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*I. Horbachevsky Ternopil State Medical University***QUALITY IMPROVEMENT THROUGH QUALITY AUDIT IN AUSTRIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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імені І. Я. Горбачевського МОЗ України”***УДОСКОНАЛЕННЯ ЯКОСТІ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ В АВСТРІЇ:
РЕЗУЛЬТАТИ АУДИТУ****The aim of the study** – to analyze the procedure, purposes and effectiveness of quality audit in Austrian higher education.**The main body.** In the early twenty-first century the problem of quality assurance in higher education became one of the main issues in the developed countries. A quality assurance in higher education at all stages and levels, evaluation of its performance and quality management system are major challenges at the present time. The quality audit is a systematic and independent analysis, allowing to determine the compliance of activities and results in the field of quality of higher education; a procedure for the purpose of assessing and certifying the higher education institution's internal quality management system.**Conclusion.** The article analyses existing approaches to auditing in Austria. It illustrates various approaches and implementation of audit in Austrian education system and is targeted both at quality assurance agencies and at higher education institutions. Consequently, the publication covers the topics of terminology, purpose and aim of the audit, national legislation and audit procedure.**Key words:** quality assurance; higher education; quality management system; audit.**Мета роботи** – проаналізувати процедуру, цілі та ефективність забезпечення якості вищої освіти в Австрії.**Основна частина.** На початку XXI століття у розвинутих країнах світу актуалізується проблема забезпечення якості вищої освіти. Забезпечення високоякісної освіти на всіх її етапах і рівнях, оцінювання її результативності та управління якістю – одне з основних завдань сьогодення. Аудит якості – це систематичний і незалежний аналіз, що дозволяє визначити відповідність діяльності і результатів в області якості запланованих заходів; процедура з оцінки і сертифікації внутрішньої системи управління якістю вищого навчального закладу.**Висновки.** У статті проаналізовано підходи до аудиту в Австрії. Представлено різні підходи до впровадження аудиту в освітню систему Австрії і висвітлено проблему забезпечення якості як з погляду відповідних органів, так і з погляду закладів вищої освіти. У статті розглянуто питання термінології, цілей аудиту, національного законодавства та процедури аудиту.**Ключові слова:** забезпечення якості; вища освіта; управління якістю; аудит.

Introduction. Higher education, research and innovation play a crucial role in supporting socio-economic and cultural development. Nowadays higher education faces lots of new challenges because of fundamental changes (internationalization, increasing demand for skills and competences, lifelong learning and the development of a knowledge-based society), but also has new opportunities to make use of increasingly diverse individual experiences by playing the key role in society. All these processes highlight the need for quality assurance in higher education and are expected to influence the role of quality assurance in supporting higher education systems and institutions in responding to these changes [7].

The aim of the study – to analyze the procedure, purposes and effectiveness of quality audit in Austrian higher education.

The main body. The quality of education is one of the essential components of confidence, mobility and motivation of students, compatibility and attractiveness of the Austrian higher education, including medical, since this criterion determines the competitiveness of both, the particular higher education institution and the national education system as a whole [7].

The Austrian system of education quality assurance is based on the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The ESG are a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher

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education. The ESG do not prescribe how the quality assurance processes are implemented, but they provide guidance, covering the areas which are vital for successful quality provision and learning environments in higher education. The ESG are used by institutions and quality assurance agencies as a reference document for internal and external quality assurance systems in higher education [8].

A new concept of autonomy and a complete restructuring of Austrian universities took place by the Universities Act 2002, which gained full power from Januaryst, 2004 and marked a new era in the development of one common university sector. It has given the universities complete autonomy, on account of the new control instruments such as global budgets and performance agreements, etc. The universities were transformed to become legal entities under public law (previously federal establishments) and divested from the federal administrative system. Universities now possess full legal power; they act free from any instructions and regulate their specific matters autonomously in their statutes. The Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy assumes a supervisory function only in legal affairs and continues to be responsible for strategic planning and research [4].

The new University Act also made it a regulation that all universities had to build up an internal quality assurance system. This system would assure the quality and performance of a university, and all areas of evaluation had to be defined in the performance agreement.

Autonomous higher education institutions in Austria are in charge of quality assurance and quality development with respect to degree programs, teaching, research, development and organization. They develop and design their own internal quality management system in accordance with their individual profiles and in compliance with European standards [3].

The task of quality assurance of higher education in Austria is multidimensional and includes:

- the availability of the necessary resources (human, financial, physical, informational, scientific, educational, etc.);
- the organization of educational process that most adequately meets the modern trends of development of national and world economy and education;
- the need for continuous improvement of educational programs with the aim of improving their quality;
- stimulating innovations in educational standards;
- control of educational performance of higher educational institutions and quality of specialist

training at all stages of education and at all levels: the university level, national and international (European) levels [10].

At the systemic level, particular attention is given to the comprehensive quality assurance in higher education institutions of Austria. It is allocated a number of key components of the quality management system of university education including: audit; accreditation; evaluation.

The audit is designed as a peer review procedure involving independent international reviewers. The reviewers assess the university's internal quality management system (QMS). They hold discussions with the institution's management, students and quality managers as well as with other individuals from among the teaching, research and administrative staff and from university bodies, with the aim of checking and verifying the functioning and effectiveness of the QMS. The reviewers write a report summarizing the main content and findings [1].

The central purpose of the audit is to assess the internal quality management system of a higher education institution, its effectiveness and fitness for purpose. To this end, all core procedures and activities are taken into account (teaching and learning, research and development, support structures and administration, faculty and staff development, internationalization etc.).

The audit procedure is designed according to the requirements of Austrian higher education legislation [5].

