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Approach to Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Abstract: *Quality assurance in higher education is streamed in two interconnected concepts: (1) quality management according to ISO 9000 and (2) Bologna process.*

In this paper both concepts are presented, with point on internal state and term plan activities for quality improvement in higher education in Serbia.

Keywords: *quality assurance, education*

1. INTRODUCTION

Process of quality improvement includes some of untouched domains. One of them is education, and specially higher education.

Attempts in changing in philosophy of quality in higher education were med at the end of 80s and in the first years of 90s in USA, with general idea to implement principles of total quality in education. During that time a new concept was developed - TQE (Total Quality Education). Review of importance of quality in education and preview of recent work was made on the 6th Forum of Total Quality in 1994. The best illustration is words of Myron Tribus: „Implement or not implement total quality in classrooms“.

Different approach to implementation of quality concept in higher education started in Europe. This process started with Bologna declaration which developed into Bologna process. In the last conference in Bergen (2005.) ministers for higher education defines goals and priorities in European higher education area up to 2010. It was specially emphasized:

- Partnership of all members in Bologna process (institutions, stuff, students, business and social partners and international institutions),
- Evaluation of achievement of defined goals,
- Accreditation system,

- Quality assurance and
- Recognition of diplomas and periods of studies.

The main goal of this paper is quality assurance in higher education, specially principles, present condition, priorities and new challenges.

2. STANDARDS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA

The starting point for standardization in the field of education is declaration from Gratz (July 2003.) from European University Association (EUA) where is stated: „the purpose of European dimension in quality assurance is promotion of mutual trust and improvement of transparency with respect of differences of national contexts and fields). Consistently with this declaration, standards and instructions contained in this report recognize priority of national systems for higher education, importance of institutional autonomy in their national systems, as well as specific demands of different academic subjects.

Standards and instructions in this field converge with study ENQA (European Association for Quality in Higher Education) publicized in March 2005. Additionally they

took „Code of Good Practice“ publicized in December 2004. by European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and other documents of ESIB publicized in 2004.

2.1 European standards and instructions for external quality assurance in higher education

The main goals of this standards is to enable support to higher education institutions in development of own quality assurance system and agencies which perform external quality assurance. They are based on 10 principles:

1. Organizations (providers) of higher education have primary responsibility for achieved quality
2. It is necessary to incorporate interest of society in monitoring and quality assurance
3. Quality of academic programs will be achieved to and for students and other sides with interest in EHEA,
4. It is necessary to provide effective and efficient organization structure,
5. It is important to have transparency and usage of external expertise,
6. It is necessary to encourage the culture of quality in this institutions,
7. Quality assurance for need of calculation of results should be synchronized with other business elements,
8. Institutions should present its quality in their homes and abroad,
9. Used processes should include aspects of diversity and innovations
10. Processes that should be developed, must demonstrate ability of organization, including interest of other for investment from public or private sector.

European instructions and standards for external quality assurance cover:

- Development and usage of internal procedures for quality assurance
- Development of process for external quality assurance
- Definition of criteria for decision making
- Adjustment of processes according

purpose,

- Reporting,
- Procedure of education monitoring,
- Periodical evaluations, and
- Analyses of evaluation results, evaluations and validations.

European instructions and standards for internal quality assurance cover:

- Politics and procedures,
- Improvement, monitoring and periodical evaluation of programs and success,
- Evaluation by students,
- Assurance of quality of teaching stuff,
- Resources for learning and students support,
- Information systems, and
- Public information.

Quality assurance performs by external agencies, and covers:

- Care about national academic studies for higher education,
- Accreditation of programs and/or institutions,
- Protection of users,
- Public assurance of independent-verification and information about programs or institutions, and
- Quality improvement.

Standards, also define framework for work of external agencies such as:

- Public status of external agencies,
- Activities realized by external organizations,
- Resources,
- Deceleration about mission,
- Independence, criteria of external quality assurance and processes which are in domen of agencies,
- Usage of procedures of external quality assurance in higher education domen.
- Procedures for evaluation of effects of external agencies' work.

In connection with work and activities of external organizations, peer review system for quality assurance agencies should be developed.

This system should have:

- International context,
- Cyclic re-evaluation, and
- Registration of agencies in Europe.

With establishment of European consultative forum for quality assurance in higher education/

3. EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND RECOMMENDATION FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The basis for development of these standards and recommendation is declaration of EUA (European University Association) form Graz (2003). In the later period this basis has been richer and has institutional support.

3.1 Politics and procedures for quality assurance

European standards demand that institutions (Universities) have politics and accompanied procedures for quality assurance and standards for foundation of educational programs and awards. It is explicitly demanded to develop quality culture and according to it quality assurance/. In order to achieve these goals, institutions (in QMS terminology: organizations (should develop and implement strategy for continuous quality improvement.

Strategy, politics and procedures should be documented and publicly available. They should incorporate the role of students and other stakeholders.

