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How does Quality Assurance Make a Difference?

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Abstract: One of the main principles of the quality assurance procedures is to encompass the interests of all stakeholders. Among the stakeholders there is one group it is students whom very often many universities does not take seriously into account especially in Russia, where there is a long history of state orders and standards. In Russia there exist several students' organizations; the biggest is All-Russian Students Union which has memorandum of understanding with ESU. The Russian QA agency AKKORK approaches on the basis of ESG help to integrate and unite the students interested in participation in the procedures of quality assurance. In this article we will tell what it costs and what it is like for students in Russia to participate in QA procedures.

Text of paper:

All-Russian Students Union (A-RSU) - a project that rallied together the bodies of student self-government and individual students and has a great potential and a lots of new opportunities for self-realization and problem-solving for students. Creating a common platform of student government, able to provide administration, information and resources to support students' projects, helps to solve really complex problems and implement the most revolutionary idea!

Nowadays A-RSU has different aims:

- establishment of representative offices in all regions of Russian Federation;
- participation in development and assistance in the implementation of federal(national), regional, municipal programs, in the implementation of development of important social programs in Russian Federation, that are related to the goals and objectives of the organization;
- performance initiatives on various aspects of social life, making proposals to government bodies and local governments;



- interaction, pooling of funds and efforts with the concerned state authorities and government, public associations, scientific, educational, educational institutions, commercial organizations and entrepreneurs to attract media attention and the implementation of the statutory goals and objectives of the organization;
- advertising, publishing and printing in order to promote views, goals and objectives of the A-RSU
- support of the students interests in Russia in the various spheres of student lives, for instance in receiving qualitative education.

A-RSU is supported by many large organizations and government agencies (Ministry of Education, Skolkovo Foundation, etc.) and international organizations (European Students' Union).

All-Russian Students Union cooperates with domestic, foreign and international organisations working in education, science and business towards integration into the European system of quality assurance education. Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance and Career Development (AKKORK) is a largest independent QA agency that carries out the evaluation and/or accreditation of both institutions and programmes. The agency is a full member of APQN, INQAAHE, and CEENQA and possesses an affiliate status in ENQA. A-RSU and AKKORK cooperate together to provide new step of education QA in Russia.

AKKORK is seeking to contribute to the development of education institutions and the whole education system and helps people in optimization of management and internal QA systems, as well as in discovering HEI's potential and competitiveness.

Independency and impartiality of AKKORK, as well as competence of its reviewers are corroborated by the accreditations in the leading international accreditation networks of education quality assurance and by the positive experience in the period of 6 years.

The team of AKKORK numbers more than 300 reviewers, who are united by common values and adherence to the quality of rendering services. The reviewers of AKKORK help execute purposes by close collaboration with education institutions. The reviewers of AKKORK have good knowledge and understanding of pressing issues that face an education institution today, as well as of secondary, higher, postgraduate and additional education field peculiarity. Thereby AKKORK helps advance the success with confidence. It should also be noted that in accordance with the Russian legislation in such activities as: state supervision over compliance with legislation of the Russian Federation on education, control over compliance with licensing requirements and conditions, state control over the education quality could be involved reviewers and reviewer organizations, accredited in accordance with rules approved by the Government of the Russian Federation. AKKORK on July 8, 2011 received the proper accreditation in the RF Federal Service on Supervision in Education and Science (FS). Also AKKORK has cooperation agreement with RF Federal Service on Supervision in Education and Science stating that if the HEI previously to state accreditation procedures has undergone education evaluation procedures in AKKORK in the same programmes the AKKORK reviewer's reports could be presented to the FS in order to make decisions on state accreditation.

Analyzing the situation in recent years in higher education in Russia, it should be noted a continuous decline in the level of training of our specialists. This is a consequence of the lack of real competition among universities. In such situation the university is not interested in the preparation of highly qualified staff (HEIs income practically do not depend on the quality of the knowledge of their graduates). Go to the allocation of money to



universities based on the number of students further aggravates the situation. But in fact, universities are interested in the quality of its graduates. Also in attracting the largest possible number of best prepared entrants.

At the same time at the forefront of the university grading system, which is now based on such a complex criteria, the number of innovative equipment in the laboratories (which does not mean that universities are able to use them), or cooperation with foreign universities (which is bad for the Russian labour market as students try to stay abroad after graduation). All these criteria are highly subjective and hardly verifiable.

