages, needs and expectations.

Understanding of the central notion "standard" resulted some difficulties. Although the word «standard» is translated in most languages unambiguously, its usage is different in different countries.

The term "standard" in Europe is treated in a broad range – from regulatory requirements to broadly generalized descriptions of effective activity. So, in the Anglo-Saxon system of higher education standards of education are defined by educational institutions as an example of "good practice" and quality assurance. But for the many countries of Eastern Europe, standard is is a regulated lowest possible level of quality of students preparation.

The standards can have a quantitative expression (the results of benchmarking are used) or they can have qualitative nature, indicating only specific targets (for example, the effectiveness of the educational process, stability, etc.).

The standards may be aimed at different moments: resources, outcomes and processes may be general or specific, developed for individual educational disciplines. Also, there are such standards of content as the level of basic competence, knowledge, abilities and skills in a particular area.

All interested in the quality of higher education parties were involved in the development of standards at the European level: representatives of educational institutions of different types, university professors, staff of administrative structures, students, employers, experts in the field of accreditation / certification. Each of the participants sought to present and defend their own interests, which are often different for stakeholder groups. So, if education institutions wanted a high level of autonomy and minimum of external regulation and assessment, then students as consumers of educational services, were focused on independent external evaluation of educational institutions. The differences were found among the agents of the same structures. Some agencies that deal with accreditation of educational programs or universities adhere to the idea that the external quality assurance primarily was intended to act a function of "Protection of Consumer Rights". This leads to observance of certain distance between quality assurance agencies and universities, and the other agencies see the principal role of external quality assurance in the development of recommendations and suggestions to improve the standards of quality educational programs and qualifications assignments. In this case, it is necessary to predict close cooperation between the agency and the evaluated educational institution [1, p. 20-24].

And still the developers of standards and recommendations for quality assurance of higher education in the European scope managed to reach a consensus based on the ideas of internationalization, humanism, democracy and decentralization of management of higher education. They constantly followed the developed in the course of collaboration principles, which were based on:

– interest of students, employers and society as a whole in the high quality of higher education;

– paramount meaning of institutional autonomy and independence of educational institutions under their significant responsibility for provided educational services;

– required conformity of external quality assurance with its objectives, for achievement of which load on educational institutions is adequate and not burdensome [7].

In the presented by Group 4 E document, the standards have descriptive (framework) character, and the document, as similar documents of international networks and associations, is a "code of good practices".

The document contains European standards for internal and external quality assessment of higher education. Each standard is complemented by recommendations, which, as a rule, in detail describe the nature of the standard and present examples of its use [7].

European standards and recommendations for internal higher education quality assurance are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

European standards and recommendations for internal higher education quality assurance

The list of standards	The main content of the standard norms for the university	The main content of recommendations
1.1. The policy of the institution and quality assurance procedures	Development and implementation of: -own policy of educational programs and awarding of	The policy foresees: • organization of quality assurance system, its content and procedures; • responsibilities of departments, faculties and staff regarding the

