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Conceptual Aspects of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

This article presents the main provisions of the Concept of Quality Assurance of Higher Education, which is considered both from the point of view of the consumer (student, employer) and from the point of view of compliance with the consumption of an educational service (product). The essence of the new paradigm of quality assurance is substantiated, based on the assertion that quality is a relative and multi-level concept. Approaches to quality assurance at different levels of management, differing in the instrumental part, are characterized. The thesis that the quality management system is understood as an organizational structure, policies, processes, procedures and resources necessary for the implementation of quality management is revealed. The authors presented Vision for the formation of a culture of quality. At the same time, the level of quality culture is determined both at the institutional and national levels. The essence of the quality assurance methodology, which is a system of principles and methods of organizing activities to support and improve quality, is revealed. The methodology of the quality assurance system is based on academic values and fundamental principles. Important elements, methods and tools of the system are presented internal quality assurance.

Keywords: quality assurance, academic values, paradigm of education, quality culture, quality of education, quality management system, accreditation bodies, quality policy.

Introduction

Higher education plays an important role in society by creating new knowledge, transferring it to learners, and promoting innovation. The new paradigm of higher education, based on the Bologna views, necessitates the restructuring of the quality of higher education with the participation of all stakeholders (internal and external stakeholders). On the one hand, higher education is practice-oriented, interacts with existing practices and takes into account the needs of the labor market. On the other hand, from the point of view of student-centered learning, mission, strategies, pedagogical concepts and processes are subject to institutional changes. All this has an impact on ensuring the quality of education.

The main task of higher education is to train highly qualified personnel in accordance with the needs of economic sectors. In this regard, the quality of higher education means its compliance with the requirements for the quality of training and the needs of students and employers. And the very functioning of higher education should be aimed at ensuring the proper quality of its final product — a trained specialist.

Thus, the focus of higher education is on students, institutional structures, the educational process, as well as its interaction with various stakeholders (the state, employers, partners, agencies). In this regard, the Concept considers quality assurance of higher education both from the point of view of the consumer (student, employer), reflecting compliance with the goal, and from the point of view of consumption of the educational service (product).

Students have requirements for the high quality of the educational program (content that reflects the interests and needs of the student), the educational environment (the infrastructure of the university) and the educational process (its organization, the use of innovative technologies). The implementation of these requirements is ensured through the participation of students in the work of academic committees for the development of educational programs and other collegial bodies. Transformation qualitative changes are that the student is an obligatory participant in the educational process.

Employers, for their part, also set requirements for the high quality of the educational program (content aimed at the formation of competencies that are in demand in the labor market) and for the qualitative characteristics of graduates (the availability of the necessary skills and competencies). These requirements are expressed through the participation of employers in the development and examination of educational pro-

grams, in the final certification of students, as well as through the participation in a sociological survey to assess the quality of graduates.

The quality of education is considered from the perspective of a strategic approach, when the quality of education is an added value between the contribution and the result. In this regard, the entire educational process is aimed at ensuring the learning outcomes demanded by society, in other words, the organization of the educational process should be based on the definition of expected learning outcomes and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes. The implementation of the strategic approach should be carried out consistently within the framework of the hierarchy of quality management goals.

The quality management process is implemented through a sequence of the following procedures:

- general quality management is a strategic task of the university, which is determined at the highest level of management (a policy is developed and approved aimed at improving the position of the university and improving the quality of both processes and products);

- quality assurance — the implementation of the tasks set by the structural divisions of the university (achieved through the teamwork of the team);

- control, evaluation and examination — a procedure focused on achieving quality indicators (carried out through an internal monitoring system and self-assessment).

In this way, “quality” is seen as an exceptionally high phenomenon that permeates all aspects of higher education and is consistent with its strategic purpose.

In this regard, it is important to define a set of measures aimed at the formation of a new philosophy of quality, focused on the development of a culture of quality and quality assurance of education as elements of the national system of higher education.

The main goal of the implementation of the proposed Concept is to create sustainable trust in universities on the part of society and employers as a supplier of competitive and qualified personnel for the real sector of the economy.

