

EUROPEAN STUDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS AS STAKEHOLDERS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКІ СТУДЕНТСЬКІ АСОЦІАЦІЇ ЯК ФАКТОР ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ ЯКОСТІ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

The impact of students' public organizations on the quality assurance and monitoring of higher education is an urgent scientific challenge. The article describes the functioning of the international and national students' organizations, first of all, the European Student Union, mechanisms of influence of the students' public organizations on the European policy of quality assurance of educational services and their monitoring, outlines the functional, organizational and structural features of the students' organizations of the appropriate type, their relevance to the process of assessment directly at the universities. It has been found that a higher education applicant who has a recommendation from the European Union of Students is always a member of the expert group of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education for the external monitoring of the activities of the member agencies. The process and criteria for the selection of the students by which they are selected into the national expert groups on higher education quality assurance are described, based on an analysis of the applied experience of the European students' organizations. It has been found that the mechanism for selecting students as experts in most countries implies the availability of recommendations from the relevant students' organization, work experience in a higher education institution, expertise in the principles and rules of higher education quality assurance, the proper level of foreign language proficiency. The most important factor in selecting a student to participate in the work of the expert groups for the evaluation of the quality of higher education is the special training. National student unions encourage students to participate in the work of the expert groups at the national and international levels. The mechanism provides for the creation of a special student pool, whose representatives join the work of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

Key words: higher education, quality of higher education, public organization, student public organization, quality assurance of higher education.

Вплив студентських громадських організацій на забезпечення та моніторинг якості вищої освіти є актуальною науковою задачею. У статті описано функціонування міжнародних та національних студентських організацій, насамперед Європейського студентського союзу, механізми впливу студентських громадських організацій на загальноєвропейську політику забезпечення якості освітніх послуг та їх моніторинг, окреслено функціональні та організаційно-структурні особливості студентських організацій відповідного типу, їх дотичність до оцінки освітнього процесу безпосередньо в університетах. З'ясовано, що здобувач вищої освіти, який має рекомендацію від Європейського союзу студентів, завжди входить до складу експертної групи Європейської асоціації із забезпечення якості вищої освіти для реалізації зовнішнього моніторингу діяльності агентств-членів. На основі аналізу прикладного досвіду діяльності європейських студентських організацій описано процес та критерії відбору студентів, за якими їх обирають у національні експертні групи із забезпечення якості вищої освіти. З'ясовано, що механізм відбору студентів в якості експертів у більшості країн передбачає наявність рекомендацій відповідної студентської організації, досвід роботи / практики у закладі вищої освіти, експертні знання щодо принципів та правил забезпечення якості вищої освіти, рівень володіння іноземними мовами. Найголовнішим фактором відбору студента до участі у роботі експертних груп з оцінювання якості вищої освіти є проходження спеціального навчання. Національні студентські союзи рекомендують студентів до участі в роботах експертних груп на національному та міжнародному рівнях. Механізм передбачає створення спеціального студентського пулу, представники якого приєднуються до роботи Європейської асоціації із забезпечення якості вищої освіти.

Ключові слова: вища освіта, якість вищої освіти, громадська організація, студентська громадська організація, забезпечення якості вищої освіти.

УДК 378.94 (045)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32843/2663-6085-2019-16-2-22>

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Target setting. The modern state is transforming under the influence of the globalization and regionalization processes. The humanitarian aspect of the activities carried out by the modern state changes the traditional content of the state functions, on the one hand, while continuing to coordinate and control various public goods. On the other hand, new trends allows public organizations to participate in the process of managing public goods such as education, medicine etc. Higher education, as a form of public good provided by the state, remains one of the priorities of the functioning of the modern state as a social institution, because it is the most important factor in the development of society, which influences

the competitiveness of the nation and determines its positions in the various world rankings. Higher education is a specific factor which make an important influence on political stability, formation of cultural identity, economic well-being of the nation. According to the determination given in the National Education Glossary «higher education» is «a specific socio-humanitarian institute through which knowledge, norms, modes of activity, behaviors and cultural values are transmitted» [1, c. 38]. Higher education is the social asset which can increase the potential of socio-economic and socio-cultural development of the country.

