

## THE PROCESS OF EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION AS INSTRUMENTS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN MACEDONIA

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### SUMMARY

*This work is focused in the public policies in education in relation to accreditation and evaluation higher education institutions in Macedonia. Since their establishment as toll for quality assurance in higher education, Law on higher education 2000, until today these tools do not have their final shape and role. For the time being we have different practices about their normative aspect within education institutions and especially for their functional aspect in relation to scientific-research and education activities.*

*Especially issues of external evaluation and self-assessment create complex debates in the university and scientific circles. The question is to what level these tools stimulate internal self-review in the study cycles, in curricula, syllabuses and especially the work of teachers and students?*

*Part of the scientific opinion in the Macedonian universities opposed the Governmental changes on the Law about the function of the accreditation and evaluation, while part of the students really supported the idea.*

*This paper work will address some key questions, like: What are the main objective educational policy makers? Which is the real contribution of the Ministry in the quality assurance in higher education? Which are the good evaluation strategies in higher education institutions for quality assurance?*

*As a Case Study, will be used the South East European University.*

*General opinion is that accreditation and evaluation as tools of Bologna Process are supporters and bases of educational reforms in Macedonia, which often are done under influence of external factors.*

**Keywords:** Higher education policy, Accreditation, Evaluation, Strategies, Quality Assurance, SEEU

### 1. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

When talking about education we should emphasize that higher education is not like the elementary and secondary education. For our living conditions with 17,000 MKD average personal income, it is very expensive. We can say that this is only an opinion, and the other opinion is based the means that higher education in Macedonia receives can not ensure its quality. Universities must meet specific criteria that are verified and are subject to international standards, and to agreements supported by the developed industrial western societies. Today, the quality assurance in higher education for all countries as well as for Macedonia has its public interest dimension. This interest applies not only to students but also to employers, from public and private sector. "Employers want to know what students learn and the skills they have acquired during their studies" (Jackson, Stephan, 2009). Inclusion of learning in practical context of their needs and work.

Specificity of higher education consists of the fact that it prepares staff of vital interest for the development and future of the community, doctors, leaders, engineers, lawyers, economists, computer scientists ... Interestingly, how Adam Smith address this issue. He links education with the division of labor.

"Although the state does not win get anything from management and education of the lower strata of the population, this task would be a great social value. However, the state does not benefit less from education groups. As much the population is educated the less it is prone to fanaticism and superstitions, which often pose the greatest threat to social order, especially in countries where ignorance reigns. " (Smith, A., 2008). These words of Adam Smith will be proven best by the industrial capitalism, whose development was based on population education, opening schools for everyone.

Education, for the moment, becomes a matter of priority for all societies. In socialism, the quality assurance in higher education could never be questioned. It was unknown topic. However, a question that more and more is discussed in circles of experts is the problem of financing higher education. In that context are the debates about public and private universities. European experience shows that if universities are funded by external sources they are more autonomous (they provide part of means from projects projects, research scientific work, partnerships with public administration enterprises etc.).

The importance in ensuring the quality of universities lies in many transforming factors of the system in which students gain most of the knowledge. If this transformation is fluid and constantly has innovations and best practices in the process of teaching and learning, then it's positive and effect is achieved. The graduates and researchers will be progressive, successful in their businesses and professions. The entire process of building up the quality in higher education will have its own meaning if graduates are inventive, acquire skills. From here, it should not be expected that higher education will prepare future graduates to seek work only from state, but they have to find, create jobs for themselves and others. It is the quality of higher education in the West and the new pulse of post-modernism. Obligation of the state is just to create alternative solutions and paths formal free. So equal environment, legal state and space for study, research and business. Do we have to think about the future of our children, we as teachers and our social and political circle?

## **2. EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN THE FIELD OF ACCREDITATION AND EVALUATION**

Now, at the time of major social esteem, at the time of major global challenges like the case with Fukushima, educational reforms and self-evaluation of every important things to our future are needed more and more. Existential and life challenges require perfection in educational system, vocational education, of teaching staff or in other words require staff training in accordance with the requirements for implementation of the requirements for a greater quality and higher efficiency of secondary education. The problem of quality assurance in higher education not imposed only by the states, but it is initiated by teachers themselves, professors, students etc.. It is interesting to note the example of Ireland. The quality of education in Ireland has been depicted as the primary issue before 20-30 years. The purpose of this was duable. Initially to gain quality and efficient framework for industry and services of the so-called "third wave" and as the second objective, to enable higher education staff stay and work at home. Here certainly helped much the production by heavy investment in higher education and general education, which as a result has high quality of workforce, researchers, engineers, programmers, designers.