Experimental

Within the framework of the stated goal, mainly universal research methods were used: systematization of scientific research on the theory and practice of quality assurance of higher education, analysis and generalization of the existing experience of the quality management system.

The new paradigm of quality assurance is based on the assertion that quality is a relative and multi-level concept. Quality assessment has many aspects, with the starting point being the interests of learners and the needs of the labour market. Education actors should continuously work on all aspects of quality assurance in higher education, which is considered more broadly, including ways to manage, monitor, evaluate and control to ensure the quality of education and educational services. Therefore, quality assurance is itself a tool for quality improvement.

For effective quality management of the higher education system, requirements are determined taking into account the level of management.

At the institutional level, quality assurance management includes measures to manage quality content, quality personnel, quality contingent, quality infrastructure, which are reflected in the relevant quality assurance standards. The key tool here is the internal quality assurance system.

At the national level, quality implies compliance with generally accepted mandatory standards, professional standards, social requirements and state regulatory requirements. Quality assessment is carried out by external independent structures, authorized bodies and stakeholders. The accreditation process is a necessary indicator of external evaluation.

Universities should carry out systematic work on the formation of a quality culture, which is formed by the team of the entire organization, where each employee, through his individual efforts and subculture, creates a professional environment and atmosphere, where certain values and traditions are maintained, which further create conditions for understanding a single culture, focused on quality improvement. Only a sustainably formed culture of quality is able to ensure high quality of work at every level, place, and site. And this means that all education actors have the same understanding of quality and quality assurance issues.

At the institutional level, a culture of quality manifests itself in collective behaviour and is a set of shared beliefs, attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterize universities and/or the higher education system as a whole. A university that has achieved a true culture of quality exhibits three common traits: leadership commitment, employee accountability, and continuous improvement across the organization.

At the national level, the culture of quality is manifested in the support of formal processes focused on compliance with qualitative and quantitative requirements, as well as methodological and organizational support in achieving effective and efficient activities.

Results and Discussion

The new paradigm of quality assurance necessitated the updating of the quality assurance methodology, which is a system of principles and methods for organizing quality support and improvement activities. The methodology of the quality assurance system is based on academic values and fundamental principles. Values and principles are the elements of a quality assurance management system. The following classical functions are implemented in the management system: planning, organization, motivation and control. Most of the qualitative characteristics are determined objectively on the basis of standards, agreements, and contracts. Accordingly, quality assurance is the maintenance of the compliance of a product/service with the requirements.

Thus, quality assurance is a continuous process of improving the quality of education, training and other services according to certain agreed sets of criteria.

At the institutional level, it is a process established by the university itself, in which it is also the responsibility of the university to explain and provide evidence of this quality. Therefore, each university develops its own quality assurance methodology. The process of quality improvement, in turn, is implemented with the help of appropriate planning methods. An internal quality assurance process requires two things: 1) the creation of a mechanism that can reform and improve university education in a real, substantial way; 2) the ability/responsibility to explain/justify these improvements to stakeholders through a well-defined set of criteria.

The Internal Quality Assurance System (ICMS) is a set of interrelated and interacting policies, standards, tools and methods for managing the quality of education.

The organization of the university's quality assurance activities is carried out on the basis of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area (ESG EHEA).

One of the important elements of the QSS is the development of internal regulatory documentation at the university. The hierarchy of internal quality assurance regulations includes four levels of documentation:

1. Quality Assurance Policy;
2. Internal Quality Assurance Standards;
3. Internal regulatory documents;
4. Regulations on structural subdivisions and job descriptions.

The quality assurance policy aims to maintain high standards of quality in education, as well as to ensure the link between teaching, research and innovation.

Quality culture is a means of implementing the Quality Assurance Policy. The system of internal quality assurance is the continuous improvement and maintenance of the development of a quality culture at all levels of the university's functioning.

Internal Quality Assurance Standards establish a set of educational requirements to ensure the high quality of activities on the basis of uniform procedures. Internal regulatory documents provide a targeted solution to management problems at the institutional level. Internal regulatory documents include organizational and legal, organizational and administrative documents. They act as regulators of internal life on a par with regulatory legal acts [1].

