

IMPLEMENTATION OF BOLOGNA DECLARATION: PROBLEMS IN RUSSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Key words: quality, higher professional education, quality of education, standards of quality, indicators of quality, Bologna Process, university, reforms, the labor market, employment.

In this article the current state of Russian and foreign labor markets of specialists with higher education are analyzed. The problems of quality of Russian higher education and foreign methods of its solving are described. The author analyzes the concept of "quality" and formulates the definition of "quality". It also describes how to implement the Bologna Declaration by the Russian system of higher education. The conclusion about the need of further improvement of the Russian higher education system in the context of the requirements of the Bologna process was made. The criterion the quality of higher education as a potential demand for a specialist in the labor market and the interest of the employer was introduced. The last should be the main indicator of high-level organization of the educational process as a practical matter.

Education in the modern world is one of the major preconditions for successful development of society. Highly educated and skillful labourforce is essential for steady economic growth and competitiveness of any country particularly taking into account fast globalization.

Society has already entered the period when the major part of its economic wealth is generated outside the tangible production sector. Human assets became the most efficient source of added cost. Ability to take managerial decisions and organize financial flows and technological chains is highly valuable nowadays.

The requisite for steady innovative development is the abilities to remain at the edge of technological progress, to set the tone for technological innovations, to influence the world by ideas and culture, and to provide safe environment for citizens and defense for states. Upwards of other factors intelligence plays the role of the most important competitive advantage. The knowledge array gathers incredible speed and everyone who is eager to succeed has to refresh his skills and knowledge constantly, otherwise he has no chance to become employed. Moreover in western economies notable for high remuneration of labour the demand for low qualified workforce has been decreasing due to its moving to less developed countries.

The need for graduated employees is growing in the West. According to Brenda Gorly, Deputy Chancellor of Open University in Great Britain and a participant of the European Conference of Education Ministers held in London, "During the

following 20 years European economic paradigm will experience fundamental shift, and social welfare and development will be based on knowledge industries. Graduated specialists will be in greater demand. However, being motive force of the new educational paradigm European universities cannot carry out this task in full. According to statistical data 21% of able-bodied population has a certificate of degree. Meanwhile the corresponding number reaches 36% in Japan, 38% in the USA, 43% in Canada. Only 1.1% of GNP is spend on education in Europe, 2.5% in Canada, 2.7% in Southern Korea and 2.7% in the USA. Western Europe sounds the alarm and fears for being behind those countries and missing its opportunity to keep pace with them"¹.

The importance of intellectual labour increases manifold in the contemporary world. The role of information runs high and knowledge economy becomes the most important sector of the national economy. It is education that defines a state's status in the world and a person's status in a society. Education is considered by many as the poverty reduction and social inequality elimination factor.

All national economic achievements were connected with educational progress and with quality and quantity improvements in professional standards for the bulk of the population. As those countries' experience shows only priority development of this sector forms innovative attraction and ensures the technological breakthrough. That was inferred on Moscow Great 8 summit in 2006.

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Higher education became a backbone component for national economy due to its ability to form staffing potential for all sectors of the economy².

Over the last decade new trends emerged in education. Those trends determined its development and were defined in the report "On Education Development in Russia" made for State Council session in Kremlin on 24 March 2006³.

◆ There is the necessity to organize the educational process to adopt people to dynamic environment and give them an opportunity to long life learning.

◆ Grave importance of personal communicative and informational competence is conditioned by the transition to information-oriented society and expansion of cross cultural communications.

◆ Life democratization and civil society formation determine the higher level of citizens being ready to take conscious and conscientious decisions.

◆ Constant professional development and retraining are brought up to date by economic development, competitiveness growth, reduction in low qualified labour force sector and shift in employment sector.

◆ The importance of human capital is constantly increasing.

Higher education and its quality bear special significance in the light of these tendencies. Higher educational institutions are unique centers of transfer, learning, replication, distribution, transformation and utilization of knowledge.

Bologna process countries (Russia among them) signed the declaration on development of unified educational environment and formation of higher education system meeting the unified European standards.