### **3. EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES**

The accreditation and evaluation process was decided in Europe in the 90. Some states were previously later and some earlier. The EUA (European University Association) experience in the field of evaluation methodologies are guided by some central strategic questions:

The main question here is how and universities recognize their work. This deals mostly with understanding the needs of internal obligations to provide quality. Revision teams watch institutional policies and practices regarding the quality and other relevant processes in terms of actors (teachers, students, deans, etc.) and procedures.

But now in times of great changes, the main question of educational philosophy is that how the institution changes toward the improvement of quality-students and the community, employers.

### **4. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN MACEDONIA**

However, in order to define thoroughly this concept in our country, as regards quality of higher education in Macedonia we must say that it started to be discussed in 1997 after the European Union initiatives for transformation of higher education in the countries of post-socialist bloc. Then in the framework of the program so-called PHARE was implemented a Multi Country project for Quality Assurance attended by all countries emerging from socialism to central and eastern Europe.

Evaluation Agency and the Council for accreditation of higher education is located in 2001. But even after 10 years still the process of accreditation and evaluation of new study programs, especially the third cycle is in front of a major dilemma which is pushing the controversy and creates doubt, major division and theoretical and media confrontation, and even street protests between Academic and government workers. Quality is seen in the efficiency of the institution, level of education of the population, number and rates of graduates, the position of graduates in the labor market, scientific awards for teachers. The quality of academic work is reflected through the scientific work to a high standard and the large number of graduates. They possess the intellectual skills that can materialize as resources and it represents strength, says (Weber, M., 2007) Satre calls the educated people to perform complex work, specific social roles as intellectuals or knowledge technicians "They represent the marrow of the social progress" (Satre, JP, 1985).

In Macedonia the demand for degrees is increasing. However, the fact that the majority of them find employment abroad. Today, knowledge of information technology, foreign languages, the diploma course, are safer arguments for a visa and securing jobs in the West.

In England e.g., almost 60-80% of those who occupy key locations, the highest posts in the army, church, court, and civil services were educated in Oxford or Cambridge or in schools paying the fee. The number of students in Macedonia in last years is increasing.

The government has opened the doors and has virtually opened faculties in towns even with 10 inhabitants. Critics of the Public Opinion especially of academic staff addressed to the Minister of Education and government are that in this way is getting lower the quality of higher education and thus contests are announced first and new programs are opened in those areas and then they start searching the place and create the conditions.

The number of students enrolled and graduates is gradually increasing. From the general number only 35.2 graduated on time and 64.8 after the deadline for completion of undergraduate studies.

*Tabela 1. Number of graduate students in 2007, 2008, 2009 (Source:Drazven Zavod za Statistika na Republika Makedonija)*

Year	Number	Full-time	Part-time	Females	Males
2009	10232	80,9 %	19,1%	57,8%	42,2%
2008	9456	80,1%	19,1%	59,8%	41,2%
2007	8360	79,3%	20,7%	62%	38%

In the last three years there is a trend of growth in the number of graduates which is due to the increase in the number of registrants in the past 10 years with the establishment of new universities and liberalization of conditions for those who wish to enroll into universities.

According to the State Statistical Office, the number of graduated students at higher schools and faculties in 2008 compared with 2007 was increased by 29.6% and the number of graduated students at higher schools and faculties in 2009, compared with 2008, decreased by 5.6%. Since 2008 and up to 2009 the increase of magistrates is 56.3. Specialists are only 3% or 13 persons.

*Tabela 2. Source:Drazven Zavod za Statistika na Republika Makedonija*

Year	Number	Females	Males	Social sciences	Technical-technological sciences	Humanities, Mathematical Natural and Mathematical Sciences, medical sciences, biotechnical sciences
2008	323	55,1%	44,9%	52,8%	18,6%	20,1
2009	425	56,6 %	43,4%	52,7 %	18,4 %	19,9 %

In our country Macedonia, it is growing the number of applicants in higher education and for this have contributed the first private universities, particularly SEE University. Now we can talk about liberal approach to all stakeholders in higher education. But the question is how educational service providers and policy makers as the philosophy and educational planning are prepared for change? When we speak about private universities, it is set out the initial question about the money available to them and whether this money is provided only by students? If so, then this is a bad news for their role in the public and their long-term interest.

We mentioned above that the process of accreditation and evaluation in Macedonia is focused in 2001. Thus, this is as a result of building a joint space of European education where as a central place withholds the higher education. The idea is the largest student mobility, curricula, teachers, the transfer of knowledge, etc. As the basis of these initiatives to be operationalised was the Bergen Conference of Ministers of Education in 2005. The National Program for the development of education in Macedonia 2005-2015 (Page 272, 274, 2005) quality assurance should be done at institutional, national and international level.