Regulations on structural subdivisions and job descriptions define the functions, duties, rights and responsibilities of employees and structural subdivisions.

The methods and tools of the internal quality assurance system should be consistent with the mission and development strategy of the university.

Criteria are used to measure quality requirements and expectations (quality criteria are characteristics of a product or service that can be used for the purpose of measuring or evaluating its quality in accordance with the requirements of stakeholders).

Indicators directly related to quality assurance address all aspects, areas or criteria of quality assurance in education: quantitative (numerical indicators of all inputs, ratios, amounts, averages, percentages); qualitative (content and implementation of the mission, policies and processes of student assessment, portfolio, quality culture, etc.).

One of the important components of the QSMS is the involvement of all stakeholders in quality assurance processes.

Involvement in quality assurance is manifested through internal monitoring of the university's activities with the involvement of faculty, administrative and managerial staff, students, employers as experts to assess the activities of the university and/or educational programs and their compliance with internal quality assurance standards.

The advantages of the proposed methodology are expressed in the increase in the productivity of each employee and the university as a whole; risks are minimized; Most decisions and conclusions are carried out correctly the first time; objective assessment and analysis of the work of various departments and the university as a whole is carried out, the effectiveness of the decisions made increases; Continuous improvement of the existing quality system is carried out. The result is meeting the needs of all stakeholders.

The external quality assurance system is based on external audit and external evaluation. Its main principles are independence, objectivity and impartiality. In this regard, accreditation agencies are independent non-profit organizations that develop their own external quality assurance policies, guidelines and accreditation standards, determine audit and evaluation procedures based on objective criteria and indicators.

The National System for Assessing and Ensuring the Quality of Higher Education derives from the priorities and principles of state policy in the field of higher education. At the same time, the state guarantees the availability of high-quality higher education for all citizens of the country. In this regard, the State controls, monitors and evaluates the quality of higher education. The trend is that there is a shift from quality control to a quality assurance system. This means that the control and supervisory functions of the state are gradually being narrowed, and the regulatory mechanisms for quality assurance based on trust and cooperation are expanding. The Republican Council for Quality Assurance has been established under the authorized body in the field of higher education, which regulates the activities of accreditation agencies. All this leads to a variety of quality assurance tools and mechanisms that are used by the state to regulate the activities of accreditation agencies and to control and assess the quality of education at the institutional level.

The fundamental principles of the quality assurance system are:

- 1) the responsibility of higher education institutions;
- 2) student-centered nature;
- 3) continuous improvement and efficiency enhancement;
- 4) sustainability, transparency and adaptability of quality assurance;
- 5) compliance with the requirements of the market and meeting the needs of employers in high-quality training of personnel;
- 6) ensuring the competitiveness of graduates and the convertibility of educational documents.

Each level of the quality assurance system has its own principles arising from the specifics of activities and approaches to their construction. These principles are formulated by each organization independently. In general, the basic parameters of the quality assurance system are focused on such goals as:

- contribution to the national development of higher education;
- inculcation of a system of values in students;
- promoting the use of new technologies;
- striving for excellence.

The most important task in quality assurance is to define the values of education, which should serve as a guideline in promoting the quality of education. As a rule, academic values are determined by the Development Strategy, both at the national and institutional level.

The academic values defined by the Concept for the Development of Higher Education and Science for 2023-2029 are:

- 1) interdisciplinarity and globality of educational programs;
- 2) inclusiveness of higher education;
- 3) critical and problem-design thinking;
- (4) lifelong learning;
- 5) creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship;
- (6) research-based learning;
- 7) information and communication technologies and digital transformation of higher education;
- 8) internationalization of higher education;
- 9) social responsibility [2].

Academic values at the institutional level are formed by higher education institutions in accordance with the Development Strategy.

Academic values at the institutional level, which form corporate and academic culture, serve as the basis for the development of norms and forms of behavior of university employees.

