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Editorial

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

1. Introduction

Quality of education is now an issue of global concern. The quality of education is one of the main mechanisms to improve the quality of life.

The European Union pays great attention to the development of adult learning and education, development of models and mechanisms to assure their quality. This process is supported with some essential documents, such as UNESCO Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning (2012), and the Belém Framework for Action, adopted by the UNO in 2009. Today the European Commission for Education supports a number of projects, aimed at creation and dissemination of standards and quality models for all types of education, especially the lifelong learning.

The survey, conducted in 2015 by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning for the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE-3), reveals a clear relationship between level of quality of life and quality of the continuing education.

In Russia there are no distinct lines to identify adult learning and education. All types of education are divided in two groups, depending on the level of state regulation:

degree education and non-degree education. The first group includes general secondary, secondary vocational, and higher education. For the degree education, there are Federal state educational standards that define requirements for the content of relevant educational programs and conditions of their implementation. The non-degree education is not regulated by the State; its quality is completely determined by the requirements of the labor market, society, and a student himself. Therefore, considering the continuing education and training, we primarily focus on the non-degree education, and above all, on continuing education for adults.

Of course, the papers presented here are not enough to describe comprehensively the issue of quality assurance in continuing education. They only outline the directions of research in this broad and extremely important area. And of course, we hope for further development of this theme within the International Journal of Quality Research (IJQR).

2. Importance of the theme and its implications for the organizations

There is no doubt that the quality of continuing education and training is quite important for organizations engaged in educational activities. But in the days of economic globalization, development of this

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subject is even more important to enhance cross-border mobility of professionals. The sufficiency of the system of higher education is a thing of the past; processes of interaction between education and the labor market are increasingly active. And all this is reflected in the development of quality models of professional education, when more flexible and adapted to the market the EQAVET structures are superseding the recently popular standards of quality in higher education ENQA.

Development of the e-learning technologies and emergence of a global information space lead to the displacement of traditional forms of education. Webinars, massive open online courses, and other modern technologies in educational process, on the one hand, and replacement of traditional lectures with the training in action (preparation of individual projects, apprenticeship, and etc.) which implies different forms of games – all this provokes radical reconsideration of the concept of quality of education.

And the most important factor of the new model of education quality is an independent assessment and recognition of qualifications by the community of customers (public associations, professional associations). Firstly, this allows reducing the gap between an educational service provider and a consumer of the outcomes of professional education: developed professional and social competences. Secondly, this creates conditions for development of a network interaction between organizations-providers. And thirdly, this gives a person the possibility to build his own educational trajectory and to manage the educational process quality.

Along with development of the educational system model, the educational technologies are also changing; educational organizations are increasing the emphasis on methodical support of educational process and scientific research in the content part of quality management.

Unfortunately, not all educational organizations have noticed a radical change in the external environment and understood the need for a full review of the fast obsolescent models of the education quality assurance. And therefore, the further development and coverage of adult learning and education are of great value and carry significant implications for both the providers of educational services and their customers.

3. Volume's contribution

The papers, prepared by the Russian authors, consider the issues of quality of adult learning and education in all the aspects. They are dedicated to conceptual development and quality assurance of adult learning and education, standardization of non-formal education and learning, specific studies in the area of perception of quality mechanisms in the educational system, and also to scientific development in the field of models and methods of quality assurance. The topics, that became relevant for the quality of education in the light of the new version of the ISO standards, are also covered. These topics are the analysis of external environment and risk management.

All papers in this issue are divided into four groups.

The first group is dedicated to the quality of adult learning and education and includes three papers. The papers of Rudaya (2015) and Aniskina (2015) contribute to review of the current situation in the area of adult learning and education, analyze the approaches to assurance of their quality in the countries of the European Union, and provide conceptual solutions for development of the quality assurance model for formal and non-formal education. The paper of Pankina (2015) puts the emphasis on management of quality of the non-formal education. The authors in this section, based on the analysis of international and Russian practices, propose new system solutions of

the problem taking into account national and sectorial peculiarities.

To promote quality ideas and effective practical use of models, it is very important that the staff of organizations can see the benefits of these for themselves and for the organization as a whole. Therefore, the monitoring and quality assessment are of particular importance in the complex semi-structured systems, among which is the system of adult learning and education. The second group, dedicated to monitoring and assessment of education quality, includes papers that give us insight into how new views of the quality of the adult learning and education are interpreted by the professional community and how the experts perceive the main points and importance of the independent assessment and certification of professional qualifications. The papers, classified in this group, cover the current stage of development of the independent assessment (Breslav, 2015), as well as the results of research of quality assurance systems within universities (Trapitsin *et al.*, 2015; Pugach *et al.*, 2015).