Russian higher educational system should answer the requirements of XXI century. That can be seen as a guarantee of success for Russia and an essential condition to take the appropriate place among world leading states.

Russia faces the task "... to form united national strategy of priority development for Russian education that allows to achieve its qualitative breakthrough and new life quality for the country *pro tanto*".

The gap between labour market demand and educational institutions potentialities is observed at present. The lack of estimated training costs

takes plays. The main reason for it is seen in the chain "government - higher school - employers" break off. To provide efficient teamwork of all the parties concerned it is necessary to shape the "employer - higher school" system of cooperation and coordination. Such a system implements ties harmonization and universalization of parties interaction.

The fundamentals of the system should be the following ones:

1. equal responsibility of an employer and a university for target specialist training;

2. collaboration of an employer and a university throughout all stages of training - from vocational guidance to placement;

3. organizational structure to provide proper functioning;

4. realizing the priority of learning over production processes;

5. taking into account student's interests and needs in the process of target learning.

Implementation of the principles abovementioned is one of the major tasks for Russia over integrating into international educational community.

The Bologna declaration (hereinafter referred to as the declaration) was signed by twenty nine European ministers of education on 19 June 1999. Russia became the full-fledged member of Bologna process in September 2003. Under the declaration Russia is obliged to support European cooperation to ensure quality for development of traceable criteria and methodologies⁵. The core statement is defined as providing comparability within the national system of education and quality assessment. The opinion was publicly voiced that we are not able to assess graduates competence. It could be done only by an employer - "staff consumer"⁶.

From philosophy-wide perspective the quality of a subject is defined as its intrinsic essence that is displayed outwardly as the whole set of properties.

This definition undoubtedly has methodological importance. It focuses researcher's attention at "quality" as the intrinsic state of phenomenon and highlights the objective side of quality.

However the concept of quality has several specific aspects. According to "German Quality Society" "quality is a set of properties and characteristics of articles and processes conditioning the degree of their purposeful utilization"⁷.

Armand Feygenbaum defines quality as “consumer decision but not the decision of an engineer or marketer. The quality is based on consumer - goods collaboration and can be measured according to satisfying their needs. The needs can be expressed vividly or indirectly and be deliberate or subconscious, objective or subjective.

The idea of quality is constantly changing in a highly competitive market”⁸. Joseph Dguran, a leading American quality systems expert sees the quality as “service ability”⁹.

Foreign scholars Harvy and Green suggest their definition “An object has quality if it meets customer/ consumer needs. Quality means satisfying the customer”¹⁰. Bell identifies quality as “target matching”¹¹.

In accordance with ISO 9000:1994 standards “Quality is the total set of an entity’s properties and its ability to meet determined and prospective needs”. I.I. Mazur and V.D. Shapiro, the authors of textbook on quality management consider this definition as the most reasonable and generally acceptable.

Judging from those definitions we can infer that from the economic perspective quality means not only obtaining objective qualitative characteristics but specific properties as well. Subjectivity is enclosed in correlation of quality concept with social demand concept and concerned to be the capacity of quality bearer to meet this need.

It is necessary to take into account not all the properties of an object but only important for the user. Economic understanding of quality throughout usability supposes practical application of

corresponding quality bearer. That means that we can speak about quality if the object is used practically according to its mission (See Figure).

Thus, we consider the product quality as the total set of its useful properties for meeting definite consumers needs.

Applying this philosophy of quality to educational services we can conclude that the top position among other criteria priorities is taken by job placement and successful career of a specialist. Correlation of educational process quality, specialist quality and his job placement is shown in the Figure.

Analysis of definitions abovementioned allows us to make several conclusions:

1. The definitions given do not contradict each other.
2. They take into account and reflect market relations in society.
3. They highlights “demand” as the major property of quality.
4. These definitions are attributed to the qualities of foods and services respectively.

Experts in the quality field define “project quality”, “projected quality” and “quality of project implementation”. Within higher education there is relatively long time span of 5-6 years between the first and the third definitions.