There are some defined recommendations. Quality declaration, for instance, should contain:

- Connection between education and research,
- Quality strategy and standards,
- Organization of quality system assurance,
- Responsibilities of departments, schools, faculties, and other organizational units and individuals in quality assurance process,
- Incorporation of students, and
- Manner for implementation, monitoring and changing of politics.

3.2 Approving, monitoring and periodical re-evaluation of programs and awards

Standards demand that institution have formal mechanism for approve, periodical re-evaluation and monitoring of programs and awards.

Recommendation for quality assurance of programs and awards cover:

- Development and publication of explicit outputs form training process,
- Consideration of curriculums and design of programs ad contents,
- Specific needs of different users (full time, part time, e-learning) and different types of education (academic, college...)
- Availability of resources for education,
- Formal procedures for approve of program by bodies that are not included in training,
- Monitoring of students' progress,
- Periodical re-evaluation of programs,
- Constant feed-back from employees, representatives from employment market, and other relevant organizations, and
- Incorporation of students in activities of quality assurance.

3.3 Students' evaluation

According to demands from standards students should be evaluated according to publicly available criteria and procedures.

It is recommended that procedures for students' evaluation should be:

- Designed to measure achievement of planned output form learning process and other goals of program,
- Adjustable to its purpose,
- Clear with publicly available criteria,
- Accepted by persons who realize role of evaluation in students' progress,
- Clear in the meaning of possible evaluation regulative,
- Designed to ensure safe and reliable evaluation,
- Designed to ensure administrative verification of procedures.

3.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff

According to standard demands institutions should develop system for assurance that persons included in students' education must have qualification and competencies for that job.

It is recommended development of procedures for evaluation of teachers and their competencies, possibilities for development and increase of capacities for training and encouragement for improvement of their personal skills. These procedures should cover corrective actions, including end of employment status.

3.5 Resources for training and students' support

According to standards' demands, institutions have to have all resources for education support for students for educative and appropriate programs.

Resources for training and specially the mechanism that support work of students (libraries, sports objects...) are defined in recommendations.

3.6 Information system

Standards demand from institution to collect, analyze and use relevant information for effective management of performances, study programs and other activities.

Available knowledge in institutions is starting point for effective quality assurance. There is recommendation of implementation of information systems for quality issues. This information system should cover:

- Students' progress and success of studies,
- Employment of graduates,
- Students' satisfaction of study programs,
- Effectiveness of teachers,
- Profile of population of students,
- Available resources for training and expenses of their employment,
- Key indicators of performance of institution.

3.7 Public information

Standards demand for institution constant actualization of objective information, qualitative and quantitative, about programs and results.

Recommendations refer to responsibilities and procedure for assurance of public information.

According to good practice, quality assurance in higher education in the Great Britain is divided in 10 fields:

1. Postgraduate studies and researches,
2. Mutual approach,
3. Students,
4. External research,
5. Students' complaints,
6. Students' evaluation,
7. Approving, monitoring and re-evaluation of programs,
8. Education, information and recommendation,
9. Training for work,
10. Apply for and quit.

Maintenance of academic standards and quality in higher education is connected with activities presented on the figure 1.

Each process presented on the figure 1 consists of large number of sub processes and relation inside processes and with other processes.

So it is not surprising that total mark of quality in higher education is very low.

4. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Working out and introducing of the internal system of quality assurance requires appropriate strategy. The strategy includes the following of actions:

- Obtaining the approval and support of the authority of the universities and community
- Appointing a few people Task Force for efficient action
- Gathering knowledge about the system of educational quality assurance system in country and abroad

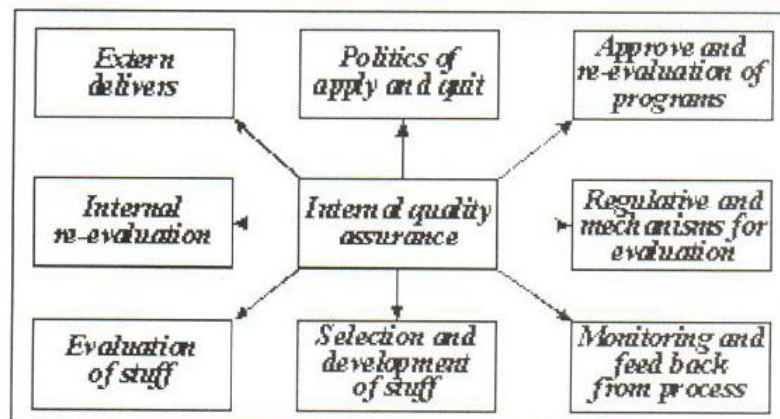


Figure 1 - Connection between internal quality assurance and field of good practice in the Great Britain

