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КРИЗИСНОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ И ТЕХНОЛОГИИ

CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGIES

No 11

ՃԳՆԱԺԱՄԱՅԻՆ ԿԱՌԱՎԱՐՈՒՄ ԵՎ ՏԵԽՆՈԼՈԳԻԱՆԵՐ

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КРИЗИСНОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ И ТЕХНОЛОГИИ

СБОРНИК НАУЧНЫХ И НАУЧНО-МЕТОДИЧЕСКИХ СТАТЕЙ

CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

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ГОСУДАРСТВЕННАЯ АКАДЕМИЯ КРИЗИСНОГО УПРАВЛЕНИЯ
КРИЗИСНОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ И ТЕХНОЛОГИИ

РЕДАКЦИОННЫЙ СОВЕТ

R. V. Topchyan, K. H. Grigoryan, V. A. Gyulazyan

MAHATMA PROJECT AS AN EXPERIENCE OF CLUSTER ACCREDITATION IN ARMENIA AND IN GEORGIA

The National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA) is member of EU TEMPUS MAHATMA (Master in Higher education management: Developing leaders for managing educational transformation) three-year multi-country joint project. The objective of the project is to promote the transformation of higher education management in Armenia and Georgia through the introduction of a new Master's program/professional development courses in higher education management. 8 Armenian and Georgian universities have developed Master's programs and are operating, to different extents, their Quality Assurance (QA) systems, delivery of masters programs along with the European principles for program design. The comparative research has been conducted: the results of pilot program accreditations were analyzed. The findings were summarized, in order to discuss the major features, to generalize the approaches and prospects. The proposed recommendations can serve as a basis for the general development of program accreditation in Armenia and the region.

Keywords: Program accreditation, regional and cluster accreditation, MAHATMA project, quality assurance standards, expert panels, evaluation reports.

JEL Classification: I20, I21, I23, I25, I29

Introduction.

The role of program accreditation: Program accreditation aims to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of academic programs as well as to monitor whether they thoroughly ensures the acquisition of intended learning outcomes. Accreditation of degree-granting academic programs is intended to provide these programs with a credential. The credential can be used by the programs and their stakeholders - the general public, students and prospective students, employers, industry, and governmental bodies - to assess the quality of the program and the extent to which it achieves its own goals as well as agreed-upon educational standards. The process of program accreditation also serves to foster self-examination by learning organizations; to develop a dialog between stakeholders of educational programs on content, methods, and learning outcomes; and to encourage continuous improvement of academic programs through benchmarking.

Program accreditation confirms that an institution's degree program has been carefully assessed and that its scale, scope, and quality meet comprehensive, global and national standards for accreditation. It makes a public statement about the deep commitment of the institution and its faculty to ongoing evaluation and continuous quality improvement [2].

The benefits of program accreditation are that it: recognizes a program's commitment to educational quality and continuous improvement; represents peer recognition and achievement of quality benchmarks; strengthens graduate employment opportunities; advances the profession - promotes standards of practice and advocates rigorous preparation. External quality assurance system, mainly said the accreditation process is an essential tool for enhancing the quality of internationalization [7].

The primary objective of the program accreditation process is to ensure that accredited academic programs prepare students to meet the current and anticipated needs of the labor market for qualified professionals working in the field of higher education management [3].

MAHATMA project.

ANQA has made a considerable progress in relation to program accreditation and the development of standards. In relation to voluntary program accreditation, as of now ANQA has conducted pilot reviews, within the framework of Tempus MAHATMA [8]. To encourage universities to apply for program accreditations, making the procedure more effective and cost-efficient, a financial policy on cluster accreditation is currently being developed.

Cluster accreditation refers to the accreditation of a number of related programs at the same time and with the same expert panel. Cluster accreditation:

- enables comparison between similar programs offered by different institutions while evaluating them;

- facilitates minimal standard benchmarking while making the evaluation process objective and transparent;

- provides for shared costs of a program accreditation.

Upon the completion of the pilot accreditations ANQA embarked upon a phase of improvement and review of the regulatory documents, methodology and the process itself based on the stakeholders' feedback in relation to the effectiveness of the accreditation process, revealing the shortcomings and obstacles. Based on the revealed needs steps towards the improvement of the procedure were undertaken and the area regulatory documentation was revised.

Generally, the pilot program review consists of following phases: program self-evaluation, desk review, site visits and report production. ANQA attaches great importance to the continuous improvement of the accreditation process; hence a review of regulatory documents was conducted. The observation of the effectiveness of the accreditation process by ANQA helps with identifying the actual state of the process, existing problems, and the revision and improvement (according to goals and objectives) of the documentation basis and the process itself.