In the current laws on Higher Education of 2001 and 2008 the processes of evaluation and accreditation were separated. There existed an Accreditation Board and the evaluation Agency. While the Accreditation Board normally functioned, the evaluation agency worked occasionally. Sometimes, as was the case between the years 2004 - 2007 the board never held any meetings. With the new law of February 11, 2011, formed a joint body for the Evaluation and Accreditation (Board) to establish quality assessment system of higher education.

This system includes:

Assessment to higher education quality, leadership, finances, academic activities, Approval, certificate, admission to academic institutions, their study programs accreditation. Evaluation is based on methods that are evaluative as Evaluation and Self-evaluation.

## **5. EXTERNAL EVALUATION<sup>1</sup>**

Major debates in university circles caused the issue of external evaluation. During the realization of the external evaluation the goal is to achieve a rough quality in the joint European space in higher education. In this case changes in the new law have the purpose in accepting and substantiating the European Association guideline practiced in the evaluation of higher education. In addition to Article 69 of the law is also defined the use of distinct organizations and international associations which carry insurance on higher education and quality assurance.

External evaluation is done through committees in certain scientific fields consisting of at least three distinguished professors from international universities. (Official magazine of RM)

Composition of the Council of 23 members of whom 9 are from universities, interuniversity conferences, 9 by the government of which 6 are university professors, two of the Academy of Sciences, 2 students. The presence of students in this institution is done for the first time.

## **6. NECESSITIES FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY**

Today there is great need that through the distinctive ways teachers to enhance the quality of their programs through active partnership with students, employers and professional bodies. Employers, through cooperation in practical work, turn out to be a practical look at the suitability of courses with social needs of the time. Professional bodies can help ensure that standards are kept at the national level and now separately in the second and the third cycle, increasingly at the international level. Students themselves are the main partners, since they are the link between these three groups and they are dynamic element in the process of their education. (Tuning, 2010)

## **7. ACTIVITIES TO INCREASE THE QUALITY IN SEEU**

At the SEE University there is a continuous and active engagement of students in its management processes and raising the quality. This commitment is seen as a very important part of their development. Professors participate or run mostly on researches dealing with the processes of assessment and enhancement of quality in higher education. A range of internal monitoring procedures are part of open systems where implications are discussed relating to improvements, such as questionnaires for student satisfaction, student discussions and group interviews, the views of staff, review of student evaluations, etc, review of annual programs, which can include both students and teaching staff, etc. In many of the departments of education, academic staff carries out continuing professional development through attending short courses, conferences and seminars. (Tuning, 2010)

At the SEE University teaching and the work with students, its quality thanks are the most important factors for its mission. In this regard, the main purpose is to use best European and American practices, innovation and methods that enable greater knowledge acquisition and gaining skills.

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<sup>1</sup> Exactly the external evaluation was an evil apple between the Ministry of education and Universities. A number of university senates refused changes in the new Law of the external evaluation separately, stressing that this violates the autonomy of the Universities. There were demonstrations on streets. Now there are complaints in the constitutional Judge. But the external evaluation of national agencies to ensure quality, developed in consultation basis, provides an opportunity for reflection and improvement in personal and departmental level, although most education professionals in the European Group for Project Harmonization favor an easy impact from outside.

Reviewing processes by colleagues under the supervision of a national quality agency can offer opportunity and motive for a consultative and positive review of teaching within an institution and can serve as a reminder that universities are the subject of some rigorous connections to the real world as it is in every other institution. (Tuning, 2010)

The focus of supervision is in the following issues:

To support the University's strategic goal and the improvement and continuous development of learning and teaching Provide quality assurance test at the faculty and University Ensuring that the learning experience of students is the highest level in each faculty to steadily support the developing of the individual staff to ensure that learning and teaching is inclusive within the University's commitment to equal opportunity.

As the practice of observation are a range of activities: lectures, small group instruction, practice hours and hours in the lab. Every member of staff is under supervision at least once a year, as part of the formal process. The observers are from the university management and faculties, mostly teachers. Within the University there exists the quality support office which provides support, training for monitors and compiles academic procedures as on how to do this activity, how to discuss the observation from the observer and the one who is observed before and after the observation. So, simply saying, this process is understood as an exchange of professional experiences in order to help learning. The University has also provided an external expert who pays a 10-days visit every semester to the university campus where s/he gathers a material as an evidence for the job. The main idea of the external evaluator is that the University must maintain high standards of education, dedication and innovative teaching methodologies. Through this it should be linked the evaluation of the curricula and syllabus together with the evaluation of students. Management of quality assurance (QA), should be focused on appropriate external review, the curriculum and then be updated and harmonized through assessment. It should continue to support teaching and learning through the process of observation, but by focusing on improving the teachers, schedule, skills-development of the observers, compiling a report and information feedback. Michel Bourse (Quality Report, November, 2010).

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