In this context, the quality of higher education provided within the state is an important element of the

higher education system, as quality itself is a universal tool for measuring the functions that underpin the higher education system. The fundamental changes influence functioning of this social institute, first of all, regarding the system of higher education quality assurance and monitoring process of higher education quality assurance. Traditionally, especially in the post-Soviet countries, the system of quality assessment of higher education consists of state actors, that is, an «external evaluation» of higher education quality assessment provided in overarge higher education institution. Ministries or specialized public bodies designed to guarantee the quality of higher education. Transformation of the state as a social regulatory institution made it possible to use another tool for assessing the higher education quality. Non-profit, non-governmental organizations have become a new actor in the public administration system: they perform external assessments of higher education institutions. Thus, a complex two-factor system of higher education quality assessment is gradually being formed.

One of the elements of such control and monitoring can be the activities carried out by non-governmental organizations, which have the necessary tools and mechanisms to influence compliance with educational services. For example, in the European Higher Education Area, such organizations are the following: the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, the European Association of Higher Education Institutions, the European Association of Universities, the European Union of Universities.

Not only associations of universities and professional networks, but also students' associations tackles upon the issues of higher education quality assurance, become a new but important element of the quality assurance system of higher education.

Actual scientific researches and issues analyses. The research works by V. Andrushchenko, L. Vashchenko, O. Vashulenko, I. Ziazun, S. Kalashnikova, V. Kremen, V. Lugovyv, V. Radkevich, O. Slyusarenko, Zh. Talanova and others are devoted to the study of the problems of the higher education system in the modern world, its transformation and quality assurance. While describing the modern universities, S. Kalashnikova notes that they operate on the principles of openness and partnership as well as on a new model of higher education governance, which «includes – many levels and many actors (participants); rules, procedures and mechanisms for their interaction to achieve common goals» [2, c. 9]. Thus, the researcher recognize the role of different stakeholders in the functioning of higher education.

The problem of new actors in the sphere of higher education quality assurance is specified in «Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area», adopted in 2005. The Standards is a major recommendation document for the external and internal quality assurance sys-

tems in higher education. This document make it is possible not only for the state actors but also for non-governmental organizations operating in the relevant field within the European Higher Education Area to apply the regulations.

Different types of public associations and non-governmental as well as their influence on the social subjects and processes are considered in the scientific papers of M. Bunchuk, V. Gorbatenko, V. Gura, G. Zelenko, A. Kolodiy, I. Kresina, M. Mikhalchenko, F. Rudych, G. Shchedrova, O. Khusnutdinova, S. Teleshun, O. Chuvardinsky and others.

The term «non-governmental organization» means an organization that is not owned, directed by or affiliated to any governmental organization, and operates on a not-for-profit basis. G. Willetts states that the ngo in the sphere of higher education is basically connected with the education system and it is engaged in the processes in the proper sphere: «The most common distinction is between operational and campaigning NGOs. This may be interpreted as the choice between small-scale change achieved directly through projects and large-scale change promoted indirectly through influence on the political system» [14, c. 28].

Thus, the scientists are interested in researching the transformation of higher education quality assurance. Moreover, the theme of the new stakeholders' impact in the relevant sphere is interdisciplinary and it is interesting to many scientists. Nevertheless, as for separate type of the stakeholders – *students' organiozations* – the theme is not highlighted in the academic papers.

So, **the research objective** is to analyze the experience and functions of monitoring and higher education quality assessment by the students' non-governmental organizations operating in Europe and in Ukraine. Putting this problem in the context is important because Ukraine adapts to the requirements of the European Higher Education Area, which objectively stipulates the need to use the potential of NGOs to act as an indicator of higher education quality assurance.

The statement of basic materials. The European Students' Union (ESU) is an organization bringing together «47 national student unions from 39 countries» [6]. National student union organizations of the European Union are open to students irrespective of their form of study in their respective national countries and «from political beliefs, religion, ethnic or cultural background, sexual orientation or social status» [7]. The purpose of this organization is to protect the educational, social, economic and cultural rights of students vis-à-vis national and European institutions, in particular the European Union, the Bologna Process Support Group, the Council of Europe and UNESCO. And as higher education decisions are increasingly taken at the European level, the role of ESU as the stakeholder of a single pan-European student platform is constantly growing.

