

Quality of Further Professional Education: New Trends in Assessment and Recognition

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The article deals with the technology of independent assessment and recognition of quality of further professional education.

Key words: professional personality development, continuing professional development, education quality assessment, assessment tools.



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Rapid development of society and technologies leads to new standards in education system. Today, any political or technological process is of interdisciplinary nature, which stipulates further development of relevant sciences and practices, as well as induces teamwork in reaching mutual goals. Although the educational and professional standards focus on a definite profile, universities and the academic staff are free in designing an innovative education process. For this purpose, they can use the best experiences of both national and international experts with due regard to the systems of education quality assessment provided by highly acknowledged organizations.

Professional development after graduation strongly depends on the activities. The term "professional personality development" means a conscious choice of professional profile and professional activities, which a person devotedly performs. Professional personality development implies various stages in continuing professional development (CPD), in other words, lifelong learning, which starts with primary focus and career guidance providing basic information on future profession in early ages.

At different stages of professional personality development, there are turning-points, i.e. short intensive transformations of professional mentality, rearrangements of professional activities and behavior patterns,

changes of professional development trends. Turning-points imply setting new goals, introducing new activities, altering professional communication patterns, and sometimes, changing professional profile.

CPD seems to be an efficient way to overcome a turning point, as it contributes to professional adaptation and ensures development of professional skills thus improving the level of proficiency.

Moreover, CPD is also connected with psychological state since it ensures so-called comfort zone: a person involved in CPD feels self-confident, knows the ways to overcome challenges and find solutions, which increases the work quality.

In our research, we stick to the term "professionalization". As a rule, it means "the process of professional formation, which includes: choice of profession with due regard to personal qualities and abilities, learning professional rules and regulations, professional development and self-perception, personal contribution to professional profile, professional personality development" [1]. There are also other definitions, however, professionalization always implies lifelong learning and professional personality development.

Professionalization means that a person is continuously acquiring new knowledge and developing new abilities and skills. This process includes several stages: starting professional activities; self-development to

meet professional education requirements and the qualification level; perception of necessity in continuing professional development, which, in its turn, determines professional goals, motives, position and contributes to professional satisfaction; absorption of professional culture [2].

To get higher professional education does not mean to become a professional. Professional formation takes place in the course of professionalization comprising CPD, further professional education, and self-education.

We would like to emphasize a compensative role of further professional education. Further professional education is to fill the gap between education provided in secondary and higher education schools, on the one hand, and rapid development of the relevant industrial sector, on the other hand. The high qualification is determined by employers' demand and described in the form of essential knowledge, abilities, and competencies.

The profound changes in ICT, new priorities and forces on the educational service market have a strong impact on further professional education (FPE) [3-5].

On the one hand, FPE is in demand, since lifelong learning is a commonly accepted concept. On the other hand, changes in the form of education (a shift from formal to informal education) introduced new ideas on assessment and recognition of FPE quality, which are based on a new model of FPE quality comprising two major aspects – development of professional competencies and independent assessment.

Although the issue of monitoring of professional competency development is more or less investigated, the question of independent assessment of FPE quality is still topical. Following the global trend, Russia is involved in designing the system of independent assessment and recognition of learning outcomes, which currently includes three major constituents:

- professional standards;

- centers for independent qualification assessment in different economic sectors;
- professional and social accountability accreditation of education programmes.

Social accountability accreditation of institute or university, as one of the types of education recognition, is implemented in Russia by means of quality management standards. Although the accreditation (ISO certification) is a voluntary procedure, it becomes more and more popular in Russian and abroad.

The logic is as follows: profound education (qualifications and competencies meeting particular requirements or professional standards) results from high-quality education process, which is provided by efficient performance of the educational organization.

Taking into account the ideas mentioned above, today it is important to develop all three types of FPE independent assessment and recognition:

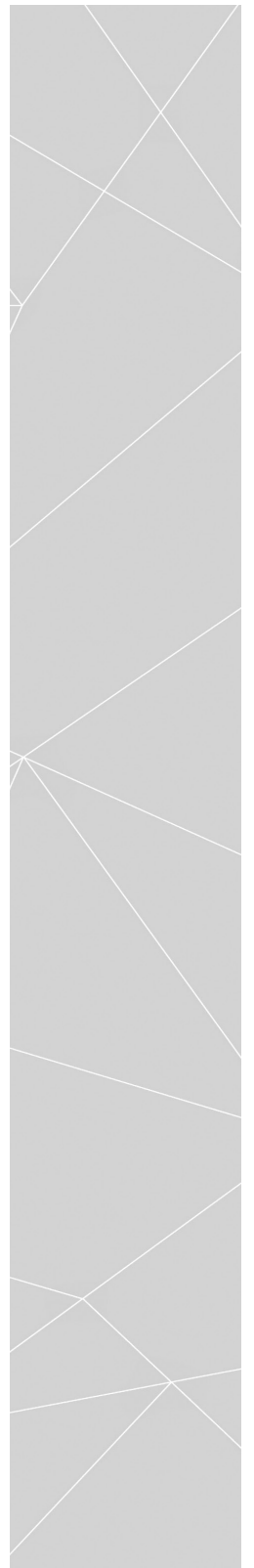
- independent assessment of staff professional qualities;
- professional and social accountability accreditation of education programmes;
- social accountability accreditation of educational organizations.

The main goals of independent assessment of staff professional qualities are as follows:

- to give objective and professionally recognized conformity assessment, which is hold to determine that professional's qualification meet manufacturing and business requirements prescribed by the professional standards; and
- to verify the professional's rights to perform the definite activities no matter where, when, and how the qualification was acquired.

The essential component of the independent assessment is adequate assessment tools.

For instance, the procedure of



professional testing can include several stages:

- knowledge and skills assessment, the analysis of evidences proving professional experience;
- assessment of relevant professional activity performance.

The assessment tools should be:

- **multifaceted:** the tasks should provide integrative assessment of knowledge, abilities, professional skills and experience of the candidate;
- **reliable:** assessment methods and tools should reveal all the aspects prescribed by the professional standards, and assessment itself should be based on unambiguous measurable criteria;
- **consistent:** assessment results should be adequate and reliable regardless of time, place, experts and candidates involved;
- **relevant:** the assessment tools should correlate with assessment goals (the tasks should be as close as possible to professional activities within the definite qualification).

Assessment tools can be different for various profiles. For instance, an efficient

system of assessment tools designed for certification of managers and auditors by the European Organization for Quality is inadequate to assess the qualification level of engineers. The principle difference between the assessed skills makes it necessary to apply an alternative assessment methodology. In particular, to assess practical skills, Worldskills methodology is commonly applied.

Independent assessment is to ensure recognition of awarded professional qualification, as well as estimation of professional performance.

The whole complex of tools should make the qualification assessment results unbiased, reliable, and recognized by the professional unity (employers). This is particularly important for FPE, which is not proved by nationally recognized certificate and often includes informal education.

There are also other factors to be considered: fidelity of organizations and individuals providing FPE; the regulations and requirements to ensure competition and preventing abuse of right; moral and ethical criteria in the assessment of educational organization performance.

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