

ACCREDITATION PROCESS IN KAZAKHSTAN: STATE REGULATION, PROCEDURES AND PROSPECTS

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Synopsis

Accreditation is recognized as the most important factor in improving the quality of education in Kazakhstan. Introduced transparent standards and procedures for quality assessment are giving clear guidance for construction of educational policy.

As the Kazakh universities have inflated self-concept, they need to develop a self-critical approach. It is recommended to conduct more frequent sociological studies of consumer satisfaction with the quality of educational services.

To form an effective system of education management it is planned:

- to implement the principles of corporate management, the system of public-private partnership in education and science*
- to strengthen the role of boards of trustees through the participation of parents, employers, NGOs, professional associations, etc.*
- to improve the monitoring of the education system, financial support for national independent ratings and participation in world rankings*
- to integrate science, education and production and commercialize intellectual property.*

Key words: *main indicators, management, regulation, self-assessment, quality.*

In modern society education is seen as a strategically important area of human activity, which forms the intellect of the nation, provides an innovative breakthrough in economy, its competitiveness. Therefore the creation of the system of quality assurance of education is the main purpose of the national model of accreditation in Kazakhstan.

The first experience of introducing the institution of public - professional accreditation in our country was brought by the Central Asian Foundation of Management Development (CAMAN, 2004.) Standards and criteria in the area of economic and business- education were suggested. Definite contribution to the development of quality assessment system of higher education was made by the corporation CARANA and Education Network EdNet (USA), Association of Business & Economic Education (USAID), TEMPUS and TACIS programs.

Today the accreditation on the basis of evaluation of the HEI activity outcomes by the community is recognized as the most important factor in improving the quality of education in Kazakhstan.

This assessment is based on the problem of determining the barriers existing between Kazakhstan education and the world educational area. It does not attempt to raise artificially the place of the HEI in the ranking through the use of appropriate

indicators, but impacts on the growth of popularity of HEI, enhances public confidence and consumers' trust to it in the long run. An independent evaluation of the university activity does not prescribe the control functions, for this the Committee of Control in the area of education at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic exists.

State regulation

Ability to determine the competitive advantages of educational institutions in the country is provided by state certification, national and international accreditation. Rating of educational institutions is also a mechanism to assess its competitiveness. Validity and reliability of the rating are based upon independent evaluation, calibrated methodologies and techniques of ranking [1].

The law "On education" reflects the forms of carrying out the accreditation, the right of HEIs to pass international accreditation in recognized by the international community foreign agencies. Extensive work to establish the legal basis of the accreditation process of higher school was carried out. The National Center for Educational Quality Assessment and the National Accreditation Centre (NAC) were established. National standards of accreditation were developed, the information is provided for training the experts to assess the quality of education. The national qualification system was formed, it includes professional standards, an independent assessment and standards of training (Fig. 1). In the regions of the country a series of trainings to prepare the HEIs for the self-assessment procedure was held.