The international organization performs the following functions:

- «bringing together, educating and informing national student representatives about the development of higher education policy at European level;
- organizing seminars, trainings, campaigns and conferences concerning students;
- conducting European research, partnership projects and campaigns;
- production of various publications for students, politicians and specialists of higher education» [6].

The European Student Union was founded in 1982 by 7 national student unions (Norway, UK, Switzerland, Iceland, France, Denmark and Austria), then called the Western European Student Information Bureau (WEESIB). Political changes in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s affected WEESIB status as the organization allowed membership of national unions of students from the former republic.

In February 1990, WEESIB was reorganized into the European Student Information Bureau (ESIB) [6]. As the European communities began to strengthen and systematize their influence on higher education in Europe and, of course, with the start of the Bologna Process, the goal of a purely information-based organization – the exchange of information at national and pan-European level – has evolved into a political organization reflecting the views and interests of the students.

In May 2007, it was decided that the ESIB should be renamed, since the abbreviation ESIB no longer symbolized the work of the organization, and ESIB changed its name to ESU. At an extraordinary meeting of the Board held in Florence, Italy, from 28 to 30 September 2014, it was decided to formally dissolve Austrian ESIB [6].

On December 27, the official register of Belgium (Moniteur Belge) announced the registration of the European Union of Students in Europe and the European Student Union (ESU) as a one entity. Since then, these two organizations are one legal entity that uses the same name and abbreviation «European Student Union – ESU». The latest merger measures took place at the extraordinary Council meetings in Cardiff in October 2017 and at the regular Jerusalem Council meetings in December 2017.

The organization operates on several levels, before individual national organizations are gradually integrated into one main executive committee, comprehensive organizational reforms have been carried out in connection with the formation of the new European Student Union (ESU). This is due to the large contribution of student representatives to the work of ESU: this organization has become a major participant in the policy-making process in European higher education institutions, which represents the interests of students.

In ESU2017 Policy Paper on Quality of Higher Education (amended), the organization formulates views on the external and internal evaluation of the

quality of education. From the point of view of the European Union of students, «quality assurance systems and procedures should focus on higher education institutions that support and facilitate student learning outcomes through teaching teaching and assessment methods» [11]. Quality assurance should include: «improving the quality of the learning process, including curricula, the learning opportunities available to students; creation and promotion of quality culture in higher education institutions; staff development; increasing mutual trust between the subjects of higher education; ensuring mutual recognition; enhancing students' participation in decision-making, promoting comparability of qualifications and addressing the social dimension» [11].

Moreover, as a result of the Bologna Process and an increase in the degree of institutional autonomy, quality assurance should also include «accountability of higher education institutions». At the same time, higher education institutions should provide relevant information about their activities and students' performance and take into account the views of the stakeholders and the society at large. «Key measures of internal quality assurance systems should include monitoring and evaluation of the activities of all elements of the educational process» [11].

A student who has a recommendation from the European Union of Students is always a member of the Expert Group of the European Association for the Quality of Higher Education (ENQA) for the external monitoring of the activities of the member agencies [5]. The European Students' Union forms a group of the experts from the students in the process of special training for those who have applied in accordance with publicly available criteria, including: some work experience or practice in the governing bodies of a higher education institution (academic council), expertise in the principles and rules of higher education quality assurance, language competence (the proper level of English is necessary to be able to carry out international accreditation).

The European Students' Union is actively cooperating with the European Higher Education Quality Assurance Association and other European quality assurance agencies, for example in the higher education quality monitoring activities provided for in the procedural requirements of the European University Association. 26 students from 28 different European countries have been selected to be included in the Higher Education Quality Assessment Team, who have had relevant training and who represents different disciplines and industries. The expert group is also gender balanced: 55% women and 45% men [7].

The European Students' Union has developed a number of important instructions that students use to participate in quality assurance processes. Guidance for students in the field of quality assurance is an important document for expert students employed

by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The document provides information on the quality assurance procedures in higher education, the varieties of assessment, the role and tasks of students in the process, and the necessary skills and qualifications to participate in the monitoring of higher education.

