

The Best and the Worst Practices of Quality Enhancement – Case of Georgia

Research Project Report
Executive Summary
(full text available only in Georgian)

Tbilisi State University
2010

Nino Javakhishvili - research group leader

Students:

- ✓ **Nana Chabukiani**
- ✓ **Magda Javakhishvili**
- ✓ **Sophia Gogsadze**
- ✓ **Manana Makaridze**



European Commission
TEMPUS

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Introduction

Study of Quality Assurance services of seven Georgian universities was conducted in April – June 2010 in the frames of the project: “The Best and the Worst Practices of Quality Enhancement - Case of Georgia” that was supported by National Tempus Office of Georgia.

Reform of higher education system started in 2005 in Georgia and respectively, quality assurance service has become 5 years old. Nowadays all public and the majority of private Higher Educational Institutions have established quality assurance departments. It is now interesting to look at what has been achieved and what is still missing in the activities of these services in Georgian universities.

Methodology

Case study method was used where combination of semi-structured interviews with study of relevant documentation of the sampled universities (retrieved from the websites) was utilized. Interviews were processed using content-analysis method.

A sample of seven major research universities was studied. They were selected to keep the representation: public and private, and central (located in the capital of Georgia) and regional universities were studied, also, some of these are relatively small size universities and some are relatively large size universities. TSU, for example is the largest in Georgia, having about 20 000 students and Kutaisi University of Law and Economics is the smallest, with 444 students.

#	University	Legal status	Location	# of students
1	Tbilisi State University	Public	Tbilisi	18 294
2	Ilia State University	Public	Tbilisi	8 593
3	Caucasus University	Private	Tbilisi	1 566
4	Telavi State University	Public	Telavi	1 982
5	Kutaisi State University	Public	Kutaisi	6 344
6	Kutaisi University of Law and Economics	Private	Kutaisi	444
7	Free University	Private	Tbilisi	634

Two representatives were interviewed from each university - a head of a quality assurance service and a professor, with the exception of TSU, where 3 representatives were studied: a head of QA service and 2 professors. We deliberately chose to interview professors as main agents of QA processes, and selected those who have intensive relations with QA service. Also, almost all participants have had Western experience in one or another way: some took

part in international projects and others spent some time at various universities in the USA, or Western Europe.

In addition, 3 interviews were carried with representatives of National Education Accreditation Centre (NEAC). In total, 19 interviews were carried out, recorded and transcribed.

Answers of QA service representatives, professors and NEAC representatives were compared to each other, also answers were looked at across universities.

Interviews covered following aspects:

- Description of QA services:
 - Structure of the QA services
 - Staff placement
 - Participation in conferences and seminars
 - Trainings for QA services staff
 - Transparency
 - Strategy of the QA services
 - Participation of students and academic staff in QA service activities
 - Collaboration with the National Center for Education Accreditation
- The functions of the QA service unit
 - Programme evaluation
 - Academic staff assessment
 - Academic staff development
 - Monitoring of students' academic progress
 - Students' mobility and recognition of credits
 - Diploma supplements
- Self-evaluation of QA service staff
- Evaluation of the QA role by the professors
- Evaluation of the QA services by the NEAC

Main Findings

Achievements and drawbacks of quality assurance services at Georgian universities:

The quality assurance service units were created because the Law of Higher Education of Georgia required it, respectively functions of QA services were defined by the Law. These are mandatory for all public higher education institutions; private universities also have copied this approach and established QA units following the model of public HEIs. There is almost no difference found between private and public institutions in terms of their responsibilities.

Relations of QA services of universities with the National Education Accreditation Centre prove that university QA services are mostly passive recipients of recommendations of

NEAC. Quite often universities try to realize the recommendations and do not work out their own approaches. Universities perceive NEAC as a direct provider of governmental approaches and ideas. Although NEAC is not officially the part of ministry and the universities are independent according to the law, they still have this attitude of “being obedient” to the government. As one of the interviewees admits the QA services were not established because universities felt the need for those, they were created from the top, hence lack of initiative from universities.

