

New Education Legislative Act as Development Vector of Public-Professional Accreditation in Russia

National Center of Public-Professional Accreditation
V.G. Navodnov, G.N. Motova

Key words: public accreditation, International accreditation, Joint accreditation, an expert organization, an accreditation agency, register of the accreditation agencies.

Due to the adoption of new Federal Law “On Education in RF”, public-professional accreditation is becoming urgent issue in contemporary education system. The article examines the concepts of public-professional accreditation, international accreditation and joint accreditation. Based on the legislation system, expert organizations and accreditation agencies are classified according to their objectives and activity areas. The ways to develop accreditation network and register of organizations involved in higher education quality assurance have been proposed.

The concept and procedure of governmental accreditation for exclusively all education institutions were introduced into the Russian legislation in 1992 [1]. The following TRIAD: state education standard – governmental accreditation – state diploma (or other state-recognized document) was entrenched into the law. However, during the last two decades, this “rock-solid” triad was gradually crumbling down: brick-by-brick and the new law “Education in the Russian Federation” prescribes new variants.

At present accreditation status within governmental accreditation will not be assigned to higher education institutions, in general (including education institutions) but, now, this

accreditation will be assigned relevant to each level and integrated speciality group and/or degree program. In this case, this document of education will not be necessarily governmental [2 (Article 60, §4)]. Federal state standards will be specified for basic education programs which include higher education programs – bachelor’s degree, specialist’s degree, master’s degree and post-graduate programs (graduate military, clinical studies).

The Legislation of 1992 legalized the right of higher education institutions to pass public-professional accreditation, but, in this case, excluded the legal rights and obligations of a state accreditation. State accreditation became an obligatory procedure, while public accreditation – permissible.



V.G. Navodnov



G.N. Motova

In accordance with the Russian Legislation of 2012, information of state and/or public-professional accreditation is officially submitted to the state accreditation agency and is liable to be considered in the case of state accreditation of education institutions. From the viewpoint of legal language (“de rigore juris”) this or that education institution should submit the results of public-professional accreditation to state accreditation agency, which, in its turn, should consider all presented material. Posing such a question, it indicates those changes in the state education policy, concerning quality assurance in education itself.

Interested communities, from top public officials to employers, are more and more considering the development of public-professional accreditation. The reason is very simple – for the past 20 years there has been a significant education boom: the number of the education institutions has increased twice, while the number of students and education programs-threefold. Education itself has become more accessible and highly in-demand. All in all, this prompted such negative aspects as the upspring of malinstitutions, implementation of low-quality education programs, non-competitiveness and non-demand of such graduates. Top public officials highlighted quality of education programs in juridical and economic specialties, as well as, in management and sociology [3,4].

Another important fact is that enrollees, employers and academic communities, all of whom, require unbiased information concerning the quality of this or that education program, but not of the university in general. To a greater or lesser extent, public-professional accreditation is focused on the detailed examination and evaluation of the program, through expert commentaries, instead of simple normative standard analysis of faculty qualification, computer resources,

library resources and courseware, lab areas, etc.

Innovation development strategy in Russia up to 2012 (Government Executive Order RF-N^o 2227-p was enacted from December 8, 2011) involved the need in developing an innovative economy, which, in its turn, requires the advanced development of the education system and significant improvement of quality assurance in education .

The updated Federal law “Education in the Russian Federation”, enforced from September 1, 2013 and the State program “Education Development” for 2013–2020 recognize the social significance of public-professional structure development for quality assurance in education. Executive authorities are interested in obtaining autonomous evaluation and quality assurance in education from public organizations and professional societies. The task: “The development of a system of evaluation and quality assurance in education and demand of education services” involves not only the solution of this task, but also the generation of such conditions to further the state and public evaluation of education institutions and public-professional accreditation of education programs.

Nowadays, public-professional accreditation is conducted through those organizations established by public and/or professional associations and societies. Such accreditation is more significant in enhancing the prestige of education programs and education institutions than those of state accreditation as public-professional accreditation involve a higher level of quality requirements to education. Such high – level standards, however, do not pursue retributive (supervisory and monitoring) purposes. The mission of the organization conducting public-professional accreditation embraces support services, identification of further development prospects of this/that education institution and stating the

possible opportunities in improving the education potential.

The growing number of universities and their education programs submitted to public-professional accreditation agencies is evidence of the reliable support policy for higher education institutions. Although such public evaluation of education programs entails no government financing or additional rights and privileges, it promotes the attractiveness of these institutions for enrollees and employer demand of future graduates.

Public-professional accreditation does not duplicate the procedures and standards of state accreditation, as professional and public associations are justified to develop its own standards in evaluating education programs. Today Russian accreditation agencies use European standards of education (engineering) program evaluation, and in some cases-American standards. This can be explained by the following facts; (1) Russia has become a participant of integrated education processes in the harmonization of the higher education structure; (2) Russia is applying unified principles in the organization of the teaching process and (3) Russia is applying common European standards for quality assurance in education [5].