It should be noted that this organization acts as an element of the external quality assurance system of higher education, which, in order to ensure more sustainable and balanced results, should be combined with institutional (internal) evaluation and accreditation of programs. At the same time, the European Students' Union acts as a non-profit-oriented organization and accordingly has no competitors in its field, while at the same time the organization takes full responsibility for its own findings and recommendations as set out in the reports.

The European Students' Union is a member of the E4 Group, which in 2008 facilitated the creation of the European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education, EQAR (EQAR, 2018), aimed at organizing all public, private and thematic agencies on quality assurance of education working or planning to work in Europe. The European Registry provides for the selection of universities as auditors by different quality assurance agencies, even located in another EU country [8].

At the national level, the higher education quality assessment has been implemented by students from several European countries, including Britain, Scandinavia, Germany. In Finland, the Finnish Higher Education Assessment Board operates, enabling students to be experts in the quality assessment of the educational programs. But there are some limitations: students are not participants of the institutional assessment of universities. This is due to the fact that initially the institutional assessment was planned to be conducted internationally without student involvement [10].

In Denmark, student involvement in evaluating educational programs began as a pilot project of the Danish Evaluation Institute (DEI). According to the Law on the Danish Institute of Assessment, to participate in quality monitoring, experts must have some professional experience that students do not have. On this basis, a pilot project was developed to ensure balanced control, to involve students in the work of the assessment teams.

In Norway, the Norwegian Quality Assurance Agency for Education appoints students to become a member of the expert groups that accredit higher education institutions and special audit teams. There is a Network Norway Council organization, which task is to involve students in the activities carried out by the expert groups while assessing the universities.

The criteria for selecting a student for becoming a member of a higher education quality examination team are entirely based on his/her individual abilities. In Finland and Norway, for example, the decision to

elect a student to become a member of the expert committee is taken by the Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency, but it is based on the recommendations of national student organizations. In Sweden, university representatives themselves recommend students, but the quality assurance agency may reject the application. An interesting feature is that experts cannot be recommended from the academic staff, unlike the students. At the same time there is a requirement to have the recommendation of the national student organization.

Student selection criteria include a good level of knowledge of the education system and high education quality assessment, management experience, for example, in student organizations. Students as members of expert groups should have some experience in the field of study/specialty being evaluated. Institutional audit and assessment are of great importance for the work of students and decision-makers at the institutional level.

In the Scandinavian countries, training is also required for all selected members of the expert group, including the students. The training examines assessment theory, methods and practice, individual project planning and other relevant issues [10].

The experience of the Scandinavian countries in the effective and useful participation of students in the process of monitoring and analyzing the quality of higher education demonstrates the necessity to provide the student with knowledge of their responsibilities, sufficient time to make decisions and identify individual areas of work in the assessment process. Developing appropriate recommendations and guidelines has not only enhanced students' knowledge and skills, but also provided some continuity in student experience as assessment experts.

In the UK, students are involved in the national quality assurance system both internally and externally through a variety of mechanisms: systematic student representation at all levels within the institution, high learning rates and support for student organizations, as an option: national university student surveys.

The UK organization, the Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency, is an independent body which is engaged in monitoring and advising on the standards and quality of higher education in the United Kingdom and influence academic quality and higher education standards in the UK [4].

The Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency is an independent body that reviews the standards and quality of higher education in the UK. The organization conducts quality checks, develops guidelines and guidelines for higher education institutions, and organizes commissions to study issues in accordance with the Charter. The organization examines how universities, colleges and alternative providers of higher education in the UK maintain their academic standards and quality.

The Association is an independent body, a limited liability company and a registered as a charity body in England, Wales and Scotland: the organization undertakes activities that include expert evaluation of institutional audit in England and Northern Ireland, institutional assessment in Wales and national and international evaluations. Engaging students in all grades is an integral part of the UK higher education evaluation process [4].

There are different methods of involving students in monitoring and controlling the higher education quality. For example, in Scotland, representatives of the National Student Council are members of the Expert Group as full members. And in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, students are not part of the expert groups, but they are active stakeholders in the process of compiling an institution's self-assessment report and submit a separate self-assessment report on behalf of students.