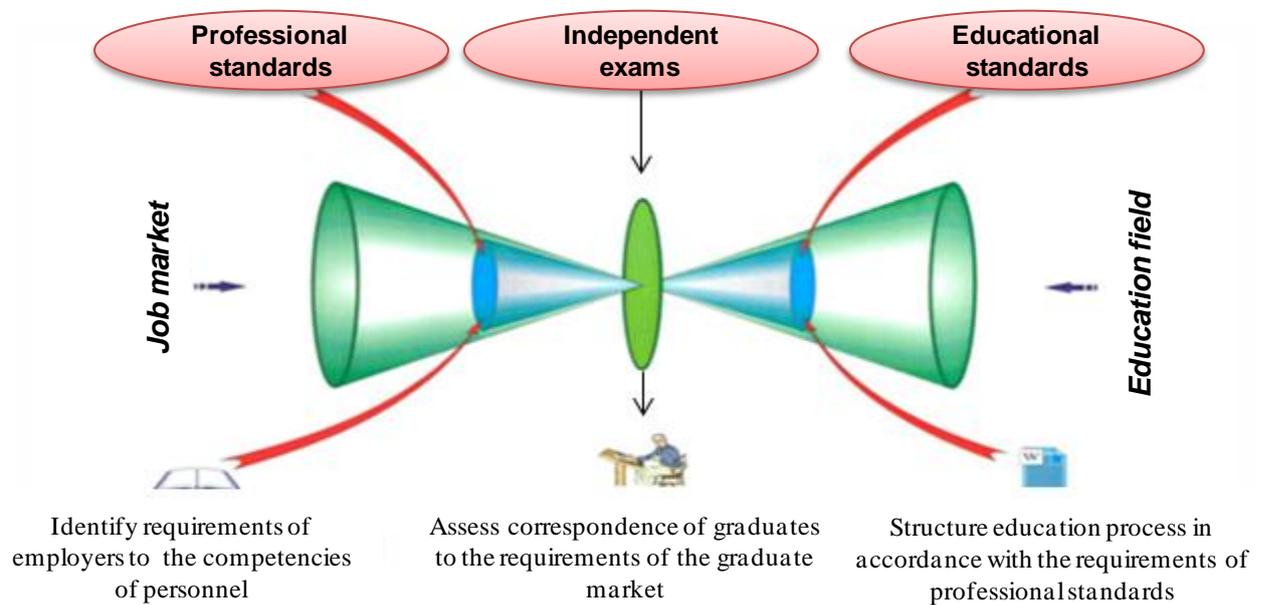


Figure 1 National Qualification System

The national model of education was formed, its elements are: creation of a network of innovation and research universities; formation of the corporate structure of the HEI ; introduction of wide-ranging autonomy of universities and the emergence of Boards of Trustees, Supervisory Boards; passing the procedures of institutional and specialized accreditation. [2]

Government repeatedly increased financing and took measures to increase the competitiveness of higher education. The State programs "Path to Europe" and "Intellectual Nation" are realized; training of human resources for the Program of Forced Industrial-Innovative Development of Kazakhstan (RK FIID SP) for 2010-2014 is implemented. The Law " On Science" was adopted. The quality of human capital and increase of the role of the teacher are in the center of attention.

What does the accreditation contribute to a Kazakh HEI?

- creates conditions for improvement of academic programs, abolishes the old ones
- facilitates the procedure of the transfer of credits and getting academic degrees
- confirms that the HEI or program meets international standards
- mobility of students and faculty is achieved
- increases the chances of obtaining grants and sponsorship from the state, private persons and companies.

Undoubtedly, accreditation enhances the educational standard of higher school, facilitates the mutual recognition of diplomas and makes it easier to integrate into the world educational area within the framework of the Bologna process. As representatives of a HEI, which has a considerable experience of international accreditation, we are inclined to public accreditation, which provides definite dividends:

- 1) recognition of the university by all stakeholders - employers, applicants, students, parents, and society as a whole;
- 2) reputation in the academic and corporate environment.

In the accreditation process alignment with the West

Countries are competing not only in goods and services that is in the strength of the economy, but also in the social values that formed mainly by the education system. The peculiarity of the international systems of accreditation is in the assessment of the quality of education based on the Mission of the HEI. At this the main attention is paid to the outcomes and effectiveness of academic programs [3].

For example, the United States focuses more on applied sciences and on the practical application of knowledge. Experts are interested in the prospects of development of the university, if there are possibilities for advancement, how dynamically does the HEI develop. The criteria and requirements contribute to the creation of innovations in academic activity.

In Western HEIs the scientific component is in the first place, the research budget is sometimes much greater than the cost of the learning process. Corporate links are very strong, close relationships with employers are formed, their opinions about the graduates are of paramount importance. Unfortunately, in our HEIs the participation of companies is limited to lecturing, management of practice, conducting classes on the basis of educational- scientific- industrial complexes.

Considering the European experience, the experts on accreditation in Kazakhstan include professionals and practitioners that represent the interests of society and pursue two purposes: 1) evaluation of the quality, i.e. establishing

compliance of the educational program with quality standards; 2) improving the quality, i.e. action program to improve the work of the HEI.