	qualifications -strategies of continuous improvement of education quality -standards and quality assurance procedures Involvement of students and other interested parties into this process.	quality assurance; • participation of students in quality assurance procedures; •clear definition of the final results of implementation of programs and achievement of objectives; • material encouragement of teachers mastery.
1.2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programs and qualifications	Availability of an official mechanism of approval of educational programs and awarding of qualifications. Periodic assessment and monitoring of programs implementation.	Quality assurance of programs and qualifications includes: • control of content development of educational programs, curriculum; • specific requirements for different kinds and types of higher education; • official procedures of approval and agreement of programs; • monitoring of students achievements; • periodic internal and external examination of programs; • constant interaction with representatives of the labor market.
1.3. Evaluation of students knowledge level	Evaluation is carried out using procedures that meet the published criteria and principles.	Procedures of the knowledge level assesment: • meet the objectives of the program; • serve the purpose (current, diagnostic, final); • be based on the strict criteria; • be conducted by highly qualified specialists who understand the role of evaluation; • if possible to involve more than one examiner for judgments; • foresee the consequences of the exam requirements; • consider good reasons of students' absence at lectures; • ensure objectivity; • inform students on control types, evaluation criteria.
1.4. Quality assurance of the teaching staff	Development of mechanisms and criteria for assessing the competence of professors. According to the criteria their work is internally and externally assessed.	Professors should: • have full knowledge and understanding of the academic subject; • necessary skills and experience for the effective transfer of knowledge to students; • have opportunities for improvement; • be removed from the professional activity because of the low level of qualification.
1.5. Educational resources and students support	Ensuring sufficiency of training facilities in accordance with the requirements of educational programs	Students should have access to: •all learning resources - material (libraries, computers); human (professors, curators); educational; • mechanisms of support systems. Students should be able to: • express their opinion on the provided services. Constant monitoring and improvement of efficiency of service delivery.
1.6. Information systems	Gathering, analysis and using of relevant information for the effective management of training programs and other activities.	Indicators of activity self-analysis: • progress of students and the level of success; • demand for graduates in the labor market; • satisfaction of students with educational programs; • teaching effectiveness; • availability and cost of resources; • comparison of the university with other educational institutions in the European area.
1.7. Public awareness	Regular publicationof the most recent, accurate and objective information (qualitative, quantitative) on educational programs and awarded qualifications.	Requirements for awareness: • accurate, objective, accessible; • should not only be used for marketing purposes; • about programs, their effectiveness, qualifications, procedures of studying, levels of teaching student performance.

It is obvious that the standards and recommendations for universities are based on the ideas of autonomy of institutions.

Higher education institutions, regardless of their size, ownership, structure and functions, are granted to develop strategies, procedures and mechanisms of educational programs and awarding of qualifications. Institution of higher education is involved in the development if content of professional training, development of the list of required academic disciplines. The identified procedures of control and evaluation of educational activities of university students should ensure the objectivity of the process. Higher education institution is also responsible for the quality of the teaching staff and their training opportunities. It also provides students with the necessary and available resources for training activities. In general, a higher educational institution, acting in its specific circumstances, is able to decide with the help of which procedures it will implement the standards of

education quality which are described in the document. Thus, based on the educational objectives, internal conditions and own needs, a university itself develops mechanisms and criteria (standards, benchmarks) for evaluating the competence of professors. The document aims universities at engagement in the development of educational policy and quality assurance procedures of students and representatives of the labor market. In general, the work of universities with standards and recommendations creates conditions for the formation of such a phenomenon, which is denoted in the document as "quality assurance culture". Only with this characteristic an institution is capable of achieving outstanding successes in education and development of intellectual potential.

By providing a higher educational institution with crucial importance in ensuring the quality of education, the document also offers standards and recommendations for external quality assurance systems. They are represented by two variants:for the official national authorities and independent transnational and international agencies.

The content of European standards and ways of implementation of external (national) higher education quality assurance are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

European standards and recommendations on external (national) higher education quality assurance

The list of standards	The main content of the standard norms	The main content of the recommendations
2.1. The use of internal education quality assurance	External education quality assurance is based on the procedures of internal quality assurance	The internal strategies and procedures within a university are studied in the course of external quality assessment. The internal procedures guarantee the quality, and the external evaluation processes are not intensive.
2.2. Development of procedures for external education quality assurance	Aims and objectives of the procedures of quality assurance are agreed by all responsible parties (including a higher educational establishment) before their development and are published with a description of their use.	In order to ensure clarity and transparency of procedures, external quality assurance methods are developed taking into account the views of all interested parties. The agreed procedures are publicly available and contain a detailed description of the goals and objectives of procedures. The procedures themselves must undergo a preliminary assessment in order to ensure their optimality.
2.3. Criteria for decision making	All official decisions made as a result of external quality assessment should be based on the clear, generally accepted criteria that are used consistently and approved.	In order to respect fairness and reliability of official decisions of agencies on educational quality assurance, they should be grounded on clear and published criteria. Conclusion on the activities of universities and implementation of programs is based on written documents and, if necessary, agencies should mitigate the taken decisions.
2.4. Compliance of procedures with the stated objectives	All procedures of external education quality assurance are developed in accordance with the defined goals and objectives.	The agencies must: • apply procedures that meet the stated objectives of the agency; • carefully select and attract competent experts; • conduct training of experts; • attract international experts; • attract students; • guarantee the validity of used expertise procedures; • combine self-report – visiting universities – compilation and publication of the report – implementing the recommendations of the report.
2.5. Reporting	Reports should be compiled and published in clear and accessible language. All decisions, recommendations, positive and negative conclusions should be available to the reader.	The reports are intended for different readership; demand different forms, structure content, style and tone. Generally reports contain preliminary explanation, description, analysis,

