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SYSTEM OF MONITORING THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN UK UNIVERSITIES: EXPERIENCE FOR UKRAINE

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the experience of the use of the system of internal monitoring of the quality of higher education in UK Universities. There has been analyzed the existing model of the system of higher education monitoring at the level of a higher education institution within the scope of the British higher education model, discovered by a famous American education philosopher P. Monroe. There has been characterized the new document "The UK Quality Code for Higher Education", which regulates the internal procedures of providing and monitoring the quality of UK universities. There have been provided the data of the comparative analysis of the trends of the internal monitoring of the Higher education quality of some UK universities. The monitoring trends, inherent in all higher education institutions, are the reports of external examiners, feedback of the students, reports of the institutional checkups. Other internal monitoring trends depend on the status, mission of an academic institution and are related to the polling of employers, higher education institutions' alumni, analysis of the reports of the experts of the new curricula evaluation boards, etc. There has been analyzed the cyclic model of higher education monitoring in UK universities.

Key words: monitoring, system of providing the quality of higher education, quality management, cyclic monitoring model.

INTRODUCTION

Up to the 80-s of the previous century in the European universities despite declaring the problem of quality as the central one, there haven't been developed special mechanisms or tools of its provision neither on the level of a higher institution, nor on the level of the state. Quality control was a part of informal mechanisms of academic community, which were self-regulated, not related to external evaluation and were not the subject of a special responsibility of universities (Дирк Ван Дамм, Питер Ван дер Хиден, Кэролин Кэмпбелл, 2003, 7).

During last 15–20 years in many European countries there were formed national systems of education quality provision, based on the own quality assessment approaches and traditions. Thus in Europe according to Josep Grifoll, the Technical Director for Quality Assurance at AQU Catalonia, Vice-President of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), there is absent the unified system of institutional assessment of education establishments' activity (Grifoll, 2013).

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study lies in providing the answers to the urgent issues for the reform of the national higher education. At the same time the foreign experience can't be the model, but will serve as the information for the analysis and help in making optimal decisions, avoiding own risks and mistakes. The study is based on the traditional analysis of



the literature, Internet sources, and also on generalizing the experience of the author's participation in the international education projects, conferences and seminars in the issues of provision and monitoring of the higher education quality.

For the analysis of the system of provision and monitoring of the higher education quality we have chosen the UK, as the country with a developed system of higher education and considerable achievements in its quality assurance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

According to American philosopher P. Monroe, it is expedient to single out three logically possible education model variants, corresponding to the dominant types of political, social and economic systems:

- 1) continental European countries' (Germany, France, Italy, Russia) model, in which the central role in regulating, financing and conducting the monitoring belongs to the state;
- 2) UK model with the minimal interference of the government with the education process;
- 3) USA's model, in which the function of education management has been passed to other nongovernmental forms of society's self-organization and is realized on the levels of the state, local self-government and private initiative (Монро, 2013).

Let's consider historically formed in Europe "UK" model of education quality, which is based on internal self-evaluation by the academic community. In modern UK this model is harmonically supplemented with a continental one, based on the external evaluation of a higher institution from the point of view of its responsibility before the society and the state (Біліченко, 2014) and partly with an American one. All the decisions, that define the perspective of the education branch development, despite the political force in power, are adopted by the parliament or the government of UK (Тупичак, 2012).

To the study of the separate aspects of the system of higher education quality provision and monitoring in UK there are dedicated the works of the national researchers (N. Bidiuk, S. Bilichenko, P. Kryazhev, A. Nezhentseva, M. Kysil, H. Poberezska, K. Stetsenko, L. Tupyshak and others) and foreign scientists (D. Westerheijden, P. Williams, N. Aksenova, V. Baidenko, O. Vorozheykina, O. Hrivennaya, A. Muravyova, O. Oleynikova, O. Pokladyuk, D. Saprykin, L. Tarasyuk and others).

The research methods we used are: theoretical analysis, synthesis, the method of studying educational and historical documents.

RESULTS

UK is the cofounder of Bologna process and the initiator of ESG creation, the country which was among the first ones in 1985 where was conducted the first higher education quality assessment. Herewith, in a polytechnics sector the system of external evaluation had existed since the end of 1960-s (Дирк Ван Дамм, Питер Ван дер Хиден, Кэролин Кэмпбелл, 2003, 16). The system of quality assurance, created in this country, sets the following tasks for itself: ensuring adhering to academic qualification standards by Higher education institutions; ensuring the quality of education services; improving the possibilities for the students to obtain education and professional experience; providing the accountability of higher education institutions concerning the state investment; providing trustworthy information about the education quality and standards to all those who want or need to get it (Уильямс, 2010). By the way, namely in UK the notion "monitoring" was first used in the respect of getting information about the functioning of higher education institutions.