Our system is based on generally accepted standards of excellence for universities with an international reputation but with the consideration of diversity and legality of national standards [4]. Standards are characterized by dynamism, flexibility and the ability to make changes. The role of the university in shaping personal qualities of students and also the contribution of the HEI to the local economy and culture development is evaluated. In general, the procedure for passing the accreditation is as follows (Figure 2).

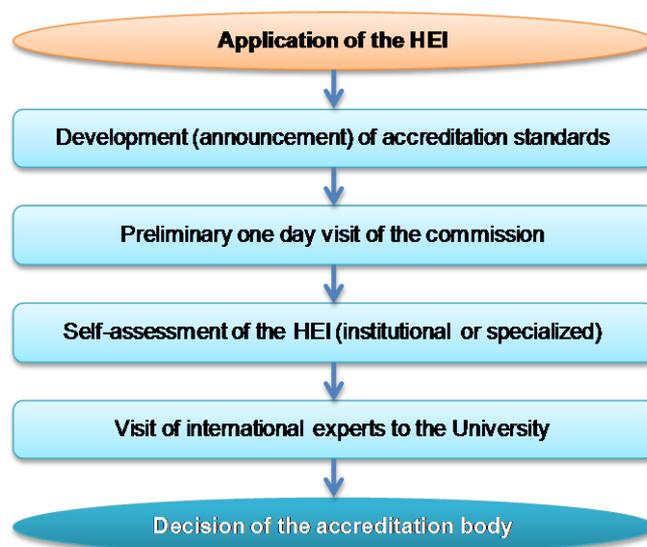


Figure 2 – Accreditation procedure

Self-assessment and self-criticism

A comparative analysis of accreditation systems of Western countries and our established practice show that the indicators reflect more the quantitative aspect of the HEI activity. The degree of development, progress of reforms, innovation in the work of the HEI, as well as the dynamics of moving forward are displayed insufficiently [5].

Usually Kazakh HEIs have an overstated self-assessment, the indicators do not reflect the real picture. Universities in the process of self-evaluation have to develop a self-critical approach, rather than doing self-promotion. It is necessary to use a positive, supportive and constructive approach. When testing and certifying the HEIs, hard conclusions are made, decisive actions are undertaken to close specialties. It is advisable to provide negative feedback in a constructive way to create the right atmosphere. The conclusions may include the offer of different solutions to specific problems.

It is needed to conduct more often sociological surveys to study students' and consumers' satisfaction by the quality of educational services. Interviews with students and teachers are a very rich source of information, but their judgments should be compared with information obtained from the academic community. The

survey of students provides the idea about the students' and the staff professionalism, program coherence, effectiveness of the organization of the educational process. The index of employment of graduates demonstrates how successful is the HEI in the formation of a competent professional.

Following the example of the universities that made a scientific - technological breakthrough in the development M.Auezov South-Kazakhstan State University (SKSU) directs its efforts at integration into the world educational area. It allowed achievement outcomes recognized by the academic environment and by all groups of consumers of outcomes. The quality of educational programs is confirmed by an international accreditation in German agency ASIIN. Positions of the university in national and global rankings substantially improved. In the QS ranking the university took the 601 + place among 2000 universities. In the ranking of the National Agency for Quality Assurance the University is among the four leaders.

Together with international colleagues from the USA, European and Asian countries, our teachers develop educational programs of double degree and academic mobility. The partners are the HEIs of the EU and Russia. The joint Master’s program with the Hamburg Higher School of Applied Sciences (HAW) «Renewable Energy Systems" and "Food science” is being implemented.

The University has the right to assign to the graduates the label “EuroBachelor “of the European Association ECTNA in chemistry and chemical technology. SKSU is a member of the European Association of Universities (EURASHE), a signatory of the Magna Charta, is a member of the Eurasian Association of Universities.

Being aware that the new formation specialist must possess not only professional knowledge but also freely navigate in modern technologies, in trends of world market, we are designing the training programs, taking into account the professional and socio-cultural competences (Fig. 3).