The quality of a graduate reflects in final exams diploma only potentially, it is manifested in the job process. The main customer and consumers of educational services are students and employers. The student himself is interested in qualitative education. His career and material

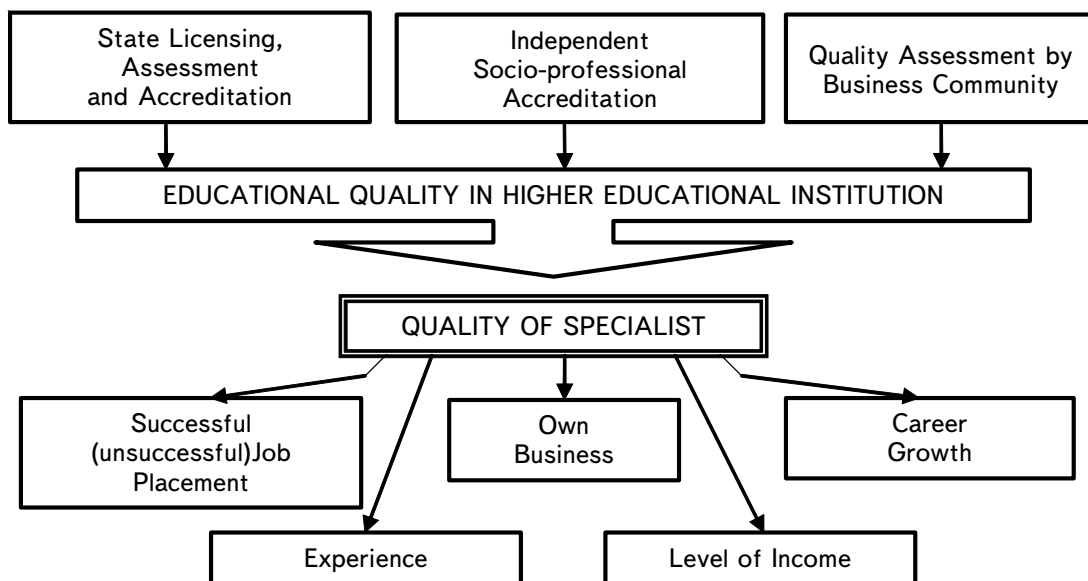


Fig. Educational Process Quality and Specialist Quality and His Job Placement

welfare depend on education quality. But we consider business community to be the main character in defining quality criteria. Russian business realizes actual demand for professions more clearly than state bodies. The other side of the defining and increasing educational quality is that graduates are not able to apply their theoretical knowledge to practice. Employers could play the main part ordering specialists training, paying for their learning and inducting on-site. It could help students to understand fundamental principles of real business and define their prospects. Undergraduates could realize the ways for being competitive in the labour market. There is similar experience in our country. Russian business has enough means to make the job in regions economically attractive. To arrange harmonized assessment procedures the decision was taken to create accreditation agencies network. European ENQA should become The head structure of this network. ENQA brought forward four step quality assessment system.

1. Quality assessment systems should be educational institutions independent structures. In most European countries foreign experts are invited to evaluate educational programmes.

2. Higher educational institution should organize self-examination procedure in advance. This procedure has been known since 1992. It is essential for a higher educational institution itself as it simplifies decision-making process.

3. The next step is an external assessment.

4. The last step is publication, procedure transparency. The list of accredited educational institutions is published in Russia .

Thus, within Bologna declaration implementation there are several urgent tasks. Among them there is enabling employers to take part in assessment procedures.

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³ Official Documents in Education. 2006. № 14.

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⁵ Bologna Process. Fundamental Materials. M., 2007.

⁶ Higher Mathematics for Economists Высшая математика для экономистов: М., 2007.

⁷ Mazur I.I., Shapiro V.D. Quality Management. M., 2003.

⁸ Faygenbaum A. Production Quality Control. M., 1986.

⁹ Bendell T. Quality Coachers. M., 2000.

¹⁰ Harvey L., Green D. Defining Quality? // Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education. 1993. Vol. 18.

¹¹ Bell C. What is hell quality? // Fitness for Purpose. Guildford: SRHE, 1985.