

Integration of the Study Programmes' Quality Assurance to the Internal Quality Management System in Russian Universities

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Abstract — The paper describes the progress in the implementation of the international Tempus-project EQUASP “On-line Quality Assurance of Study Programmes” (543727-TEMPUS-I-2013-1-IT-TEMPUS-SMGR). Some problems of soft integration of elements of the European system of quality assurance with the Russian quality management system in higher education are clarified; possible ways of overcoming of determined barriers are discussed.

Keywords—*quality assurance; Tempus-project; study programmes; higher education; quality management system.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The problem of the development of up-to-date unified system for quality assurance of study programmes of higher education is very urgent for universities of the Russian Federation [1-2]. There is the main principle of the modernization of the national higher educational system announced by the Russian Government consisting in the correspondence of the reforms to the Bologna process. It is known that one of the issues of the Bologna process is the movement towards the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). One of the tasks of the process is to promote the cooperation of countries in providing of expected quality of education by creation of compatible criteria and methodologies. The actuality of the problem is confirmed by the interest of the European Commission to the subject: the fact is that the 3-years TEMPUS project was started in 2014 devoted to On-line Quality Assurance of Study Programmes (EQUASP).

II. EQUASP-PROJECT – GENERAL DESCRIPTION

International Tempus project EQUASP now moved its median line. The project devoted to the development of a system of on-line study programmes' (SPs) quality assurance (QA) aims to the definition and adoption of an internal QA system of study programmes in the Russian Federation. Advanced system should correspond to the ESG “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education” [3] and must be compatible with the online documentation and monitoring system of QA.

Introduction of quality assurance is one of the national priorities declared by the European Commission for the Russian Federation for participation in Tempus programme. In

accordance with the priority the project EQUASP supposes to solve of the following tasks:

- Adoption of the national accreditation system in correspondence with the ESG;
- Improvement of quality, transparency, and comparability of study programmes;
- Promotion of modernization of higher education through the introduction of the on-line documentation and monitoring.

The consortium of the EQUASP project consists of universities and public organizations from Italy, Spain, Slovakia, Lithuania, and Russia. Consortium includes 10 universities from different regions of Russia (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Tambov, Rostov-on-Don, Tomsk, Astrakhan, Ekaterinburg, Volgograd, and Kirov). Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation (MESRF) and the Association of Engineering Education of the Russian Federation (AEER) are also the members of project's consortium.

EQUASP project declares as its wider objective [4]: “To promote the improvement of the quality of technological SPs through the adoption of internal QA systems focused on the definition of learning outcomes and the definition and implementation of an online documentation and monitoring system of the quality of SPs consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)” The project has the following specific objectives:

- “To promote the design of student-centered technological study programmes focused on the definition of learning outcomes consistent with the needs of the interested parties.
- To bring the internal Quality Assurance process of study programmes in the RF into line with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for QA.
- To enhance quality of study programmes in the RF and to increase their transparency and comparability, in order to allow all the interested parties to formulate an informed assessment of the educational process offered by study programmes and to enhance mutual trust in the quality of study programmes.

- To promote modernization of higher education through an on-line documentation and monitoring system of study programmes' quality.
- To obtain recognition by the competent national authorities of the internal QA system and of the on-line documentation and monitoring system as adequate systems for the QA of study programmes, in order to guarantee their dissemination among all the universities of the RF and their sustainability”.

III. PROBLEM OF HARMONISATION OF THE EQUASP APPROACH WITH THE SPECIFICS OF THE RUSSIAN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Achievements of the project's objectives, their introduction and dissemination are expected to have a number of significant results important as for each partner university and for the Russian higher educational system as a whole:

- Promotion the design of student-centered study programmes, focused on the definition of learning outcomes consistent with the needs of the interested parties,
- Contribution to the enhancement of quality of study programmes and to increase their transparency and comparability.
- Development of complete, updated, easily available documentation consistent with national and international requirements.

During the initial period of implementation of EQUASP project it became clear that for harmonization of developing documentation and methodology and for their integration to the internal quality management system in Russian universities it is necessary to take into account some specifics of traditions of the Russian higher education system: declared goals of education, the roles of interested parties (“stakeholders”), etc., distinguishing it of the European system.

The main principal declared in the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation” [5] consists in the strong correlation of quality of study programmes with the requirements of Federal State Educational Standards (FSES). So introduction of advanced quality assurance documents and methodology into Russian universities should foresee their strict compliance with the FSES [6]. The next step of project's implementation consists in clarification of obstacles for soft integration of elements of the European system of quality assurance with the Russian quality management system in higher education, and in determination of ways out of the clarified barriers.

Till the moment the basic documents for EQUASP QA-system were developed:

- “EQUASP Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Study Programmes” (S&G),
- “EQUASP Glossary of Terms”,
- “EQUASP Questionnaires for the monitoring of the perceived quality of study programmes” for different

target groups (students, graduates, employed graduates and employers).

These documents were designed by the academic coordinators of the project in Genoa University (Italy) in coherence with the ISO 9000. The documents use the Tuning approach [7] to the design of study programmes, the standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance in the EHEA. S&G document contains Annexes determining attributes of correspondence to ESG, EUR-ACE Guidelines for Programme Assessment and Programme Accreditation [3], Federal State Educational Standards (FSES), AEER Accreditation Criteria [8]. Working out the documents is conducted in close cooperation of all the consortium members including Russian representatives; workshops of the developers give the possibility of discussion and feedback analyses.