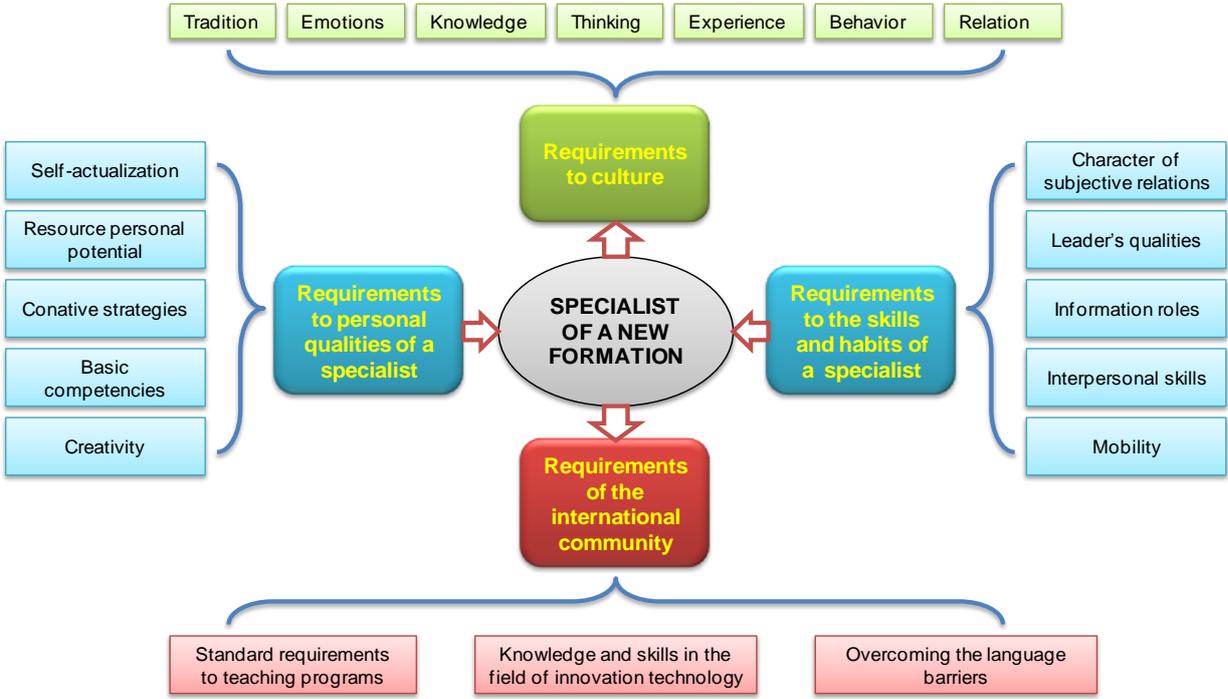


Figure 3 Model of a specialist of new formation

Quality assurance of educational services

Since 2004 the University has implemented the quality management system based on ISO 9001. After reviewing several models of self-assessment – the model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM), Malcolm Boldridge Award, the model of self-assessment according to Herbert Kells, the model of Tito Conti, President of the RK Award "Altyn Sapa", model ISO 9001(4) we have developed an integrated model of quality of educational processes.

It includes the following framework standards: policy and procedures of quality assurance of work; monitoring and periodic evaluation of educational programs and qualifications; assessment of students' knowledge level; quality assurance of the teaching staff; material and financial resources; the system of social protection of students; the system of informing the public.

This was our first step. Later we realized the dynamics of our advance and felt the need for institutional changes. The Strategic Plan of the University Development for 2011-2015 has been developed, the Mission and Quality Assurance Policy were revised.

Life prompted the need to form the corporate culture of the HEI, which is a complex fusion of beliefs, expectations, ideas, values and behavior of all employees. To do this we used the factors of the construction of a "successful organization", among which the main one is the development of partnerships with key leaders of the region, the management of the university as a business.

The ideas of the Bologna process influenced the development of mechanisms of internal and external evaluation of the university activity (6).

At self-assessment the efficiency of work and level of maturity of the quality system of the HEI were determined. Today there are all levers to influence on the organization of the learning process. We have developed our own view of the quality assurance system of education. Key indicators that reflect the quality of the university activity were determined (Figure 4):

-  1. The quality of educational programs - K1.
-  2. The quality of applicants and students - K2.
-  3. The quality of scientific- innovation activity - K3.
-  4. The quality of the methodological and logistical support - K4.
-  5. Quality of the staff - K5.
-  6. Quality of motivation of the staff - K6.
-  7. The quality of learning technologies - K7.
-  8. The quality of international cooperation and mobility - K8.
-  9. Quality of management and growth of the prestige of the university - K9.