MAHATMA is a three-year multi-country joint project, under the EACEA N° 25/2011, 5th call and Curricular Reform action. The overall goal of the project is to promote the transformation of higher education management in Armenia and Georgia through introduction of a new Master's program/professional development courses in higher education management.

The project is implemented through 9 work packages. The fourth work package is focused on the initial accreditation of the new MA (Master in higher education management). The initial accreditation of the study program was undertaken in 2015 [8].

The National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance foundation of Armenia (ANQA) and National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement of Georgia (NCEQE) shared responsibilities of leadership in this work package, and organized the initial accreditations in respective countries and monitored the WP implementation. ANQA and NCEQE were responsible for setting-up peer-review panels including local and international experts to conduct desk-review and site-visits and produce the final reports on the status of the new MAs.

In Armenia 4 expert panels (Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovyan (ASPU), Armenian State University of Economy (ASUE), Vanadzor State University after H. Tumanyan (VSU), Goris State University

(GSU)) were established according to ANQA regulation on the expert panel composition to implement pilot program accreditation in Armenia Each expert panel consisted of 2 local experts, 2 international experts (one from Bath Spa University, UK, the other from National Centre for Education Quality Enhancement, Georgia) and 1 student expert. The international experts participated in all panels [4, 6].

The same principle was applied for Georgian Universities. One Armenian expert was involved in the processes. In Georgia each expert panel consisted of 2 local experts, 2 international experts (one form Bath Spa University, UK, the other from NCEQE (National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement of Georgia). The processes were coordinated by a Coordinator and assistant to the Group. The international experts participated in all 4 procedures (Ilia State University (ISU), Tbilisi, International Black Sea University (IBSU), Tbilisi, Akaki Tsereteli State University, Kutaisi (ATSU), Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University (BSU)). All site visits in partner universities met completely site visit schedule and kept agenda.

ANQA conducted several introductory workshops with the self-evaluation implementation teams of the universities, as well as through periodic meetings intensively worked with the universities, providing necessary guidance to implement self-assessment.

After site visits the experts prepared drafts of their site visit reports. The final reports were sent to Project coordinators in NCEQE and ANQA.

Self-evaluation.

For contributing to universities' effective implementation of the self-evaluation process, ANQA has developed guidelines [1], including a program self-evaluation format, which is the part of the Accreditation statute. Analyzing the information provided by universities, it should be noted, the self-evaluation format helps and guides program leaders and teams in their activities.

Based on the results of research, it can be stated; that the experts want to see more analytical data and not just descriptions of facts and figures [4,6]. Therefore, there should not only be quantitative data provided, but also analysis of the program dynamics, the causes of reductions or increases of student numbers, etc.

The selection of peer-review experts is one of the most important steps of the accreditation process, in as much as the recognition of accreditation decisions mainly depends on the level of adherence to both the selection criteria of external experts and the implementation of established procedures. The selection criteria of ANQA experts and procedures are in line with standards set by the European Consortium for Accreditation. Highly qualified local and international experienced professionals were selected for the implementation of the external evaluation. Generally, the expert panel consists of: representatives of the teaching staff, representatives of professional or specific field, and representatives of the field of education management; students and employers.

The coordinators consolidated the link between the expert panel and the university under review. He/she is a guarantor of the accreditation methodology. They have the following responsibilities: the smooth flow and effective implementation of all procedures (holding discussions, regulating misunderstandings); protection of the rights of all panel members; the analysis of situations; in case of need coming up with right decisions and solutions; keeping to the site visit agenda. Analyzing the results, it can be stated that the coordinators carried out their duties properly. In some cases there were shortcomings in decision-making process and monitoring the smooth flow and effective implementation of the process.

Desk review.

During the desk review the experts assessed the adequacy of the self-evaluation report, academic programs and respective documentation submitted by the universities to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of academic programs according to ANQA and NCEQE (National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement of Georgia) criteria and standard. It was observed the effectiveness of desk review depended upon the following perspectives: developing a clear idea about the universities, writing out issues that are subject to examination at the time of a site visit, production of a panel report.

It can be stated that the desk review was implemented effectively in different expert panels. Thus, the process has served its purpose; the experts were able to develop a clear idea about the nature and qualities of the university/academic program and to assess its strengths and weaknesses. The problematic issues/questions that were not introduced sufficiently and were subject to examination at the time of a site visit were written out. According to experts the latter was very useful for effective organization of the site visits. The experts were provided with all the necessary documents, including normative acts and legal documents for the effective assessment of the universities activities and the implementation of academic programs. The experts are satisfied with the documentation package (legal and normative acts, guidelines, formats, etc.) provided by ANQA and NCEQE (National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement of Georgia) and are convinced that they are sufficient for the implementation of external evaluation [4,6].