Conclusions

The quality of higher education is ensured, first of all, by higher education institutions that directly organize educational activities: universities create a high-quality educational environment (high-quality educational content, high-quality educational infrastructure) and organize a high-quality educational process (high-quality personnel, high-quality contingent). Thus, the university creates a system of internal quality assurance — this is the basic level of the quality assurance system.

At the same time, various structures and parties are interested in the quality of higher education, some of which assess the quality of higher education, others control the quality of higher education, as well as management, regulation and monitoring. In this regard, the quality assurance system also distinguishes an instrumental level, which is represented, on the one hand, by the external quality assurance system aimed at auditing and quality assessment carried out by specialized structures — accreditation agencies, on the other hand, by the provision system for quality assurance agencies, aimed at establishing requirements and evaluating their activities, and, on the third hand, by the state quality management system education aimed at controlling, evaluating, monitoring and regulating the quality assurance system.

This concept determines the quadripartite system of quality assurance of higher education in Kazakhstan. The main goal of all components of the quality assurance system is to achieve high academic quality, which is indicated by the Q point (quality).

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Жоғары білім сапасын қамтамасыз етудің тұжырымдамалық аспектілері

Мақалада тұтынушы (білім алушы, жұмыс беруші) тұрғысынан да, білім беру қызметін (өнімін) тұтынудың сәйкестігі тұрғысынан да қарастырылатын жоғары білім сапасын қамтамасыз ету Тұжырымдамасының негізгі ережелері туралы қарастырылған. Сапаны қамтамасыз етудің жаңа парадигмасының мәні сапа салыстырмалы және көп деңгейлі ұғым деген тұжырымға негізделген. Басқарудың әртүрлі деңгейлеріндегі сапаны қамтамасыз ету тәсілдерінің инструменталдық бөлігінде ерекшеленетін сипаттамалары келтірілген. Сапа менеджменті жүйесі сапа менеджментін жүзеге асыру үшін қажетті ұйымдық құрылым, саясат, үдерістер, рәсімдер және ресурстар ретінде ұғынылады деген тезис ашылған. Авторлар сапа мәдениетін қалыптастыру туралы көзқарастарын ұсынды. Бұл ретте сапа мәдениетінің деңгейі институционалдық деңгейде де, ұлттық деңгейде де айқындалады. Академиялық құндылықтар мен іргелі принциптерге негізделген сапаны қолдау және жақсарту жөніндегі қызметті ұйымдастырудың принциптері мен тәсілдерінің жүйесі болып табылатын сапаны қамтамасыз ету әдіснамасының мәні ашылған. Мақалада ішкі сапаны қамтамасыз ету жүйесінің маңызды элементтері, әдістері мен құралдары ұсынылған.

Кілт сөздер: сапаны қамтамасыз ету, академиялық құндылықтар, білім беру парадигмасы, сапа мәдениеті, білім беру сапасы, сапа менеджменті жүйесі, аккредиттеу органдары.

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Концептуальные аспекты обеспечения качества высшего образования

В статье представлены основные положения Концепции обеспечения качества высшего образования, которое рассматривается как с точки зрения потребителя (обучающегося, работодателя), так и с позиции соответствия потребления образовательной услуги (продукта). Обоснована сущность новой парадигмы обеспечения качества, основанная на утверждении, что качество является относительным и многоуровневым понятием. Дана характеристика подходам к обеспечению качества на разных уровнях управления, отличающихся инструментальной частью. Раскрыт тезис о том, что система менеджмента качества понимается как организационная структура, политика, процессы, процедуры и ресурсы, необходимые для реализации менеджмента качества. Авторами представлено видение о формировании культуры качества. При этом уровень культуры качества определяется как на институциональном, так и на национальном уровне. Раскрыта суть методологии обеспечения качества, представляющая собой систему принципов и способов организации деятельности по поддержке и улучшению качества, основанной на академических ценностях и основополагающих принципах. В статье представлены также важные элементы, способы и инструменты системы внутреннего обеспечения качества.

Ключевые слова: обеспечение качества, академические ценности, парадигма образования, культура качества, качество образования, система менеджмента качества, аккредитационные органы.

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