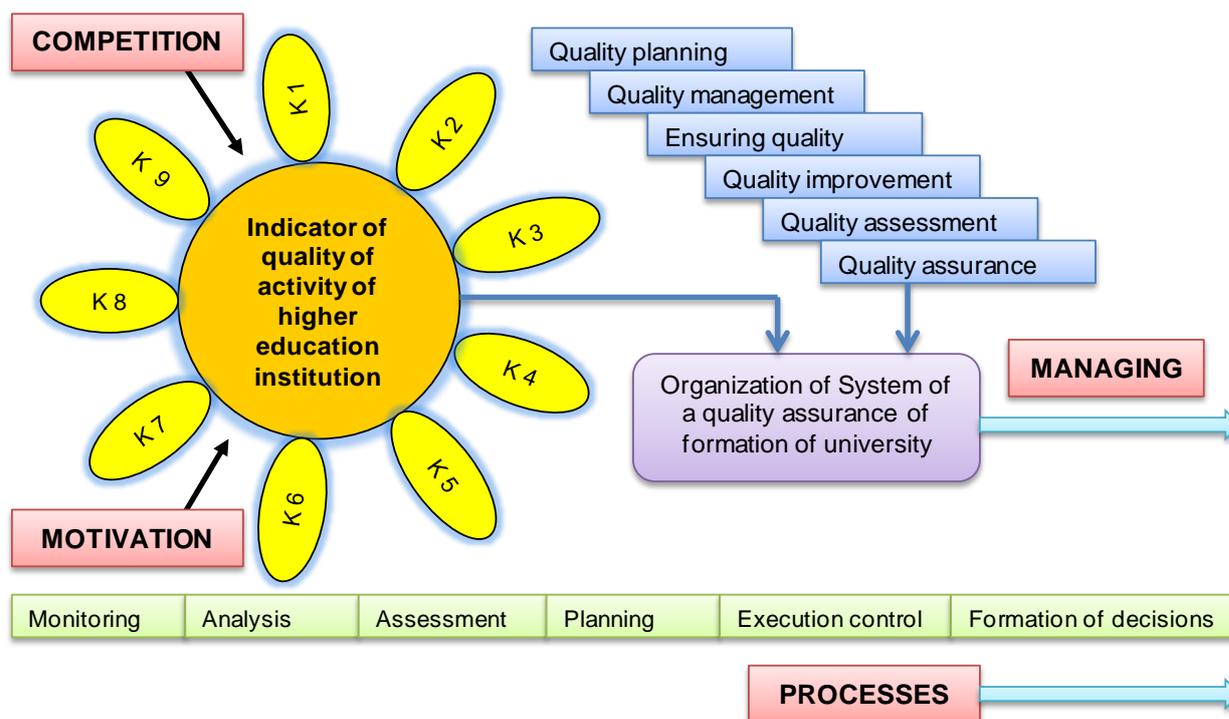


Figure 4 Key indicators of the quality of the university

We have developed evaluation criteria that are transparent and objective and which allow to evaluate comprehensively the whole activity of the HEI. As an example the Table 1 below gives a criterion for "The leadership role of university management". The criteria describe five levels of excellence. They assess the personal involvement of management into shaping mission, vision, core values, policy, goals and tasks in field of quality.

