

Report on the work of the focus group "Actual problems of organization and development of university a quality management system in education and getting accreditation by the university.

Date of the focus groups: 12/12/16

Agenda: Formation of list of the most relevant issues/topics in terms of the organization and development of university management system of quality education and getting accreditation by the university

Before the start of discussion, the following information was provided to all participants of the focus groups:

- Goals and objectives of the focus group's conduct and forthcoming workshop on experience exchange in a sphere of organization and development of institutional structures and internal mechanisms of quality management, as well as the cover of a university accreditation;
- Format of the discussion;
- The duration of the discussion;
- Record the event;
- Privacy and voluntary.

Focus group study was divided into two parts:

- presentations by accreditation agencies and
- discussion of the issues toward the focus group.

Delivery of presentations by accreditation agencies

Presentations were given by (presentations are attached):

- «EdNet» - Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (hereinafter EdNet),
- Agency for accreditation of educational programs and organizations (hereinafter AAEPPO).

In 2016 the National Accreditation Board of the Ministry of Education and Science in the Kyrgyz Republic recognized only these accreditation agencies.

During the presentation by accreditation agencies, the following was emphasized:

- Independent accreditation is designed to give a start or a new vector for the improvement of the quality of education in the universities of the country. State licensing together with the state certification of educational organizations and programs did not give sufficient quality assurance.

- One of the most important factors for the successful completion of accreditation by a university is an effect of good implementation of an internal system of quality assurance
- The educational institution must demonstrate its own efforts to ensure the quality, including the systematic management of an organization that allows providing quality services.
- Also according to the requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science, universities must implement a quality management system of education and create appropriate quality departments.
- A list of legislative and normative legal acts that is ensuring the legal basis for an independent accreditation and expressing the requirements toward higher education institutions (the documents are attached).
- Also, representatives of accreditation agencies noted one fact. Those accreditation agencies perform a wider range of functions and responsibilities besides main activity in assessing the quality of educational programs and organizations in accordance with prescribed minimum requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science, which were required for educational institutions of primary, secondary and higher education of the Kyrgyz Republic to be accredited. In particular, agencies pay attention to informative lectures, training (including workshops, roundtables, advisory assistance in the preparation of a report on self-assessment, etc.) and the preparation of educational organizations for the process of accreditation.

This is due to the fact that the Ministry of Education and Science did not conduct the preparation of the educational system to undergo accreditation. That is why at the present time, it is very difficult to meet requirements for the majority of educational organizations because accreditation involves an entirely different approach to the evaluation of the quality of educational programs and organizations, and a completely different procedure, in comparison with the state certification.

Upon completion of the presentations, focus group participants asked questions to the speakers and shared their comments.

In the discussion process following was noted:

- Pilot accreditation, mentioned in the presentations by both accreditation agencies, were carried out and paid for through various international projects, and did not require an expenditure of educational institutions themselves. The main purpose of such pilot accreditation was testing criteria and procedures for accrediting agencies. After each trial accreditation criteria and procedures were corrected. At the moment, the criteria and procedures are finalized.

Following universities completed trial voluntary accreditation programs: KEU (2 programs), KSU in name of Arabaev (1 program), Osh State University (1 program), KSJA (1 program).

- At this time, accreditation agencies focus on different specializations. EdNet orient on accreditation of universities, when AAOPO orient on primary and secondary education.

However, AAOPO also plans to carry out accreditation of higher education institutions but only engineering and medical profile. Engineering universities will be mentored by AAOPO and medical school programs will be the responsibility of both the accreditation agencies.

According to findings of AAOPO, engineering and medical make up about 15% of the total educational programs' market.

An initiative of the division of responsibilities and educational programs goes from accreditation agencies themselves.

Nevertheless, competitive model of accreditation agencies was laid in the law, and with the emergence of a larger number of accreditation agencies (there are no restrictions on the number of quality of agencies in the law), educational institutions would be able to choose the accreditation agency for the process of accreditation.

