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Self-Assessment Report as the Basic Instrument of External and Internal Procedures for Higher Education Quality Assurance

Keywords: accreditation, quality assurance system, educational activities, study programs, self-assessment report, self-assessment form

Abstract. In 2019 the new accreditation procedure of higher education study programs had been adopted in Ukraine. The academic community was able to get acquainted with the basic principles of the higher education quality assurance system through the experience gained by higher education institutions and the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance experts in the process of the new procedure implementation. One of the basic instruments for higher education quality assurance, which is of crucial importance in the nowadays accreditation procedure, is the study programs self-assessment report (self-assessment form). The experience of accreditation during the 2019–20 academic year has shown that higher education institutions can successfully employ this instrument for accreditation only if it is a part of the internal higher education quality assurance system.

Sprawozdanie z samooceny jako podstawowy instrument zewnętrznych i wewnętrznych procedur zapewniania jakości w szkolnictwie wyższym

Słowa kluczowe: akredytacja, system zapewniania jakości, działania edukacyjne, programy studiów, raport samooceny, formularz samooceny

Streszczenie. W 2019 r. na Ukrainie została przyjęta nowa procedura akredytacji programów studiów wyższych. Środowisko akademickie mogło zapoznać się z podstawowymi zasadami systemu zapewniania jakości szkolnictwa wyższego poprzez doświadczenie zdobyte przez uczelnie oraz ekspertów Państwowej Agencji ds. Zapewnienia Jakości Szkolnictwa Wyższego w procesie wdrażania nowej procedury. Jednym z podstawowych instrumentów zapewniania jakości szkolnictwa wyższego, który ma kluczowe znaczenie w dzisiejszej procedurze akredytacji, jest raport samooceny programów studiów (formularz samooceny). Doświadczenia związane z akredytacją w roku akademickim 2019–2020 pokazują, że uczelnie mogą z powodzeniem stosować ten instrument do akredytacji tylko wtedy, gdy jest on częścią wewnętrznego systemu zapewniania jakości szkolnictwa wyższego.

Social accountability and enhancement are the two main goals that form the basis of quality assurance activities. The creation of trust in a higher education institution's performance itself depends on the degree of achievement of these main goals of the higher education quality assurance system. A successfully implemented

quality assurance system will provide information to assure the higher education institution and the public of the quality of the higher education institution's activities (accountability) as well as provide advice and recommendations on how it might improve its performance (enhancement)¹.

Improving quality in a higher education institution is a very complex process of creating and applying appropriate instruments that affect the entire quality management system. Internal and external quality assessment stimulate the system's development². A harmonious integration of both proves to be the most effective. Theoretical foundation as well as the most effective practices of the integration are given in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (hereinafter ESG-2015). These standards are considered to be key directions for the countries, higher education quality assurance agencies, and higher education institutions that improve and perfect their higher education quality assurance systems. The following standards of the aforementioned document are of particular importance for the purposes of this article: "2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance", "2.3 Implementing processes", "1.7 Information management".

The standard "Consideration of internal quality assurance" defines the necessity to take into consideration the processes and criteria established for the external quality assurance system while dealing with the internal quality assurance system.

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently, and published. These processes include a self-assessment or its equivalent ("Implementing processes" standard). Depending on the design of the external quality assurance system, the institution provides the basis for the external quality assurance through a self-assessment or by collecting other material including supporting evidence³.

An essential prerequisite of effective management is the quality and completeness of the information that is the basis for strengths and weaknesses identification and decision-making. Here, the principle guidelines are outlined in the standard "Information management", which defines the requirements for the effective data collection processes on study programs and other activities as well as to the analysis and presentation of the information to the stakeholders. Another integral part of the quality assurance system is a university performance self-assessment, in particular assessment of educational activity outcomes, strategic planning, and

¹ Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), K.: Ltd "Poligraph plus", 2015, pp. 5-7.

² Локальні системи управління якістю: світовий досвід та українські практики побудови, За ред. Т.В.Фінікова, В.І. Терещука, К.: Таксон, 2018, 316 с.

³ Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance..., pp. 17-19.

monitoring. A self-assessment report is one of the key instruments of the self-assessment procedure.

In sustainable higher education quality assurance systems, a self-assessment report is defined as an instrument of self-analysis that covers institution's study programs, a higher education quality assurance system assessment, and educational activities quality assessment. A self-assessment report assists in the identification of weaknesses in the programs or a system as a whole and elaboration methods to address them. Withal, an external higher education quality assurance system recognizes a self-assessment report as the fundamental document formed by an institution for external assessment purposes, including accreditation. At the same time, the report provides data on a higher education quality assurance system and study programs quality in particular.