Table 1 Criterion "The leadership role of university management"

<i>Nº</i>	<i>Name of sub criteria</i>	<i>grade</i>
	Personal participation of the management of HEI in shaping the mission, vision, core values, policy, goals and tasks in the field of quality	10
Lev els	Description of levels of perfection of sub criteria	
1	The management has its own vision of the quality of the working processes and makes necessary decisions. This vision is not discussed with the personnel. Mission, vision, core values and policy in quality area are not clearly formulated and documented.	1-2
2	The management extends its vision to the personnel of the HEI. Questions of mission, vision, core values and policy in the field of quality are discussed with the personnel.	3-4
3	The management is the initiator of an extensive discussion with the personnel of mission, vision, core values and policy in the field of quality. Information for policy and strategy correction is	5-6

	systematically collected.	
4	For development and updating of strategy and policy all interested parties are involved by the management. Strategy and policy in the field of quality are analyzed and improved constantly.	7-8
5	In the HEI a complex system of collecting and analyzing different information functions. Measurable indicators and monitoring methods are determined. The received results are used for correction of policy and strategy.	9-10

It was not easy to achieve significant results. The management system of the university has been continuously improved in the process of extensive discussions at the meetings of the Academic Council, the Coordinating Council for quality; many valuable ideas were put forward. Our success was highlighted in the media; constant monitoring and assessment of quality of processes were carried out.

LARGE SCALE TASKS

The State Program of Education Development of the RK for 2011-2020 states that by 2015- 50%, by 2020- 65% of HEIs will pass the independent national institutional accreditation in accordance with international standards. The share of HEIs that have passed independent national specialized accreditation according to international standards by 2015 will be 20%, by 2020 - 30% [7]. The success of the accreditation is provided by:

- implementation of the principles of corporate management, of the system of public-private partnership
- strengthening the role of Boards of Trustees through the participation of employers, parents, NGOs, professional associations, etc.
- improvement of the monitoring of the education system, financial support of national independent ratings

Serious work on the harmonization of national standards for accreditation with the world ones, in particular, with the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG) is ahead. Ministry of Education and Science is working to improve the legal basis of accreditation of HEIs, in particular, to determine the mechanisms of registration (certification) of the accreditation bodies.

The Register of accrediting agencies, which will be submitted to the Kazakhstani market of educational services, is being made. This is very important, because today in addition to NAC there appeared accrediting bodies, differently positioning themselves in the area of the quality assurance of education.

To implement the targeted plans we need radical measures of intensifying the accreditation process, implementation of total quality management principles:

1. We think, for Kazakhstan the most effective option is organization of associations by HEIs on the basis of allied profiles, where uniform rules and requirements to the level of training human resources will be worked out. For all members of the Association they will be mandatory and normative. The Association

must by all means include Western experts. In the course of time, these rules should be improved, because there are significant changes in the economy and society in whole under the influence of scientific -technological innovations, globalization, labor migration, internationalization of many spheres of life.

2. In maintaining the quality of educational services and the impact on training the specialists the role of media, NGOs, local community and other public organizations is essential. At accreditation the opinion of the regional authorities and the community should be considered. If high school graduates and college graduates go to study to well-known megacities - Astana and Almaty, then something is wrong, when there is training in the same specialties in the region.

3. Usually the support of graduates is very significant, unfortunately, we have organized this movement weakly, the Alumni Associations should be more active to help their alma mater and to assist in the financing of science and education programs, as well as purely moral support through media, virtual forum, Internet-conference is necessary.

We are still at the beginning of the complex path of accreditation, the integration into the European Higher Education Area is ahead. This will create the conditions for recognition of qualifications of our specialists both abroad and in foreign companies operating in Kazakhstan. We are determined to meet all the challenges of globalization and to direct our efforts to improve the quality of educational services and to create a platform for innovative academic environment.

Questions for discussion

1. How self-criticism of High school can be appreciated? Which indicators can characterize the self-criticism of High school?
2. Whose opinion is more proper: employer, parents, and representatives of the public?
3. Whether different questioners of employers, parents and representatives of the public can form objective opinion about High school?
4. Is it necessary to hold sociological research more often, because it is time-consuming procedure? Will they be necessary during accreditation?
5. Whether in the countries where the government regulation of High school is harder are more advantages to pass accreditation quicker and effective because the government invests money and controls their use?
6. For example, in German agency ASIIN the European High school and our Kazakhstan University are accredited at the same specialty. Whether the national differences and peculiarities of education programs should be taken into account?
7. Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan have created the Custom union, Single economic space. Is it advisable to form single system of qualification basing on national models?
8. The authors of this paper consider that for successful passing of accreditation is necessary to form reliable system of guarantees of management quality of High School. Is it so?

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