All the meetings gave opportunities to understand activities of the university. Maintenance of procedure is a necessary prerequisite for the effective meetings.

Closed meetings give a great opportunity to exchange ideas and share experience and are based on the most important principles of democracy – accepting the opinion of the majority by taking into account the opinion of the minority [3]. The duration of the site visit was enough to obtain all the necessary information about each university, to develop a clear idea about the university and to identify its strengths and weaknesses.

Report production.

After the site visit the expert panel and the ANQA and NCEQE coordinators produced the **panel report** based on desk review and the findings brought out from the site visits. Based on the findings the expert panel conducted in-depth analysis in accordance with the format.

Apart from structural elements, the content issues of the report were observed, which are following: the language of the reports was understandable; the panel reports were linked to Higher Education Institution's self-evaluation report; reports reflected the perception of the HEI's environment, the panel report takes into account HEI's history and further development directions; the report reflected the strategy of the HEI; the HEI accepted the weaknesses outlined in the report; the report can have an impact on HEI's new strategy; an impact on the administration and governance of the HEI; and finally the reports provided the universities with new analytical opportunities.

Based on the obtained data, it can be said that the reported recommendations were very useful from the perspective of further development and improvement of the universities; they were understandable from the perspective of their implementation.

According to the Statute on Accreditation, universities represented their remarks on each assessment of criteria and about the draft version of the report. The chairman of the expert panel and coordinator revised the report if the remarks were well grounded.

The experts were independent during the external evaluation. There were not any obstacles to restrict their independent and impartial activities. The cooperation with the international expert was quite effective. The experts consider that the international expert should be provided with the information about the educational systems of Armenia and Georgia. Also, the coordinators worked effectively for their team demonstrating communicative, managerial, organizational and teamwork skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO HEIs:

For Academic programs:

1. Develop mechanisms for program monitoring and improvement.

2. Improve the mechanisms for identifying the link between the learning outcomes of the program and the Armenian National Qualifications Framework (ANQF).

3. Take steps to ensure the sustainability of the program.

For teaching staff:

1. Clarify the mechanisms for the recruitment of the teaching staff.

2. Take steps for the reduction of risks; which are related to the fact of having non-permanent teaching staff.

3. Formulate a system of needs assessment and development of the teaching staff involved in the program.

For teaching and learning practices:

1. Take steps for linking the choice of teaching and learning methods with learning outcomes.

2. Within the framework of teachers' academic freedom, develop mechanisms, which will certify that the methods chosen by the teachers are in line with learning outcomes.

For student assessment:

1. Take steps to align assessment tasks and tools with learning outcomes.

2. Develop mechanisms for the students to be able to become oriented in their education (knowing how to improve) based on the results of assessments.

For research and development:

1. Develop a research strategy for the academic program emphasizing the mechanisms of students' involvement.

2. Take steps towards the formation of research skills among the students linking these with research projects.

For the learning environment:

Take steps to develop clear mechanisms for the improvement of material and technical and educational methodical resources based on the results of evaluation.

For quality assurance:

1. Develop clear internal Quality Assurance policy for the academic program emphasizing especially the review phase (plan-do-check-act: PDCA).

2. Take steps for the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders in internal QA processes.

3. Disseminate the good practices among other programs of the university.

The strengths of the academic program are:

1. The learning outcomes of the academic program are clearly defined and visually mapped on the level of modules and courses.

2. International experts were involved in the process of development of the academic program.

3. The teaching staff is experienced and has relevant qualifications (PhD, Full Professors and Associate Professors).

4. University-wide approaches of the assessment of knowledge are applied within the academic program and the components are specified taking into consideration the peculiarities of the academic program.

5. The academic program is provided with the necessary resource base.

6. QA procedure has been developed for the academic program. Students and teaching staff are involved in QA processes.

The benefits of regional accreditation are:

1. Sharing of experience in organizing program accreditation between two countries, which have many similarities in education system,
2. Survey of different methodological issues of both countries' quality assurance.
3. Participation of regional experts in expert panels in Armenia and in Georgia, gaining experience of different procedures, criteria and standards, groups, traditions and cultures.
4. Savings in time and in resources during regional and cluster accreditation process planning and realization.
5. Knowledge gained from new experience in regional cluster accreditation.

The benefits from regional accreditation, particularly for ANQA are:

1. New cooperation between regional quality agencies.
2. Exchange of regional experts and sharing of different experiences of experts.
3. Evaluation of regional experts' activity by foreign universities and partner agencies.
4. Cross analysis of experts' evaluation reports.
5. Survey of different quality cultures.