Analysis of the university experience of developed countries shows that one of the main criteria for evaluation of their work is the relevance of its graduates in industry and business (employment of graduates in the specialty, his salary, and the next career during five years). This objective information published in the press, will affect the applicants for entering to top universities of the country, and these universities to increase the enrolment of new students. This information is provided by the government to avoid "egalitarianism" in the financing of universities and, every institution is interested in how to produce a stronger professional.

Higher education institutions are by law responsible for conforming to the quality standards of education and they must train their students according to the State Educational Standards. In addition to federal legislation, institutions are expected to follow the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. One of the important instruments in the quality assurance of teaching in Russian HEIs is students' assessment of their teachers. For the most part, Russian students only have the role of survey respondents in quality assurance, but some institutions have also involved students as reviewers in self-evaluations.

The law "On Education" reaffirms the state's right to evaluate and control the quality of education offered in HEIs. The right is claimed not to limit the institutions' autonomy and independence, but to safeguard the required level of compliance with the state policy of high quality education. To date, the requirements listed in the State Educational Standards to be met by graduates remain at the core of the Russian HEIs activity.

Also in this law is stated that the HEIs may at their own expense turn to the independent QA agencies. It must be noted that the requirements of State Educational Standards does not fully reflect the ESG ENQA, which certainly does the standards of AKKORK which are based on multistandard approach.

The involvement of students in the established by AKKORK quality assurance procedures is an essential element of such procedures. The requirement to involve students in quality assurance activities relating to programmes and awards is further stated in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Institutional and agency quality reviews which have taken place in higher education and training institutions over recent years have considered the issue of student involvement in quality assurance procedures. A-RSU and AKKORK cooperate together in order to promote new forms of students involvement in quality assurance process.

Nowadays Russian students are interested in high-quality education in Russian HEIs. That is why A-RSU together with AKKORK trains students-reviewers according to European and Russian standards of quality assurance. Students have opportunity to become reviewers and to share their opinion about quality of education in Russian universities.

A-RSU chooses students that have good marks, have working experience in students' organizations and want to become reviewers. Then these students pass training, held by



AKKORK together with other reviewers. After such trainings students are supposed to write a qualification work which could demonstrate their skills as reviewers. Then this qualification work is evaluated by the AKKORK Advisory Council. If the students work is positively assessed by the Advisory Council they receive the reviewer's certificate. After that students take part in AKKORK education quality assurance procedures in Russian HEIs.

During 2011 more than 50 universities in Russia were reviewed by AKKORK reviewers and by students that were trained by A-RSU and AKKORK as professional reviewers. In this system students take part in external review of universities and/or their programmes. Students-reviewers are involved in the evaluation of the same program of education that they are studying. Student can make his/her opinion not only about education system of HEI and its internal QA system, but also about students' support and students' activity in university. This helps to change education system in university. After review, all participants make a report according to AKKORK standards about university, that includes the whole picture of situation in HEI and offer prospects for changing and development. Students-reviewers always give valuable views and proposals for improvement of HEI attitude towards students.

The participation of students in QA procedures certainly help to promote students interest and make them known to the leadership of the HEIs. In Russian HEIs the rector is a key figure which is interested in quality assurance, but the quality work is usually also supported by a quality management unit. The role of the faculty is central in quality assurance, as the professional and pedagogical skills of the academic staff determine to a large degree the quality of education. So when they know apart from their professional duties the interests of students, this helps to adjust their work to the students interests.

Now we can say that it is a great experience for Russian Federation. Program of cooperation between A-RSU and AKKORK has good results: on the one hand, students can take part in modernization of education system in universities; on another hand AKKORK invites more reviewers that help to change Russian HEIs according to Bologna process and other European programs and standards of education.

By cooperation with AKKORK A-RSU can also make some steps in changing partnership with Russian Ministry of Education. According to the students' and reviewers' reports, A-RSU offers the Ministry ways of changing some aspects of Russian system of education.

References:

AKKORK <http://www.akork.ru>;

All-Russian Students Union <http://rsunion.ru/>.

Questions for discussion:

1. Students' activity in QA procedures in Russia.
2. Students' role in quality improvement of HEIs.
3. Development of students' civil institutions in Russia in terms of QA.