The country has a multistage system of universities accreditation and of the evaluation of their curricula with the leading role of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education, founded in 1997. QAA is an independent non-governmental organ, which is



the main pacemaker of the assessment approaches to the higher education quality in the UK (while having certain procedural differences in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) (Уильямс, 2010).

For a long time in the country in the sphere of higher education there has existed the tradition of local educational policy, based on the principles of institutional autonomy and deregulation. Academic institutions are independent self-governing corporations of higher education with a wide range of powers, for instance related to the awarding of degrees and other qualifications. Besides this, higher institutions themselves but not QAA, accredit their own curricula.

On the legislative level, as well as by the way in Ukraine, there has not been assigned the requirement of the functioning of the system of internal provision and monitoring of the higher education quality in UK universities. The principle of the primary responsibility of the higher education institutions for the provision of the quality of the academic and scientific processes has been laid down in the notion of the autonomy of the higher education institutions of Britain and other European countries. At the same time professional education and training institutions legislatively are obliged to have such systems, that function in self-assessment mode.

Until recently all internal procedures of the provision and monitoring of the universities' quality in UK were fulfilled according to "Quality and standards in UK universities: A guide to how the system works", developed by QAA. This document consists of ten chapters: grad school research programmes; different forms of study (including the distance one); students with special needs; students' external examining; students' appeals and complaints; students' assessment; structure of the programmes, their approval, monitoring and review; assistance in job placement; practicums and internship; admission to universities. It was a part of the collection of universities' regulatory documents (qualification framework of the higher education in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland; academic standards in different knowledge fields, which describe the expected results of mastering subjects, also including the level of the skills, aptitudes, competencies development; specification of educational programmes) under the title "Academic infrastructure".

Starting with 2012–2013 academic year for the replacement of "Academic infrastructure" QAA developed the new document "The UK Quality Code for Higher Education", consisting of three parts (The UK Quality Code for Higher Education, 2014):

1. Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards.
2. Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality.
3. Part C: Information about higher education provision.

The document clearly distinguishes two key notions: "academic standards" and "academic quality".

Academic standards are predetermined, clearly defined levels of academic results which a student must achieve to be eligible for an academic award. Academic quality is concerned with how well the learning opportunities, made available to students, enable them to achieve their award (Уильямс, 2010). And the "provision of quality" is viewed by QAA as the set of procedures dedicated for overseeing the adherence to the academic standards and the creation of conditions for receiving the quality education by the students (The UK Quality Code for Higher Education, 2014).

Indicators, which are assessed in the first part of the Code, refer to the achieved results of the students' study relatively to the established academic standards, have national qualification framework of the higher education etc. The second part of the document



contains the indicators, which influence the quality of the students' study, namely: structure of the curriculum, teaching process, academic resources, students support and their participation in the procedures of assuring the quality of higher education etc. The third component is dedicated to the elucidation of the information about higher education and access to it of all the interested parties. On the basis of the Quality Code every university develops its own strategies and programmes of internal provision of the higher education quality.

In particular, according to the principles of part 8 "Programme monitoring and review" of the Quality Code any new training programme at the university must undergo the procedure of validation before teaching it and approving in a special Board, which analyzes its content, structure, resource support, time needed for its study, demand on the market etc. The result of the periodic review of the training programmes at the university is the decision of the Commission about the continuation of the programme's realization during the following five years or its revocation. Students must be represented in training programmes' quality assurance Commission.

In the country widely spread is the practice of using the results of the annual national query of the universities' undergraduates concerning their attitude to the programmes and their own achievements in mastering the programmes. Such information is presented on the web-site of every university, where there are also provided other statistical data, in particular about the students' achievements and their further employment. Besides this at UK universities for the evaluation of the students' knowledge on the stage of the semester final control there are usually used external examiners, whose reports are further discussed with the representatives of the students for the working out of the strategy of higher education quality improvement.

Nowadays there is noted a considerable increase of the students' role in the university's life. In the system of external and internal evaluation of the education quality ever more important is becoming the role of the student, paying for getting educational services. There happens real involvement of the students into the processes of external quality evaluation. Higher education quality assurance agency conducts common conferences with the National Union of Students, "students' written reports" become the integral part of an institutional audits, and it is compulsory for the commission members to meet with the heads of students' unions as well as with average students of different years of study and in different majors. Their own evaluation of the academic courses students express by the way of filling out the questionnaires, through the "focus groups" or the students-respondents of the course (The QAA, 2014).

An important role in the increase of the quality of teaching at the country's universities is played by the Higher Education Academy, which offers 200 programmes and professional courses for the constant increases of the teachers' qualification, organizes innovative experience exchange in the educational environment.