As it was noted by representatives of the accrediting agencies, it is important to have a high quality of cooperation between the accreditation agencies to agree on the necessary procedures, maintaining transparency and objectivity, and to ensure that agencies can work together to take proactive steps to resolve the current problems in the education system.

- Accreditation agencies base their work on the minimum requirements for educational institutions of primary, secondary and higher education of the Kyrgyz Republic which are about to get accreditation. Accreditation agency potentially has the right to change the requirements for educational organizations. At present time, universities should follow the requirements of the Ministry of Education.

- Accreditation can assist individual programs or use cluster method: several programs in one block at a time. The cluster method lets a lower cost payment for accreditation of each program.

- Participation of representatives of accreditation agencies in the work of the focus group and their willingness to raise public awareness, education and preparation of educational organizations in the accreditation process. These activities are an important indicator of the dialogue between the educational institutions and independent accreditation agencies. Process and attribution differ from state certification when one side had only rights and the other had only responsibilities. At this stage of the formation of an independent accreditation, when not all participants in this process have all the information and experience, the desire of accreditation

agencies to cooperate and assist in this process rather than sticking to the requirements is extremely important for educational institutions.

- The experience of accredited universities in international programs shows a significant difference between a state certification and accreditation. Thus, it became clear that commissions, involved in the accreditation, pay attention to the very different aspects of the program's activities than before the state certification did. In the result, training for educational institutions - preparing for the accreditation to the maximum extent indeed is necessary, and in the future, it will help for the common good. The participants asked to have training on the free basis in the early stages because for educational institutions the cover of costs of accreditation is very considerable.
- Universities can acquire the service of institutional diagnostics (on EdNet example). Diagnostics as a service is not a part or stage of independent accreditation and it does not guarantee passage of accreditation. This service allows the university to understand at what level guarantee of quality systems is, to get a conclusion and recommendations for changes in the work in order to meet requirements of accreditation according to international standards (rather than a specific agency) and to implement into the system of quality. Diagnostics can be considered as a recommendation for action. In order to avoid conflict of interests, those experts who diagnose the university, will not be involved in the accreditation of the university. Moreover, experts participating in the accreditation will not receive the information about previous university's diagnostics. Diagnostics takes an average about 6 months, including the work of 3-4 experts, weekly meetings, during which all aspects of university activities are examined. Diagnostic cost depends on the size of the university, ranging from 70,000 soms (over the entire period including the writing of conclusion).

Discussion questions toward focus group

The participants of the focus groups were asked the following questions:

1. What is the need in a system of quality assurance? How is it implemented?
2. Trial accreditation. What kind of experience, learned lessons and challenges you can share? The question is for educational institutions and for the accreditation agencies.
3. How does the system of the quality of education should be reflected in the mission, strategic plan, program? How should be these elements linked to each other?
4. What would you like to discuss at the seminar, what to put on the agenda (the question for educational institutions and for the accreditation agency)

During the discussion of issues participants of the focus group noted the following:

- In the discussion of the quality management system (QMS) in an educational institution, there are relevant questions: is it needed and who should conduct the QMS certification in higher education; the importance of such certification for the accreditation and the role of the accreditation agency to obtain such a certificate.

As it was explained by representatives of accreditation agencies, certification of quality management systems is not a function of the accreditation agency and does not replace the accreditation and it is not mandatory. The presence of such a certificate during accreditation will be an additional advantage, but it is agencies business to check the conformity of quality management procedures and reality.

World practice shows that QMS certification in the field of education does not meet educational goals. The educational system is conservative and fairly inertial. Certification of QMS correspond to production systems but do not satisfy educational systems.

However, in many countries, there are agencies that provide certification of QMS and in educational institutions, for example, in Russia, and KRSU passed certification and their QMS is certified.

If the university is interested in certification, confirmation of the document reception on the implementation of the QMS in accordance with a certain standard, it is a responsibility of the quality management systems certification bodies, such as ISO, eTQM. In Kyrgyzstan, it is a state agency for standardization and metrology under the Ministry of Economy which function is the evaluation of quality management systems. Two years ago, this body established Quality Award “Sapat” for educational institutions, which tested and evaluated the quality management system. At that time, evaluation was carried out on the basis of the EFQM model.