Preliminary analysis of correspondence of the FSES of the Russian Federation to the Tuning regulating documents has shown that not all the terms and process descriptions are the same in the standard documents and in the Russian educational regulations. First of all, it appears in the structure of FSES that has insufficient structuredness of professional competences and has no unified general cultural competences announced for different study programmes. The main disparities of the basic EQUASP documents and of the realities of Russian universities were brought to light during the development process:

- Contradictions between definitions “learning outcomes” in S&G and “competences” in FSES;
- Criteria and procedure of students admission;
- Assessment tests procedure and monitoring of educational process;
- Traditional role of Dean's offices and chairs in specification of study programmes and curriculum in Russian universities, selection of lecturers and teachers, etc.

Another problem consists in terminology disagreements against the Tuning glossary. For example, “specific competences” to a field of study in FSES defined as “professional competences”; “generic competences” in Tuning terminology appears as “general cultural competences” in FSES. Such disagreements deepened at the translating process from English into Russian. That is why the necessity of careful translation of EQUASP standard documents is obvious; for each EQUASP term a precise Russian equivalent should be selected and agreed by professional and pedagogical community.

IV. EMBEDDING OF THE EQUASP QA SYSTEM INTO THE INTERNAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN MADI

Discussion on the topic of integration of EQUASP QA-system in the existing quality management system (QMS) of the University took place in MADI in the framework of the workshop in May 2015 with participation of the Vice-rector on Educational Activity, Heads of the Educational-Methodical Direction and of the Department of Quality of Education, representatives of EQUASP working group, and staff members

of universities' chairs. Some internal regulatory documents on quality management system for organization of study process were presented. It was especially mentioned that integration process of EQUASP QA-system of study programmes should respect the regulating document of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation No 1376 of 19 December 2013 "On Approval of the Procedure of Organization and Realization of Educational Activity on Study Programmes of Higher Education" [9]. Methodical recommendations of the MESRF [10] indicate the following main requirements to the development of basic professional educational programmes of higher education (study programmes):

- Taking into account demands of professional standards during actualization of study programmes, forming of programmes' structure and contents;
- Determination of forms of professional activities;
- Forming of learning outcomes with a glance of professional standards;
- Expertise of study programmes by stakeholders, students and scientific-pedagogical staff.

So one of the urgent tasks in the integration of advanced QA-system consists in the necessity to foresee the alignment of study programmes for different qualifications with forms of professional activity. Another necessary point is to stay within the regulations indicated in FSES on personnel requirements necessary for realization of study programmes.

The following scheme is suggested for embedding of the EQUASP QA-system into the existing structure of QMS in MADI (Fig. 1). Matrix of responsibility distributes personal duties among persons involved.

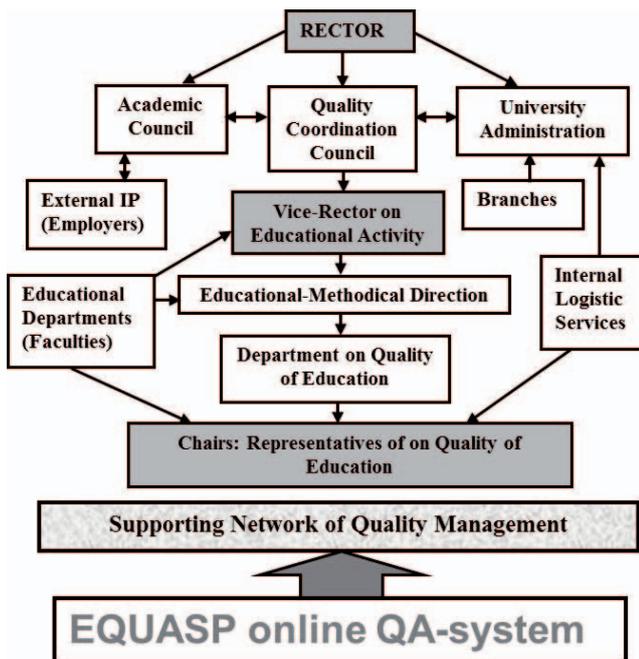


Fig. 1. Scheme of the embedding of the EQUASP QA-system into the existing QMS of MADI.

Vice-rector on Educational Activity is the representative on QMS of university's top-management; he is responsible for development, supporting and improvement of QMS. Quality Coordination Council coordinates the activity on QMS operation, makes general decisions. Department on Quality of Education (DCE) implements day-to-day activity on QMS operation, documentation, monitoring; it interacts with university's departments and chairs. Each chair has representatives on quality; they act in coordination with DCE in realization of internal tasks and inform teaching staff of the chair. According to this approach EQUASP QA-system is supposed to become a part of supporting network of QMS.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the results of our study makes it possible to define ways of overcoming of discovered disagreements and disparities for harmonization of the EQUASP documentations for their integration in Russian universities. Some of measures can be activated in the framework of the project. For example, definition and activation of translating procedure for accessibility of developed documents for management staff in Russian universities, clarification of the mechanisms of embedding of EQUASP system into the quality management boards of universities, up-skilling of teaching and management staff, activation of feedback in universities. Representatives of Russian Ministry of Education and Science are involved in the project development. So we can expect the following steps at the governmental level: actualization of FSES according to the main regularities of ESG and creation of the system of active interaction with stakeholders (and first of all, with employers) in upgrading of study programmes.

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