The analysis of Ukrainian higher education development throughout history shows that self-assessment reports are not brand-new novelties for the higher education institutions. The Article 9 of the "Regulations on accreditation of higher education institutions and specialties in higher education institutions and higher vocational schools" (of 2001) points out that higher education institutions claiming accreditation of the field of study/specialty have to submit a report on its activity within the field of study/specialty under accreditation to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. The report has to confirm the compliance of personnel, educational-methodical, material-technical and information support with the licensing conditions for the educational services in the field of higher education provision, as well as the compliance of the qualitative characteristics of the training of specialists with the state requirements. The report includes the commentaries (instructions) of the supervising bodies regarding license conditions; information on legal and physical entities complaints concerning the educational activity of an educational institution in the field of study /specialty under accreditation for the period of training (retraining) of specialists; measures to address the listed issues and information on the implementation of such measures; a description of the internal educational activities quality assurance system⁴.

Thus, the report included a large number of various materials to provide information on a higher education institution's internal regulatory framework, certificates of compliance with many regulatory documents, and a large number of statistical documentations.

Also, an institution claiming accreditation on a certain level had to submit to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, among other documents, a re-

⁴ Положення «Про акредитацію вищих навчальних закладів і спеціальностей у вищих навчальних закладах та вищих професійних училищах» [Електронний ресурс]. Режим доступу: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/978-2001-%D0%BF> [access: 24.05.2020]

port on an educational institution educational and scientific activity results considered by the academic council, and sealed by the educational institution. The report included the following:

- general information on the higher education institution;
- general information on the personnel and material-technical support;
- a list of fields of study/specialties the institution provides training (retraining), and their levels of accreditation;
- general number of students, their distribution by fields of study, specialties and forms of education;
- postgraduate and doctoral studies activity results for the last 5 years (relevant for the educational institutions of the IV accreditation level);
- information on the international relations with educational institutions and organizations;
- information on textbooks and study guides publications (drafting for publication) for the last 5 years.

Despite the similarity of some of these requirements to the self-assessment reports headings of European agencies, there is a key difference. These requirements are focused more on the formal reporting to external supervising organizations, but not on the self-analysis and identification of underlying strengths and weaknesses. In fact, these documents have much in common with the “evidence base” that appears in European and American agencies guidelines. There is a clear insufficiency of study programs strengths and weaknesses analysis and their further development references. The higher education institutions attempting to undergo education programs accreditation in European and American agencies have experienced this insufficiency firsthand.

Before the Law of Ukraine “On Higher Education” approved the study programs accreditation procedure and institutional accreditation requirements the accreditation had been carried out by the central executive body in the field of education and science following the procedure for accreditation of specialties and institutions

The adoption of the Law of Ukraine “On Education”⁵ and the Law of Ukraine “On Higher Education”⁶ changed the situation. These Laws define the key role of the study programs accreditation and institutional accreditation among the main functions of the external quality assurance system:

⁵ Закон України “Про освіту” від 5.09.2017 № 2145-VIII [Електронний ресурс]. Режим доступу: <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2145-19> [access: 24.05.2020].

⁶ Закон України “Про вищу освіту” від 1.07.2014 року № 1556-VII [Електронний ресурс]. Режим доступу: <http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1556-18> [access: 24.05.2020].

- a study program accreditation is an assessment of a study program and/or higher education institution educational activity under this program targeted to secure and improve higher education quality⁷;
- an institutional accreditation is an assessment of a higher education institution's educational activities quality⁸.

A higher education institution claiming to undergo a study program accreditation and/or institutional accreditation shall submit a written application and documents confirming compliance of its study program and educational activities under such program with the requirements and established criteria (for study programs accreditation) and/or compliance of its internal quality assurance system with the requirements for the higher education quality assurance system (for institutional accreditation) to the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education of Ukraine⁹.

The Laws regulate key stages of the accreditation procedure and define an independent body responsible for its realization, viz. the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education of Ukraine. The Provision “On the accreditation of study programs for the training of applicants for higher education”¹⁰ (hereinafter the Provision) is the latest elaborated document. It includes requirements for the information on a study program and an educational activity presented by the higher education institution as well as their assessment criteria.

During the 2019-20 academic year, the Provision had been tested in the majority of the higher education institutions of Ukraine and was used for accreditation of more than 500 educational programs. The Provision defines that “a study program accreditation is an assessment of a study program quality and higher education institution educational activity under this program targeted to determine compliance with the higher education standard, ability to meet the requirements of the standard, as well as the achievement of the learning outcomes stated in the program in line with the study program quality assessment criteria”¹¹.

It should be mentioned, that the definition of a “study programs accreditation” in the latest version of the Law of Ukraine “On Higher Education”, in contrast to the definition in the Provision, emphasize securing and improving the higher

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ Закон України “Про освіту” від 5.09.2017 № 2145-VIII...

⁹ Закон України “Про вищу освіту” від 01.07.2014 року № 1556-VII...