In Scotland, students are selected as members of a panel of experts on the recommendation of the National Union of Students of Scotland. The selection criteria are current or recent experience in the field of higher education, experience in protecting the interests of students at the institutional level, knowledge of the methodology of quality assessment. The selected students, similar to the experience of the Scandinavian countries, participate in the training together with other members of the expert group.

Duties and rights of students as members of the expert group include participation in all meetings of the expert group, visits to the university, students share responsibility with other members for participating in the quality assessment of teaching and teaching, and also they write one section of the assessment report.

To increase the effectiveness of student participation in quality assurance processes, the Student Participation Agency for Quality Assessment of Scotland (Sparqs) was established. The purpose of the Agency is to support students participation in the quality assurance systems of universities and student organizations, as well as to assist universities and education departments in attracting students. The agency is funded by the Scottish Funding Council and administrative work is carried out by the National Student Council of Scotland [14].

The German higher education quality assurance system provides guarantees for the student participation in the higher education quality assessment process. The German Accreditation Council, which accredits German quality monitoring agencies, consists of four representatives of higher education institutions, four representatives of the governments of the land, five representatives of employers, two foreign experts and two representatives of the students [12].

Accreditation agencies are required to establish a body that makes the final accreditation decisions. These bodies make accreditation decisions based on

the report and the recommendation of the evaluation expert panel. Accreditation agencies include representatives of students as voting members in such bodies. With regard to expert evaluation teams for educational programs, agencies are required to involve all stakeholders, including higher education experts, students and employers. There is no clearly regulated procedure, but there is a tradition of involving three experts (professors), one employer and one student.

The process of electing students as stakeholder representatives for quality monitoring bodies or full members to peer review teams is interesting. While the members of the Accreditation Council are jointly appointed by the Conference of Rectors and the Conference of Ministers of Education and Culture of the Federal Governments, the selection and appointment of members to the decision-making bodies of the agencies and of the evaluation teams are carried out by the agencies themselves.

In order to legitimize the participation of students in the above bodies, as well as to provide relevant qualifications and experience, the National Student Union of Germany, the Regional Student Union Associations and the Federal Associations of the Student-Student Unions have created the Student Accreditation Pool. The Board supports the pool and recommends for the quality assurance agencies to select students from the organization to participate in peer review teams.

The accreditation pool of students holds a general meeting twice a year. This provides an opportunity for many students of higher education policy at various levels to discuss the latest trends in accreditation and to share views and experiences.

Student representation on the Board is generally decided at general meetings. The secretariat is located in the National Student Union of Germany, which deals with administrative matters. The Coordination Council shall support the Secretariat and make the necessary decisions between the general meetings.

The founding members delegate students for their to be elected in the pool. At the request of the Accreditation Agency, the Secretariat of the Student Accreditation Pool nominates the student candidates who meet the required profile. If a student is nominated as a member of any decision-making body, the Secretariat shall announce a competition to all pool members, after which a new member of that body shall be elected either by the Coordinating Board's decision or at a general meeting.

To meet the requirements of the required qualifications of the expert students and representatives of the pool, regular trainings are held. They are free to be participated to all interested students. Training sessions introduce participants to information on educational reforms, the Bologna Process and accreditation procedures. Workshop participants gain practical knowledge of the content and procedures of the expert group.

Delegating to the Student Accreditation Pool is a voluntary decision of the relevant organizations, and participation in the training seminar is not mandatory for participation, but most organizations recommend it. Thus, the National Union of Students of Germany, decided to delegate students only after they had completed a training seminar or obtained a comparable degree of knowledge in another way [12].

Regarding the Ukrainian experience of student participation in the assessment of the quality of higher education, it is represented by the student associations that promote the formation of moral and socially active leaders and initiative student groups. If we talk about the institutionalized participation of students in the higher education quality assessment of institutions, it should be noted that such now powers are only becoming part of the quality monitoring system in Ukraine. There are many active student associations, including: All-Ukrainian Student Council; All-Ukrainian Student Council; Ukrainian Student Union; Association of Human Rights Organizers of Students of Ukraine; All-Ukrainian Youth Non-Governmental Organization «Student Republic»; The Student Union Democratic Union of Students, but they do not participate in external monitoring of higher education quality.