The universities of England and Scotland must publish the information about the condition of the academic programmes for the interested parties (students, employers, etc.) (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2014). According to the data of The European Higher Education-2012 report almost all higher education institutions of the UK publish their own Strategies of constant quality improvement and some of them publish education quality evaluation reports, including the critical and negative ones (Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2012, 68–69).

Integral parts of the quality assurance system of professional education and study are national qualification standards, based upon national professional standards; national



qualification framework, which levels are described in the terms of credit units. In the higher education the regulation of qualifications by the universities is performed with the help of the special document “Academic infrastructure”, which contains: the qualification framework of the higher education of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland; academic standards in different knowledge fields, in which the expected results of courses mastering are described, including skills and aptitude levels, competencies development; specification of academic programmes (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2014).

Thus, depending on the mission and the need of solving current tasks European universities choose the most attractive quality management models, but all of them should be based on the monitoring system, which allows to coordinate and improve its activity on the way of reaching the goals. The comparative analysis of the trends which should be monitored, as exemplified by some British universities, is given in table 1.

Table 1

The comparative analysis of the trends which should be monitored in UK universities

University of Glasgow (Scotland)	University of Oxford (England)	Institute of Technology Sligo (Ireland)
similar		
external examiners' reports		
students' feedback (polling results)		
institutional checkup reports		
alike		
The work of the commission as to the changes in programmes and academic courses	Annual reports of programmes examination	Annual reports about programmes realization
		Reports of the expert commissions on new programmes evaluation
different		
Personnel feedback	Work of programme committees in knowledge fields	Employers survey
Analysis of the academic achievements of the students relatively to the ECTS grade	Liaison managers visits (faculty deans)	Final-year students survey

So as it can be seen from the table the stable higher education quality monitoring trends in UK universities, despite their status and mission, are the practice of using independent experts while conducting the semester control with the further discussion of the examiners' reports for the elimination of the revealed drawbacks; constant polling of the students concerning different aspects of academic and accompanying processes at the establishment as the quality of academic courses and their teaching, the convenience of library halls' work etc.; analysis of institutional reports, which are generated by the expert teams during the inspection of the universities etc.

Besides the aforementioned ones in UK universities there may be noted also other monitoring trends, in particular, the internal review of the teaching and studying processes, evaluation module, compliance with the Scottish qualification framework and credits, abiding by the Bologna process principles, collaboration and exchanges, annual academic



monitoring, degrees distribution; annual analysis of the students' achievements in the study of modules and academic programmes; the number of appeals and complaints, the number of expelled grad school students etc.

Despite the differences in choosing the trends, the monitoring process in all UK universities has a cyclic character and such obligatory parts: review, examining, plan and its fulfillment (fig. 1).

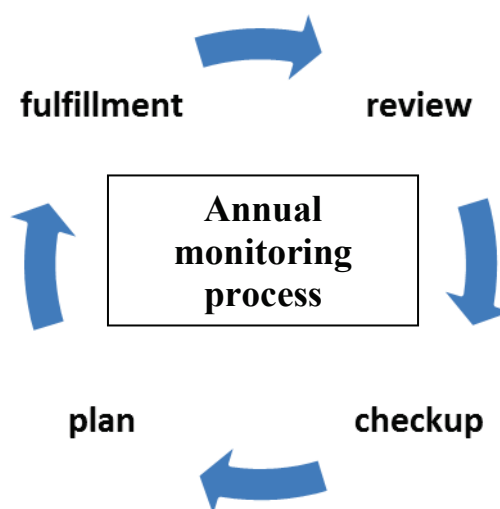


Fig. 1. Cyclic monitoring model in UK universities

In addition to this the annual monitoring report undergoes certain stages of forming, approving and hearing on different organizational levels and finally is published on the university's site with a free access. The report traditionally contains such parts: actual data, examples of better experience, introspection, improvement perspectives.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the conducted analysis makes it possible to conclude, that UK universities traditionally take advantage of a wide institutional autonomy, which together with a number of academic freedoms foresees the full responsibility for the quality of specialists training at the universities. Then the universities are free in their choice of a more attractive model of a higher education quality management, which depends on the institution's mission, strategy and its realization under the conditions of a tough competition on the education market and is directed towards the satisfaction of the requirements of all the beneficiaries: firstly the representatives of all the job market and students. At the same time all management models are based on the monitoring which allows to coordinate and improve the university's activity on the way of attaining goals.

Extremely significant is the fact that at the multiplicity of approaches to the higher education quality monitoring in UK universities, all of them use the cyclic model with clearly outlined stages and procedures of collecting, processing and providing information to all the interested parties. Undoubtedly, the discovered positive experience may be useful for the national higher education institutions, taking into account the national peculiarities and traditions of the development of the quality management systems on the institutional level.



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