The group "Quality assurance methods and tools" includes papers devoted to the design of management mechanisms for various processes in the framework of adult learning and education. Among them is the information model of formation of the feedback channel within ergatic systems for monitoring the quality of processes of formation of personnel competences (Veshneva *et al.*, 2015) which was developed by the authors to automate weakly formalized process to support managerial decision-making. The second paper of this group (Nazarevich *et al.*, 2015) is dedicated to assessment of results (products) of the scientific activities of educational organizations which are an integral part of the overall process of formation of professional competences in higher education.

This group also includes two papers that present the results of projects, carried out

within educational institutions and aimed at development of integrated management systems. The first one is devoted to the study of integration of management methods with a view to improve the project results (Varshapetian *et al.*, 2015). The second one presents the analysis of implementation peculiarities of an integrated management system in the pharmaceutical industry (Ershova, 2015). The latter paper is related to the theme of this issue because it represents results of the educational project carried out by the author in the framework of the practice-oriented program "Master of business administration" (MBA).

The fourth group "New aspects of quality management in education" contains papers focused on the issues are almost not considered when analyzing problems of quality management of education. In this section, the emphasis put in the new version of the standard ISO 9001:2015 upon importance of the external environment for the quality management, is reviewed through the analysis of quality of authority, including quality of education of officials. Impact of the public policy and how effectively it is being implemented on development of the adult learning and education is very strong in all countries. Therefore, the study of relationships between quality of life, quality of authority, and quality of education is directly related to development of the theme of this issue. Special attention is paid to the theme of risk management which runs all through the standard ISO 9001:2015.

3.1 Quality of adult learning and education

The paper of Rudaya (2015) is the result of extensive research that underlies the development of the concept of continuing adult education in the Russian Federation. It characterizes the quality of continuing adult education in the Russian Federation by results of the review of official statistical information and summarizing the international and Russian studies. The

analysis of the relationship between levels of education and employment, and economic requirements for workers' skills is relevant to development of the unified approaches to the quality assurance in adult learning and education. Comparison of data from the international and Russian sources which reflect the educational statistics, welfare, and quality of life of the population is an important step to promote the European models of quality assurance in continuing education, particularly the EQAVET, at the national level.

The paper of Aniskina (2015) systematizes approaches and models of quality assurance in adult continuing education. On the basis of analysis of the experience of quality assurance of adult continuing education in the European countries, the author offers recommendations regarding applicability of the EQAVET model at the national level in the Russian Federation. Thus, the results of comparative studies of quality ideas perception by the VET providers from Malta, Turkey, Sweden, Italy and Russia are also valuable. They allowed to identify main trends and to formulate proposals for the development of National Quality Guidelines in these countries. This paper proposes an approach and presents a model of quality assurance of adult continuing education, based on this approach, which includes process of formation of competences along with independent assessment of them. It makes a great contribution to extension of the traditional limits of assurance of education quality and inclusion into the sphere of informal education management.

The paper of Pankina (2015) presents features and prospects of practical implementation of the standard ISO 29990:2010 "Learning services for non-formal education and training – Basic requirements for service providers" in the Russian Federation. A systematic and methodologically supported presentation of the universal model of quality of professional practice, general requirements to design, development and delivery of non-

formal education and training are of great importance for providers of educational services in the field of non-formal education and training and their customers. This work solves an important task: allows a customer to select a reliable, competent organization which provides services in the field of non-formal education and allows providers to demonstrate the required level of quality of their services through certification in accordance with the requirements of the international standard.

3.2 Appraisal Activities for Decision Making

The paper of Breslav (2015) presents the results of monitoring of independent assessment and certification of qualifications in the Russian Federation which was conducted by the Pastukhov State Academy of Industrial Management (Yaroslavl, Russia) in the framework of the project of the Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science (Rosobrnadzor). The purpose of the monitoring was to study how public organizations and professional associations realize significance of public recognition of the quality of professional education and assess the need for their participation in this process. The results of the monitoring which revealed that the system of independent quality assessment is in its infancy are of great importance for planning measures for its development. The author reviews the ways to improve the situation and offers recommendations as to bodies for independent assessment and certification of qualifications, so to the other stakeholders, in particular professional associations and authorities in the field of education. The paper considers the development of professional standards and participation of different stakeholders in this process.

The paper of Trapitsin *et al.* (2015) is dedicated to examination of how the staff of a major University percept the quality assurance efforts, realized in the

organization. The authors consider the staff as those who are the most interested in education results. It is emphasized in the paper that the accuracy of determining the objectives of a study and the correctness of questions do matter to the sociological methods of assessment of the staff opinions. The issue to improve reliability of results of the research in the context of high dynamics of changes of external conditions of activity of an educational organization in the period of reforms is being addressed through the selection of recipients who hold a significant pool of knowledge about the subject. The conclusions of the authors of the paper are considerable for all organizations applying sociological methods to assess the quality. The results of the analysis of performance of universities and attitudes toward introduction of an Employee Performance Agreement for teachers, presented in this article, can be applied not only for the current improvements, but also to configure the actual model of quality assurance of continuing education.