6. Increasing of efficiency of resources (quantity experts, costs, time savings etc.) during cluster accreditation process planning and realization.

Quality requirements and key implications.

Development of the education should be aimed at improving the quality assurance [5]. Mahatma project helped involved institutions to commit themselves explicitly to the development of a quality culture. They put in place a management system that recognizes the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. This system is *effective* (e.g. it would need to be understood by all participants), *efficient* (e.g. to avoid 'gold plating'), *fair* (e.g. the arrangements would militate against conflicts of interest), and allow for appropriate *external input* (e.g. through the use of external subject experts in program review).

These pilot accreditations focus on quality assurance and they also cover provision of programs at collaborative partners. The institutions have in place monitoring mechanisms to collect the necessary data and establish a team involved in providing additional information. The process involves the provision of reports and documentation to be reviewed by a panel of experts.

The MAHATMA team considered which QA mechanisms must be introduced and identified steps necessary for the monitoring and reporting of results. The partners aimed for transparency of procedures and strategic alignment of operations.

The strategic priorities for development are the following:

▪ Efficient continuation and development of the program accreditation process, its total recognition, focus on student-centered learning, and the establishment of cluster accreditation,
▪ Promotion of the establishment of cluster accreditation in the country, and the Agency's internationalization with both regional and European vectors aiming at enhancement of international recognition of Armenian higher education,
▪ Development of the Agency's potential as an institution realizing external quality assurance in the field of professional education.

Hopefully, the newly formed Professional Association of Educationalists will promote the enhancement of the higher education systems of Armenia and Georgia through an active change dialogue, experience exchange and research in the field of higher education.

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ՄԱՀԱԹՄԱ ԾՐԱԳԻՐԸ ՈՐՊԵՍ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆՈՒՄ ԵՎ ՎՐԱՍՏԱՆՈՒՄ ԿԼԱՍՏԵՐԱՅԻՆ ՀԱՎԱՏԱՐՄԱԳՐՄԱՆ ՓՈՐՁ

Մամնագիտական կրթության որակի ապահովման ազգային կենտրոնը (ՈԱԱԿ), մի շարք երկրների հետ համատեղ, ԵՄ ՏԵՄՊՈՒՍ-ի ՄԱՀԱԹՄԱ եռամյա ծրագրի անդամ է: Ծրագրի նպատակն է խթանել բարձրագույն կրթության կառավարման փոխակերպումը Հայաստանում և Վրաստանում՝ բարձրագույն կրթության կառավարման նոր մագիստրոսական ծրագրի ներդրմամբ: Թվով 8 հայկական և վրացական համալսարաններ մշակել ու իրականացրել են մագիստրոսական կրթական ծրագրեր, ստեղծելով որակի ապահովման (ՈԱ) տարբեր համակարգեր՝ եվրոպական սկզբունքների հիման վրա: Մանրամասն վերլուծվել են կրթական ծրագրերի փորձնական հավատարմագրման արդյունքները: Քննարկվել ու ամփոփվել են հիմնական հաջողությունները և հետանկարները: Տրված առաջարկությունները կարող են հիմք ծառայել ՀՀ-ում և, ընդհանրապես, տարածաշրջանում կրթական ծրագրերի կլաստերային հավատարմագրման զարգացման համար:

Առանցքային բառեր. *վարածաշրջանային և կլաստերային ծրագրային հավատարմագրում, ՄԱՀԱԹՄԱ ծրագիր, որակի ապահովման չափորոշիչներ, փորձագետների խումբ, գնահատման զեկույցներ:*

Р. В. Топчян, К. Г. Григорян, В. А. Гюлазян

ПРОЕКТ МАХАТМА КАК ОПЫТ КЛАСТЕРНОЙ АККРЕДИТАЦИИ В АРМЕНИИ И В ГРУЗИИ

Национальный центр по обеспечению качества профессионального образования (ANQA) является членом трехлетнего совместного проекта нескольких стран - ЕС ТЕМПУС МАХАТМА Целью проекта является содействие преобразованию управления высшим образованием в Армении и Грузии путем внедрения программ / курсов нового магистерского образования в управлении высшим образованием. 8 армянских и грузинских университетов разработали программы магистра и работают, в разной степени, над системами гарантии качества, наряду с европейскими принципами для разработки программ. Анализированы результаты пилотной аккредитаций

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программ. Обобщены основные особенности, подходы и перспективы. Предложенные рекомендации могут служить основой для общего развития аккредитации программ в Армении и в регионе целом.

__Ключевые слова:__ региональная и кластерная программная аккредитация, проект МАНАТМА, стандарты обеспечения качества, экспертная группа, отчеты оценивания.

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