The representatives of accreditation agencies reported that the presence of the QMS is easy to check. QMS requires a clearly defined mission, clearly defined educational goals, and learning outcomes, as well as policies to ensure the quality of education at the university. In general, QMS is required to meet the demands of consumers, employers, students, their parents, other partners, and teachers themselves. Therefore, in the development of quality assurance policies, all stakeholders should be involved.

- Discussing experiences and learned lessons from the pilot accreditation, accreditation agencies have noted a lack of awareness of educational institutions, unpreparedness, and lack of understanding on how to formulate the mission and educational objectives - quality assurance policy. It requires work on informing and

training. Also, attribution of heads of universities is an important factor in relation to the results of accreditation and need to reform the university from within, introduce innovations, and meet criteria that an independent accreditation defined. Current practice showed that most of the leaders of universities are conservative and tough to accept and respond to the constructive criticism of the agencies on the results of accreditation.

- On the part of universities, self-assessment in preparation for accreditation is critically important. So, major gaps in terms of working with employers were found. Working process with the education management system has been revised (for example, AVN).

The whole experience of the accreditation shows that many issues in the organization, as a result, will be reviewed. The proper formation of the working group for the preparation of self-evaluation and accreditation was noted very important. The group should consist of people with an analytical mind, understanding about management of the quality and strategic planning. These people have to analyze what is working good in the high school, what are the shortcomings that must be improved, in other words, to do a lot of analytical work.

- The representatives of accreditation agencies noted that the QMS elements present in every university, in most cases, there is just a necessity to modify or incorporate some elements and place them in a constantly operating system. It is important that specific group of people was engaged, such as a service or quality control department. The main standards for this group should be a policy of quality assurance, information management and bring it to the public.

- Focus group participants noted the need for the development of a culture of education quality among the academic community.

- Participants noted the need for the presence of representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science in the seminar.

- All participants in the focus groups pointed out the need for a unified platform for the exchange of experiences, including virtual environments and meetings/round tables at universities, which passed accreditation.

Thus, according to the results of the focus groups, the following list of the most relevant issues/topics was formed; it regards the organization and development of

university management system of quality education and getting accreditation by the university:

1. Practical recommendations for the implementation of QMS in higher education with the involvement of all participants in the system.
2. Effective self-assessment of the university in process of preparation for accreditation. Writing the self-evaluation report. Practical recommendations and pilot accreditations' evaluation. External evaluation.
3. The relationship of university's strategic planning, quality management systems, mission, goals, and objectives; the role and importance of strategic planning when conducting accreditation in higher education.
4. The role and importance of the president/head of university in the efficient progress of accreditation and subsequent reformation within the university;
5. Systematic organization of training for all members of the accreditation process.
6. Accreditation of universities' programs in the Kyrgyz Republic by international accreditation agencies, past experience, and the future status of such accreditation to the Kyrgyz Republic.

The following proposals on the part of the formation seminar program were received:

1. Invite international experts to participate in a seminar. The expert should have previous practice in the pilot accreditation in some programs in the Kyrgyz Republic, present a report on the experiences, discuss strengths and weaknesses of analyzed universities and share general observations.
2. Invite leaders of the working groups (from the KTU, KRSU, Osh State University), that had already had pilot accreditation or international accreditation programs, to participate in preparation for the purpose of idea exchange.
3. Invite experts on accreditation from Kazakhstan and/or Russia to participate in a round table to exchange experiences.

The report was prepared by E.Kombarova, facilitator of focus groups, curator of organization committee on preparation and conducting focus groups discussion and seminar, coordinator of the Center of Teaching, Learning and Technology, AUCA.

Annexes to the report:

1. Presentation materials of representatives of accreditation agencies;
2. Legislative and regulatory - legal acts mentioned in the course of the focus group