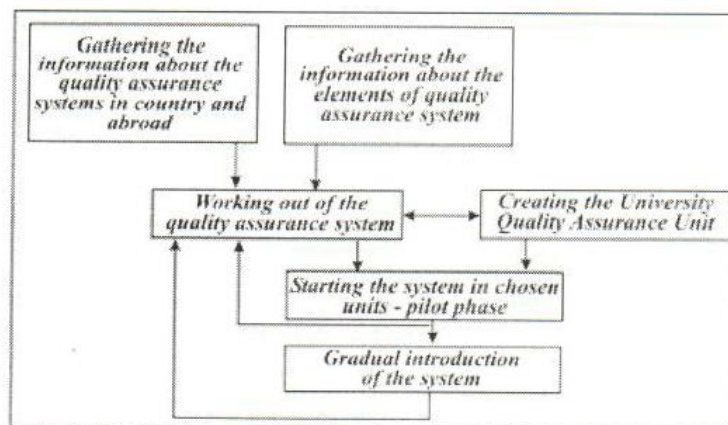


Figure 2. Introducing of the quality of education assurance system

- Gathering knowledge about elements of quality assurance system existing at the universities and titts units,
- Working out of the quality assurance procedure and the criteria for their assessment
- Verification of the system – pilot stage of the system initiating
- Gradual introducing of the system at the universities.

The process of preparation and gradual introducing of quality assurance system has been illustrated in Figure 2.

5. ACTIVITY PLAN IN IMPLEMENTATION OF QA IN SERBIA

Based on analysis of needs, phases for implementation of QA in Serbia are defined (figure 3):

1. Development of institutional frame in Republic of Serbia,
2. Planning of QA on Universities,
3. Design of QA on Universities,
4. Implementation of QA on Universities,
5. Internal evaluation,
6. Extern evaluation, accreditation, certification ,
7. Benchmarking, monitoring and improvement.

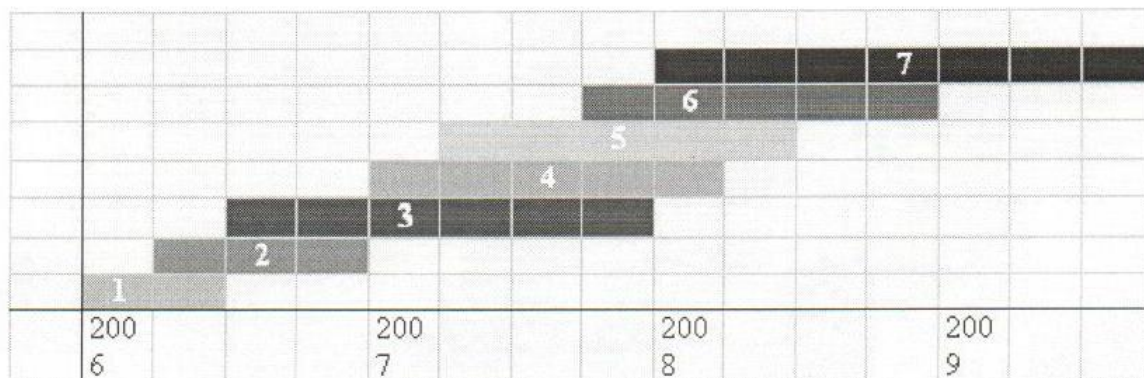


Figure 3. Phases of implementation of QA in Serbia

1. Development of institutional frame in Republic of Serbia

- Analysis of regulation in higher education system in Serbia
- Selection of models and making decisions,
- Development of institutions for internal and extern quality assurance
- Beginning of work of institution for QA
- Incorporation in European network of institution for QA

2. Planning of QA on Universities

- Making initial decisions
- Definition of domen of accreditation and certification
- Definition of project organization,
- Foundation of working teams and definition of roles and responsibilities
- Training of working teams
- Decision about inclusion of extern experts and consultant organizations.

3. Design of QA on Universities

- Analysis of present condition
- Definition of politics and quality strategy
- Development of documentation of quality system
- Adoption of documentation of quality system

4. Implementation of QA on Universities

- Implementation of QA documentation
- Adjustment of QA after implementation of QA documentation

- Determination of efficiency and effective of QA
- Improvement of QA

5. Internal evaluation

- Approve, monitoring and periodical evaluation of study programs and success factors,
- Evaluation of teaching stuff,
- Evaluation of resources,
- Evaluation of information, and
- Evaluation by students.

6. CONCLUSION

In estimation of improvement up to 2007, it will be special evaluated progress in:

- Translation of standards and recommendations for quality assurance,
- Translation of national frameworks for qualification,
- Delegation and approve of mutual studies, including PhD level,
- Development of precondition for flexible education forms, including procedures for inclusion of previous education.

Signing Bologna declaration Serbia has to implement quality standards in domen of higher education and to improve processes that exist in higher education in order to become integral part of European education area.

European funds and projects (Tempus, Socrates) support knowledge transfer and information important for more efficient reform

of higher education (ECTS system, QA, usage of new methods, techniques and tools, mobility of teachers and students etc.). Department for education and sport is coordinator of Tempus Project „Implementation of National Team of Bologna Promoters” with basic task to promote principles of Bologna process and support Universities in Serbia in definition of strategy

and action plan form implementation of Bologna process.

The basic conclusion of this paper is that Serbia needs long period for successful integration in European education area. This long period we can make shorter by mutual employment of responsible person for field of HE and experts in the field of quality.

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