In their paper, Pugach *et al.* (2015) examined the problem of independent assessment of quality of higher education. The authors present the results of their project "EQUASP" which is aimed at implementation of the methodology of independent online assessment of the quality of realization of higher education programs in Russian universities. They suggested a model of education quality assessment based on the five internal standards defining needs and objectives, educational process, resources, monitoring and results, and the organization's management system. The results of the comparative analysis of models for quality assessment in higher education applied by Vyatka State University, and models of education quality assessment of the European universities, participating in the project "EQUASP", are useful for educational organizations. The authors have developed and submitted proposals to improve their assessment model of quality education.

3.3 Quality assurance methods and tools

The paper of Veshneva *et al.* (2015) is valuable for those who deal with information models of education quality assurance. The authors have proposed a number of models of management of quality of the process of competence formation including image recognition system, status functions method, testing system, video registration, and photogrammetric methods. The evaluation of competences is carried out during actions, and their interdependence is also reviewed. On the basis of reducing uncertainty, the risk of ineffective management of formation of competences is minimized. The presented models of management of quality of the process of competence formation enable to make management decisions based on facts in accordance with the principles of quality management. The scope of the developed training and educational intelligent information systems is design of information and educational systems, interactive monitoring of educational process, psychophysiological monitoring of state of students, their non-invasive medical express-diagnostics, and other specialized projects. This approach also can be widely used in complex training complexes, anthropomorphic training systems, and in distance learning.

The paper of Nazarevich *et al.* (2015) is devoted to the innovative products which is the result of scientific activity of the educational organization. Qualitative scales for the interpretation of assessment results are developed. Blind spots are compensated by the use of fuzzy sets. The authors apply the integral criterion taking into account the fuzzy membership of a product of a certain form. The numerical values of the integral criterion reflect sufficiency of technical characteristics for definition of the form of new products, and identification of the gap between characteristics of these products and analogues and/or standards. The technique is applicable for assessment of novelty and competitiveness of new and existing

products, as well as for addressing issues of determination of innovative features of the new products.

The paper Varshapetian and Semenova (2015) deals with the possibility of integration of the three most prevalent methods of quality management, namely: **Six Sigma method**, including a complementary method of design for Six Sigma- **DFSS**; Lean Production, which was transformed into the “Lean management” and then into the “Lean thinking”- **LEAN**; and the Theory of Constraints, developed E. Goldratt- **TOC**. The authors consider the possibility to apply these methods in various areas of industrial activity, the positive effects of their integration, and changes in the management structure. The paper contributes to the general theme of this issue in terms of development of content of training of quality specialists.

The paper of Ershova (2015) is dedicated to development of integrated management systems in the galenical pharmaceutical production on the basis of a risk-based approach to process. The author considers the key elements of an integrated management system on the example of a galenical pharmaceutical company and shows how each element is correlated with the requirements of various standards. The paper includes examples of risks at each stage of an enterprise life cycle that meets the requirements of the new version of ISO 9001:2015 in terms of applying the risk-based approach. Along with the research part, the paper contains the information and methodological base that can be useful to teachers, developing a course of integrated management systems.

3.4 New aspects of quality management in education

The paper of Tyurikov (2015) focuses issues which are relevant to development of managerial education – how to achieve a balance between management quality of process and of results. The research,

conducted by the author, revealed a shift in emphasis to the process of realization of management functions, while assessing the quality of authority, and the underestimation of importance of the result-oriented management. This conclusion is of great importance for the development of the system of management training and focuses our attention on the need for deeper and more specific analysis of the external environment when developing a model of quality of continuing education. The contribution of this work is that clarifies the meaning of the new requirements of ISO 9001:2015 to the consideration of the external environment in the system of quality management of continuing professional education.

The paper of Vasilkov and Gushchina (2015) is dedicated to quality of managerial decisions, made on the basis of risk management. The authors substantiate the importance of a risk-oriented thinking for organizations. It concerns providers of the education system both from the point of view of their organization's management processes and the content of training programs for managers in all areas. Recommendations of the authors regarding the risk-based approach methodology and building algorithms for internal risk management will be useful for managers of educational organizations. The general concept of internal risk management for variant ways of emergence of particular threats, presented by the authors, will be useful for organizations with limited resources.

4. Summary

To summarize this Editorial, I would like to say that the topic of quality of adult continuing education is so broad that to cover it completely within the one Issue seems to be impossible. The papers collected here give only a general idea of the problem and provide some specific examples of how specialists in the field of education quality

management apply management models and methods to practice by adapting them to the challenges.

I hope, and would like to, that this Special Issue will be useful to a wide readership and will serve to deepen insight of quality management in adult learning and education. I also hope that the covered issues will incentive further research and the topic of

quality of education will be developed in the pages of IJQR.

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