Findings of our research show an absolute prevalence of top-down approach to quality assurance in Georgia. Ownership was created neither by the ministry, or those who drafted and adopted the new law on higher education and “passed” it to universities, nor by the university decision makers who “passed” the law to their administration and professors. Hence professors are less involved in the decision making processes and procedures on planning stage, they see recommendations of QA as a burden – tasks that have to be fulfilled but can be avoided sometimes. Professors of the universities studied are mainly superficially accepting QA service recommendations, while few of them try to resist.

It is not surprising that professors are not happy with QA services and quite often perceive them as a unit that puts obstacles on their way instead of providing support. The constant tension of working on programs and syllabi that are perceived as something imposed brings negative emotions to professors and naturally these emotions are directed to QA service.

It is interesting to look at what functions were picked up by QA services and what functions were not picked up and why. Mainly functions of controlling professors in their everyday teaching activities are fulfilled by QA services. Many professors lament that they are constantly asked to write up and bring changes in syllabi and programs, to carry out exams and grade students based on endless instructions; some professors have feeling that they are “terrorized” by QA service. Certain hierarchical model can be traced: government (through ministry and NEAC) dictates to universities and universities (through QA services) dictate to professors.

Despite trying to be in compliance to the Law, the QA services do not take some of the responsibilities “prescribed” in the Law, these are: looking at the quality of research, cooperation with quality services in foreign HEIs and support of professors. Most of Georgian universities give minimum attention and provide almost no conditions for carrying out research. Relatively recent innovation at Tbilisi State University provides a good example where, merit based differences in salary of a professor is defined according to teaching load only. As explained in the introduction of the article, research is given small attention and support, it is carried less in most of the institutions studied, hence the quality assurance of research is not done. While all universities studied claim to be major research universities, only Ilia State University QA service is occupied with research.

Relations with quality assurance foreign services require human and material resources – programs and procedures need to be translated to make them understandable for foreigners, finances are needed to bring colleagues - and Georgian HEI lack both of these. Support of

professors need human and material resources – QA staff should be able to provide trainings and consultations to professors in terms of how to organize teaching, how to prepare a syllabus and a program, how to include students, peers, and other stakeholders into the study processes - there are very few specialists working in HE system who are able to provide these. Organization of such meetings with professors need minimum, but still some finances – again HEIs lack these. In addition, there is lack of understanding of providing explanations and trainings to professors in the existing framework of top-down approach: why to spend time, energy and money, when one can just dictate? At the same time, some representatives of QA services (Free university, Ilia State University) think that a professor should be motivated to raise the quality of teaching and to raise the motivation and interest of students. QA should not be imposing on professors, QA service should be taking into account opinions of professors.

Review of Western experience clearly shows that while "western" HEIs try to support their professors, Georgian HEIs mostly demand and dictate, not even bothering to explain what specifically they need and why it is needed. We do not want to criticize decision makers and administrators only for lack of democratic approach at universities and lack of inclusion of professors and other stakeholders. Professors are also responsible for lack of involvement. Many times quality assurance representatives complain that professors do not provide feedback to the recommendations and do not propose. Many professors simply do not read or answer to emails and for large size universities this is the main source of information exchange. Lack of communication causes lack of inclusion.

Not all of the universities are ready for autonomy and still depend on instructions and guidelines of state authorities, fearing independence. Creating new structures and regulations are not effective without development of new academic culture – the soviet legacy is still manifesting in lack of initiative and obedience to all recommendations coming from "above". At the same time continuous changes of rules, amendments to law, new regulations disorientate HEIs.

Quality assurance services together with the National Education Accreditation Centre in Georgia are in the phase of constant changes facing many difficulties on their way. Introduction of a top-down model of QA was an unavoidable necessity in Georgia under given conditions, but now it is time already (if not too late) to enhance involvement of stakeholders in the processes and start working on quality culture instead of staying focused on quality control.