For example, the purpose of the All-Ukrainian Youth NGO «Democratic Union of Students «Student Platform» is to: carry out activities aimed at protecting the rights and legitimate interests of youth and students; promoting the development of their scientific, creative, political, organizational potential; the satisfaction and protection of the legitimate interests of its members. The NGO «Ukrainian Student Union» sets out the following tasks: protection of the legitimate interests of students within the state bodies, public associations, educational institutions; conducting independent sociological surveys on issues relevant to youth; organization of scientific, educational activities, meetings with eminent scientists, statesmen, specialists in one or another field and another.

An attempt to systematize the available information on the European practice in the sphere of highr education quality assurance provided by the specific type of the non-governmental bodies (students' NGOs) in

Europe is presented in the form of a table defining the functional characteristics of such associations.

The analysis of the table leads us to the conclusion that among the spheres of activity of the organization the special training programs and training for the implementation of high professional standards in the activities of students in the assessment and quality assurance in higher education dominate. Professional student organizations that train expert students to participate in the quality assessment system provide one solution to the problem – first, they train professional staff and human resources, and secondly, they function as permanent forums capable of providing ongoing exchange of knowledge, consultations and practices for the students and already experienced professionals and experts. Annual events, meetings and trainings, the collection and analysis of information on the activities and specifics of university evaluations, official statistics and ongoing monitoring make it possible for the students to participate in the quality assurance of higher education.

Conclusions. The activities of non-governmental or public organizations which operate in the sphere of education and higher education, especially the ones which are engaged in the sphere of higher education quality assurance and control is now a new tendency of educational development in the European Higher Education Area. The use of public bodies, among which are the student' s organisations, ensures an unbiased and balanced assessment of the activities of higher education institutions, as well as the opportunity to participate in the evaluation process of all interested stakeholders: universities, employers and students themselves. The public oversight system leads to higher standards of activity as a result of external audits of the university in the various spheres and, consequently, to improved quality of educational services. That is, there is a correlation between the cooperation of NGOs and the effective functioning of the modern educational institution.

The system of involving student organizations and students themselves in peer review of higher education institutions in Europe is a well-established and systematic practice in many highly developed

Table 1

Structural and functional characteristics of the student organizations involved in quality assurance in higher education

Structural and functional characteristics	England	Scotland	Germany	Norway	Finland
Professional training on quality assessment	+	+	+	+	+
Full membership in expert groups	-	+	+	+	+
Advisory membership in expert groups	+	-	-	-	-
Students' pool – experts in quality assessment of higher education	-	+	+	-	-
Providing guidance to students to work in expert groups	+	+	+	+	+

Source: compiled by authors according to: European student' s union. Students Expert' s Pool on Quality Assurance (<http://www.esu-online.org/structures/qapool/>); European students' union (<https://www.esu-online.org/>); Student participation in QA: strengths and challenges (http://www.eua.be/Libraries/EQAF_2010/EUA_QA_Forum_publication_1.sflb.ashx); Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs) (<http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/>).

countries. The involvement of students in the external evaluation team of universities is not only of great importance in evaluating the performance of universities, but also enhances the student experience by giving students leverage over their own expertise and community experience. Defining the criteria for selecting students and conducting special education helps students to become aware of their responsibilities and roles as experts. At the same time, the criteria for selecting students as experts have one thing in common in many countries: the need for guidance from student associations or organizations and the experience of managerial work either at the university or in the public organizations. Developing established guidelines for students serving as members of the expert teams on quality assessment improves students' qualifications in this field.

Prospects for the future research. The role of the students' associations in the assessment is a new tendency for democratization in the sphere of higher education especially as for assessing the quality of higher education, as European experience shows, is significant. The organizational forms and legal provisions of the influence of the students upon the higher education quality assessment are to be investigated to use the effective European practices for monitoring and controlling compliance with higher education quality standards of Ukrainian civil organizations of the proper type.

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