		conclusions and recommendations. Users of the report (both within the university and beyond) can express their opinion on its suitability.
2.6. The following procedures	Quality assurance procedureswhich assume implementation of the plan of the following actions must have predefined consistent procedures of aftereffect.	Quality assurance should serve as a stimulus for continuous improvement of work. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report , but provides elaborated following procedures, the action plan. The purpose of these procedures - quick response to the problem areas and operational correction of deficiencies.
2.7. Frequency of evaluation	External assessment of quality of higher educational institutions (programs) should be conducted on a regular basis, periodically. Duration and control procedures are clearly defined and announced in advance.	Quality assurance is a dynamic, continuous process. It not restricted to the first inspection and following official procedures. The following external evaluations should take into account the progress made since the last inspection. The procedure used in all external examinations should be clearly set.
2.8. Systematic analysis	Agencies should regularly publish analytical reports, the main results of expert examinations.	Collected by the agencies information on programs and institutions is used for structural analysis of higher education system, trends of development, experiences, problems and drawbacks, ways of improving quality, etc.

The principle of subsidiarity is traced in standards and recommendations of this level. All national quality assurance bodiesand they can be both governmental and non-governmental, providing the quality higher education should give priority to policies and activities of universities in this direction. It is taken into account the basic indicators of internal quality assurance of education and developed for this purpose criteria and procedures. Standards require entities of external (national) quality assurance in the first place to study in detail the practice of internal quality assurance, and if it is implemented properly and meets the European standards, then the process of external assessment minimizes. All external expert examinations of education quality must be conducted according to a previouslydeveloped, published, verified, agreed criteria be objective and transparent for universities whose activities will be studied. Considerable attention in standards and recommendations of the external quality assurance is paid to such an important moment as implementation of recommendations of the report. In fact, important is not so much the act of examining the condition of education quality and making a decision on its level, but efficient continuous and progressive quality improvement actions that take place for the implementation of recommendations mentioned in the report. Ensuring the quality of education due to implementation of standards and recommendations has become a dynamic, ongoing process.

European standards on international higher education quality assurance which are carried out by independent agencies are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

European standards and norms for external quality assurance carried out by the independent agencies

The list of standards	The main content of the standard norms	The main content of recommendations
3.1. The use of procedures of external quality assurance	International quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of external (national) quality assurance	Standards of external (national) quality assurance are an important foundation for the international external quality assessment.
3.2. The organizational status	Agencies should be formally recognized by the competent authorities of the European educational space and have legal personality status	Agencies must meet all the requirements of the legislation under which they operate.
3.3. Activity	Agencies should regularly work on external quality assurance (at the institutional or program level).	Activities may include evaluation, verification, audit, accreditation and other similar procedures and must be a part of the main functions of the agency.
3.4. Resources	For efficient external quality assurance agencies should have adequate human and financial resources and equipment.	Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources for the effective and efficient organization and carrying out the procedures of external quality assurance, in case of appropriate ensuring of improvement of these processes and procedures.