Russian legislation promotes the possibility to obtain public accreditation in foreign and international organizations. Moreover, one of the top priority areas in the development of domestic higher education organizations, especially federal and national research universities, is their global ranking, as well as, the public accreditation of education programs.

"International" accreditation registration does not imply that it will be acknowledged in all countries abroad. However, in the case, if an international accreditation agency is accredited by other international association agencies for quality assurance in education, the recognition

of such an organization is of high prestige for any university and certifies the relevance of the quality of education programs to high international standards.

Thus, such an organization is European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) for European countries, including Russia as a member of Bologna process. European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) maintains the information of certified agencies in Europe. There are no public accreditation agencies in Russia which are included in the above-mentioned Register.

Without doubt, the concept "international accreditation" is nominal as this embraces only the accreditation of particular programs in Russian universities by one of the international accreditation agencies. That is, any agency in any country is not compelled to acknowledge the results of this or that accreditation.

Registration of accredited education programs in recognized international accreditation agencies is not only prestigious for a university, but also is often necessary, especially, in the case of university collaboration with international education institutions; as well as, the implementation of joint diploma programs which are recognized in both countries – Russia and university partners.

Implementation of networking education programs, including joint programs with foreign education institutions were legislated in the updated law [2 (Article 15, §1)] and the issue of accreditation of such networking joint programs is becoming urgent. Such programs are accredited in collaboration with Russian and foreign accreditation agencies in accordance with standards and unified commission of Russian and foreign experts. Joint accreditation reduces the number of accreditation procedures and excludes nostrification of such university degrees.

Nowadays, joint accreditation of education programs generates interest and relevance for European universities, where more and more joint programs are being implemented. These education programs are developed and implemented by 2 or even 3 universities of different countries within the framework of international projects and/or interuniversity agreements. Completing such programs the graduates receive joint diplomas which are recognized in 2-3 European countries without further nostrification of such university degrees.

At present only “double-degree” programs are being implemented in Russia, which, in its turn, means that a graduate simultaneously receives two diplomas: Russian diploma and diploma of university-partner. At the same time, however, one and the same program being implemented in two different universities should be accredited in accordance with the standard requirements of each country. However, state accreditation is obligatory for Russian education institutions.

Joint accreditation is possible only in the case of interaction between international accreditation agency and public accreditation agency within Russia. State accreditation cannot be carried out in cooperation with international accreditation agencies as it insures the compliance of educational programs to Russian Federal education standards and is applied not to a particular educational program, but to all educational programs provided by University. Joint accreditation of education programs by foreign and Russian agencies in public-professional accreditation can be considered and acknowledged in the process of state accreditation.

Nowadays, in Russia public-professional accreditation is conducted by several organizations, each of which has its own specification and activity domain.

Since 2010 National Center for Public Accreditation (NCPA) conducts public-professional accreditation in compliance with European standards and technologies. This Center has experience in conducting joint accreditation. This accreditation of education programs involves self-study report for a joint expert commission review, expert commission visit and preparation of expert recommendations, accreditation registration and publication of accreditation results in mass media (www.accreditation.rf).

A specific feature and important criterion of accreditation in NCPA is public recognition of this or that program based on the national project results of “Best Education Program in Innovative Russia”[6]. Public recognition involves the results of internet-questionnaire of academic communities and professional associations.

The next step – evaluation of education programs by a special expert commission with host visit. The expert commission includes representatives of Russian university community, name and recognition in the academic and scientific communities (members of Guild experts in professional education domain), foreign experts, employers and student communities. Such a commission entertains the opinion of all interested parties and presents objective and independent evaluation of the program. Besides, an important feature of public-professional accreditation is that the commission includes professionals with academic degrees and/or ranks, solid in a University, acknowledgement of scientific publications. Only these experts have the corresponding qualifications to evaluate the quality assurance in education programs, to recommend all necessary improvements and to confirm the achievements and quality of the program. Decision of public-professional accreditation is rendered

by the collegiate board of Guild experts and NCPA.

Joint accreditation is conducted by NCPA in collaboration with established European quality assurance agency, pertaining to existing standards. The commission includes representatives of Russian and foreign university communities who have been elected by accreditation agencies, as well as employers and students. The accreditation results include joint expert conclusion and decision of two collegiate agencies from both parties. All documents of public-professional and joint accreditation procedures (self-study reports and external expertise) are available for public in two languages – Russian and English. These procedures are objective and self-supporting.

Every existing accreditation agency is governed by specific targets and at the same time develops individual evaluation tools. Considering the new state education policy in supporting the procedure of public-professional (professional-public) accreditation, the number of organizations evaluating education programs will increase. In this respect, emerges the demand in promoting an effective interaction of all interested parties, associated with accreditation procedures: accreditation agencies, state education authorities, public and professional associations and societies, and education institutions.