¹⁰ Положення «Про акредитацію освітніх програм, за якими здійснюється підготовка здобувачів вищої освіти» [Електронний ресурс]. Режим доступу: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0880-19#Text> [access: 24.05.2020].

¹¹ Положення «Про акредитацію освітніх програм, за якими здійснюється підготовка здобувачів вищої освіти» [Електронний ресурс]. Режим доступу: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0880-19#Text> [access: 24.05.2020].

education quality, and the issue of compliance with the standard is considered to be the part of an “education quality” notion.

The goals of accreditation are 1) to establish compliance of the study program quality and educational activities under this program with determined criteria; 2) to assist to higher education institutions in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of a study program and educational activities under this program; 3) to provide all stakeholders with the information on the quality of a study program and educational activities under the program; 4) to strengthen trust in higher education in Ukraine; 5) to promote the integration of Ukrainian higher education institutions into the European Higher Education Area.

One of the key documents that are submitted by a higher education institution claiming to undergo study program accreditation is a study program self-assessment report and documents confirming the provided information (evidences). A self-assessment report is prepared in line with the defined criteria. A form of the report is approved by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education of Ukraine and is published on the official website¹². The form of a study program self-assessment report contains a list of obligatory documents that are to be submitted to confirm the provided information.

A mandatory condition for accreditation is the compliance of the higher education institution study program and educational activities under this program with the defined criteria, that are applied following the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The latter characterizes the higher education institution education policy, study program conclusion and editing procedures, approaches to methodological and personnel support, meeting the needs of higher education applicants and other stakeholders, as well as transparency and publicity of higher education institutions, etc. Approved criteria are applied by the higher education institution in the process of self-assessment report preparation as well as by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education of Ukraine and its sectoral expert councils and expert groups during accreditation under the methodological recommendations approved by the National Agency itself.

Thus, the new self-assessment report is the result of internal analysis and contains an assessment of individual activity under the pre-defined criteria. One of the self-assessment report preparation results is expected to be independent identification of study program weaknesses, consideration of measures to address them, and generation of measures to the study program enhancement and improvement by a higher education institution. Provided for the re-accreditation, the report has

¹² Форма відомостей про самооцінювання...

to account for the dynamics of indicators' changes to prove program goals and accreditation criteria fulfillment.

Thus, it is possible to observe a shift in the requirements to the content of the report on a study program implementation. This is in line with a change of the accreditation process goals, whereas the accreditation process is also expected to provide objective and unbiased information on a particular study program quality, as well as to assist to a higher education institution in identifying a study program weaknesses and elaborate measures to address them¹³.

Despite some formal similarities of separate headings, the self-assessment report content differs significantly from the documents that higher education institutions used to submit. The report has to contain sufficient data for criteria compliance assessment, as well as the report's preparation process itself is required to utilize the following self-assessment instruments:

- employers survey;
- comparison of study programs content with the similar study programs of national and foreign higher education institution;
- study program assessment with the graduate's participation;
- students survey on education process and separate educational components satisfaction;
- expert assessment by the practicing professionals¹⁴.

It is possible to conclude that a self-assessment report preparation process allows to take advantage of the internal quality management system and self-analysis to attract relevant stakeholders and to define possible directions of a study program improvement and further development. Higher education institutions should consider the accreditation process itself as the quality development project, not as the solely bureaucratic external inspection procedure.

Thus, the self-assessment report preparation has become both a prerequisite for successful study programs or institutional accreditation and an important instrument for internal higher education quality assurance.

Conclusions. During the existence of the independent higher education system in Ukraine, the set of reporting documentation that accompanied accreditation processes has evolved from a formal information statistical report to an analytical study with a multi-criteria holistic assessment of the effectiveness of study programs and a higher education institution as the whole. The experience of the

¹³ Акредитація освітніх програм (за матеріалами проекту QUAERE): методичний посібник, В.А.Бугров, А.П. Гожик, Д.В. Щеглюк та ін.; за заг. ред. Л.В.Губерського, К.: ВПЦ «Київський університет», 2018, 74 с.

¹⁴ Впровадження локальних систем управління якістю в українських університетах: Аналітичний звіт, За заг. ред. Т.В. Фінікова, В.І. Терещука, Міжнарод. благод. Фонд «Міжнародний фонд досліджень освітньої політики», К.: Таксон, 2018, 88 с.

first year of the study programs accreditation under new guidelines showed that it has encouraged higher education institutions to develop internal quality assurance systems and to introduce a self-assessment report as an instrument for recurrent study programs monitoring and decision-making. There is no doubt, that the higher education institutions that will recognize self-assessment as a mandatory component of the educational policy implementation and the internal education quality assurance system will successfully accredit their study programs and gain the right to institutional accreditation at the earliest opportunity.

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