3.5. Defining the mission	Agencies should have published, plainly and clearly stated goals and objectives of their activity.	The process of external quality assurance should be the main activity of the agency in the presence of a systematic approach to achieving the goals and objectives.
3.6. Independence	Agencies must have an independent status. They carry autonomous responsibility for their actions, and no third parties (universities, ministries and so on) cannot influence the decisions and recommendations contained in the reports.	Independence of the agency appears in: • functional independence from government agencies, universities and political parties; • independent defining of the procedures and methods, the results of the assessment process, appointment of external experts; • consultation with the interested parties (students, etc.).; • full responsibility for the examination.
3.7. The criteria and procedures for external quality assurance that are used by agencies	The criteria and procedures used by agencies should be determined in advance and must be available to the public; to such procedures are included self-evaluation, external evaluation by a group of experts, publication of the report, proceduresbased on the recommendations of the report.	Agencies may develop and use other procedures for practical purposes. Agencies should be guided by their own principles and ensure that their goals and objectives are achieved professionally and decisions and conclusions are formulated in concord, even if they are taken by different groups of people. Agencies that make decisions with formal consequences should provide appeal procedures in their statute.
3.8. The procedure for accountability	Agencies must have their own accountability procedures	These procedures must include: • published policy of quality assurance of the agency with the access on the web-site; • documentation of the agency on: -processes and performance results; -mechanisms of overcoming the conflict of interests of external experts; -mechanisms that ensure the quality and reliability of the materials; -procedures of internal quality assurance. • mandatory external inspection of the agency activity (each 5 years)

Involvement of independent agencies that have non-national, transnational or international status of quality assurance enables to enhance the benefits and limit the potential disadvantages of internationalization of higher education within the European educational space. Developers of standards, being aware that Europe is moving towards development of common foundations of quality assurance of higher education, yet understood that at present it cannot afford creating a single center that would monitor the compliance with European standards by all signatory countries of the Bologna Declaration. That is why it was proposed an idea to carry out a register of European agencies of external quality assurance. At the present time such register exists, EQAR is responsible for its formation, the association was created by ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE [7].

Currently, the registry includes 32 agencies, which in their activity demonstrate full compliance with European standards and recommendations (ESG). The registry meets the needs of European countries and universities in defining professional and credible external quality assurance agencies. Registered agencies that periodically undergo an examination and certification by ENQA, with their activities serve as a benchmark for external quality assurance of higher education.

Generally, even if "Standards and recommendations for quality assurance in the scope of European Higher Education", as a document is recommendatory and is does not have a directive character, from the moment of its approval at the conference in Bergen, it became a true manifesto of a long process of formation of national systems of education quality assurance in European countries and a basis for reasonable and objective evaluation of the results of higher education.

In general, the analysis of documents and declarations that accompany the implementation of objectives of the Bologna process indicates that special attention in the common European space is given to the development of methodologies and finding mechanisms of ensuring the higher education quality. Consolidating the efforts of European associations, the Ministers of the participating countries of the Bologna process managed in a very short, as for such transnational activities, period to accept the important consensus documents. Among them "Standards and recommendations for quality assurance in the scope of European Higher Education". This document defines the main norms of European standards for internal and external higher education quality assurance.

Nowadays, higher education of Ukraine is reformed towards the introduction of European standards of education quality. A powerful impulse to a change in perception of quality of higher education and ways of its improvement was the Law of Ukraine "On education", adopted in 2014. The law provides formation of an integrated system of higher education quality assurance, which consists of internal and external quality assurance and activities of the National Agency for Quality Assurance

in Higher Education, assessment by independent institutions and quality assurance of higher education [2]. All this conforms to European strategic approach of implementation of tasks on quality assurance of higher education.

For example, Lesya Ukrainka Eastern European National University is the guarantor of internal higher education quality assurance, which is especially visible in the course of licensing and accreditation of educational-professional and educational-scientific programs. In particular, the monitoring and periodic review of education programs is performed; annual evaluation of higher education seekers and scientific-pedagogical staff; it is ensured the advanced training of scientific-pedagogical and teaching staff; monitored the availability of the necessary resources for the organization of educational process; implemented the measures on prevention and detection of academic plagiarism; it is ensured the publicity of information on educational programs, higher education degrees and qualifications, etc.

Embarking on the path of joining the European educational space Ukraine makes consistent steps towards democratization, humanization, decentralization of higher education, establishment of European standards for quality assurance of the higher education.

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