Two new concepts “expert organization” 2 (Article 92, §13)] and “authorized organization” [2 (Article 96, §3)] have been introduced in the new law “Education in the Russian Federation”. These concepts embrace those organizations included in the education system, as well as education organizations and regulatory agencies. Expert organizations can be involved in state accreditation. Organizations, authorized professional and public associations, conduct public-professional accreditation. Expert organizations follow procedures, expertise forms and methods specified

for state accreditation and determine the interrelation of training content and quality of students and graduates to the requirements of federal education standards. “Authorized organizations” have the rights to establish the forms and expertise methods for quality assurance of graduates in accordance to the requirements of professional standards and labor market.

Thus, the new legislation is beyond the scope of the state regulation of education institution activities and envisages the participation of professional communities in quality assurance for received education. However, there are unsolved problems concerning the activities of engaged expert and authorized organizations.

The question arises – if expert organizations use evaluation tools for education standards, while authorized organizations – evaluation tools for professional standards, then what standards are relevant for universities? In this case, education standards and professional standards are quite different.

What is the legal structure of such expert and authorized organizations and what requirements should they comply with? In international practice these requirements are toughly detailed: this organization should be only a non-profit organization, i.e. not deriving any profit. This organization should be independent of any influence of third parties, i.e. not be related to any state authorities and / or individual education institution; should have self-sustained resources for the implementation of assigned tasks; and periodically going through accreditation procedures within state and / or public organizations.

In world practice, there prevails the so-called procedure “accreditation of accredited agencies”. For example, the establishment of European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), which was initiated by European public associations and government agencies of Bologna country-members within

the framework of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)? In the USA accreditation agencies go through this procedure in the non-government agency – Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), which was established by the accreditation agencies personally, and government – US Department of Education.

The review analysis of world experience indicates the fact that there should be several accreditation agencies for large countries, even for such a centralized country as Russia. Why? – if the task is: effective and objective quality assurance for education. How many agencies should there be, and should they be established according to the profile principle or territorial principle-it remains to be seen. However, one should take into consideration the possible emergence of commercial or malorganizations, the so-called “in-line processing factory of accreditation certificates” within the accreditation domain. Such examples can be found in Russia and abroad. To avoid and exclude such incidents, it is necessary to establish non-governmental self-organizing network (association) of accreditation agencies. The task of such an association would be the Code of Good Practice (for example, “Standards and Recommendations for Quality Assurance System in European Higher Education Area”, developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education-ENQA).

New law enforcement in Russia would ultimately introduce amendments in the work of existing accreditation agencies. It is quite obvious that well-defined cooperation objectives in the education quality expertise domain for domestic education system are necessary [7].

Taking into account the existing accreditation experience in Russia and abroad, as well as the requirements for new legislation laws in state accreditation (including monitoring and supervisory procedures), more

and more expert organizations will be involved. In this case all requirements will be developed by the federal executive agency, responsible for the monitoring and supervision in the education domain. In compliance with Article 92, §14 of the Law, this agency will maintain a register of expert organizations.

The situation is quite different in the case of “authorized organizations.” Not in every sector of economy and production do exist employer associations, are developed professional standards and are defined the market requirements to specialists, workers and personnel of this or that profile” [2 (Article 96, §4)]. Another serious problem is the employer’s relationship to his / her interaction with the education system in the sphere of quality assurance for education and their personal professionalism in expert activities.

The way out is to establish an association of accreditation agencies with developed code of good practice approach and focused-activities in estimating close interactions with existing and emerging employer associations and societies. In accordance with new law requirements, public-professional accreditation is not regulated by the executive agency responsible for the monitoring and supervision in the education domain; and, in this case, it is practically impossible to establish a unified association of employers. Thus, the register of good practice accreditation agencies should be in the hands of the association of accreditation agencies through established rules and procedures, which, in its turn, ensures the availability and transparency of all information concerning the activities of such an association.

This path of accreditation practice in the Russian education system will be based on the following factors: integration tendencies into the Russian-European Higher Education Area, the shaping of government-public

partnership in education management, new state education policy, transparent and recognized by Russian and foreign communities.

REFERENCES:

1. Navodnov, V., Gevorkayn, E., Motova, G., Petropalovski, M. (2008) Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Russia. Manual. Ioshkan Ola: Mariiski State Technical University, 166 p.
2. Federal Law "Education in the Russian Federation" N 273-ФЗ from December 29, 2012.
3. Russian Federation Presidential Decree N° 599 of May 26, 2009 "Procedures in Improving Higher Juridical Education in RF".
4. Russian Federation Presidential Decree N° 599 of May 26, 2009 "Procedures in the Implementation of State Policy in Education and Science".
5. Motova, G., Pykkö, R. Russian Higher Education and European Standards of Quality Assurance / G. Motova, R. Pykkö // European Journal of Education/ Special Issue: Russian Higher Education and the Post-Soviet Transition, Volume 47, Issue 1, March 2012, P. 25–36.
6. Bolotov, V., Navodnov, V., Motova, G., Saricheva, T. (2013) Project "Best Education Programs in Innovative Russia" // Higher Education Today N° 4, P. 5-13.
7. Navodnov, V., Motova, G. (2010) Accreditation: Reloading? // Accreditation in Education N° 40, P. 49-51.