The quality audit in Austria pursues two objectives:

- confirms the existence of a functioning internal QMS at the public university or university of applied science (*Fachhochschulen, FH*);

- supports the university or FH in continued improvement of its internal QMS.

According to the Quality Assurance in Universities Act, the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy has to define the quality assurance agencies qualified to perform audits at public universities and universities of applied sciences in Austria. Audits in the fields specified in § 22 of the Quality Assurance in Universities Act can be performed by:

- Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (*Agentur für Qualitätssicherung und Akkreditierung Austria, AQ Austria*);
- quality assurance agencies registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (*EQAR*): Evaluation Agency Baden-Württemberg (*Evaluationsagentur Baden-Württemberg*); Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (*FINEEC*);

Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (*FIBAA*); Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (*Organ für Akkreditierung und Qualitätssicherung der Schweizerischen Hochschulen, OAQ*); from January 2015 renamed as Swiss Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (*Schweizerische Agentur für Akkreditierung und Qualitätssicherung, AAQ*); Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hannover (*Zentrale Evaluations- und Akkreditierungsagentur Hannover, ZEvA*);

– other internationally recognized and independent quality assurance agencies: European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (*EAEVE*); European Foundation for Management Development (*EFMD*) [6].

The AQ Austria was established in 2012 as an agency for quality assurance for Austrian higher education institutions on the basis of the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (*Hochschul-Qualitätssicherungsgesetz – HS-QSG, Bundesgesetz über die externe Qualitätssicherung im Hochschulwesen und die Agentur für Qualitätssicherung und Akkreditierung Austria*).

As a national Agency for quality assurance, AQ Austria also offers a wide range of activities, including accreditation, quality audit, assessment and consulting services for higher educational institutions.

The goal of the Agency is to assess the adequacy of planning procedures and decision-making in higher educational institution, correspondence of specific actions to particular purposes and effectiveness from the point of view of their achievement.

AQ Austria certifies performance and effectiveness of the internal quality management system in universities and contributes to their further development and improvement.

The decision-making body of AQ Austria is the Board, which consists of independent experts, including foreign ones.

The AQ Austria follows the basic principles:

– higher educational institutions bear the main responsibility for the quality of their activities and for quality assurance;

– quality assurance procedures support a higher education institution's quality enhancement. Decisions in quality assurance procedures are made exclusively in accordance with quality criteria;

– co-operation with higher educational institutions and other interested parties serves as basis for the development of procedural rules and standards or criteria;

– any formal decisions made as a result of the activities of external quality assurance are based on the clear well-defined published criteria;

– all the processes of external quality assurance are designed to guarantee the achievement of the goals determined for such processes;

– system of external quality assurance should serve its purpose and not to complicate the work of educational institutions [9].

The AQ Austria with the help of audit certifies performance and effectiveness of the organizational system of quality management in universities and contributes to their further development and improvement. The Agency cooperates, in particular, with such universities: Vienna University of Agricultural Sciences, Danube University Krems, Paris Lodron University in Salzburg, Medical University of Graz, Medical University of Vienna, etc.

The AQ Austria follows the principle according to which universities are autonomous and are responsible for the assurance and improving their quality of studying and teaching. System of quality management and external processes of organization and management are the competence of universities. It should be noted, that the quality audit procedures are conducted only in public universities or professional higher schools [2].

The AQ Austria applies four audit standards to assess the quality management system of the university. They define the requirements for quality management system and the assessment areas in accordance with the § 22 (2) HS-QSG to the Austrian law.

The standards shall be used by the higher educational institutions for self-assessment of the internal quality management system and should be published in their documentation. At the same time they give the opportunity to the experts to assess the internal quality management system.

Standard 1 specifies that the higher education institution defines goals and develops a strategy systematically supported by management tools. A prerequisite for the organization and implementation of internal quality management system is that the higher education institution defines strategies and objectives. Based on these strategies are developed relevant activities and responsibilities at all levels of educational institutions. The higher education institution independently forms its internal management processes.

According to standard 2, quality management system aims to assist the higher education institution

in achieving its goals. Quality management system comprises internal quality control that supports the higher education institution in achieving its goals and tasks, as well as in further development of internal processes of organization and management. The main responsibilities of the higher education institution, in accordance with section 22 paragraph 2 HS-QSG, section 3 of the Universities Act (*Universitätsgesetz, UG*), section 4 of the Law on the University for Continuing Education Krems (*Bundesgesetz über die Universität für Weiterbildung Krems, DUK-Gesetz*) and section 3 of the University of Applied Sciences Studies Act (*Fachhochschulstudiengesetz, FHStG*) include: studying and teaching, including further training, research, tasks in the fields of organization, administration, support, human resources, resource management and internationalization.

Standard 3 indicates that an integral component of the quality management system is evaluation, monitoring and information system. The subject of systematic monitoring is strategy, organization and achievements (results). In the process of formation or further development of goals and strategies, as well as when making management decisions, the higher education institution uses the results and findings of internal monitoring, its information and reporting systems. In turn, the results of the evaluations are used in further development and improvement of the quality management system.

According to standard 4, quality management system relies on the quality culture of the higher education institution and involves the systematic participation of various interest groups. Quality culture is presented by the higher education institution representatives and maintained by active communication strategy. The composition of interest groups is determined

by the profile and objectives of the higher education institution and reflects its public responsibility [3].

The audit is a peer review. For each audit, agency assembles a panel of experts with long-term experience in the management, governance or quality assurance of higher education institutions. On principle, there is a student representative in each panel. All experts receive an intense briefing on the special features of the Austrian higher education sector, current trends and developments etc [5].

A panel of external independent experts assesses the internal quality management system, based on the four audit standards and documentation of the higher education institution and draws conclusions. These conclusions provide an assessment and recommendations on quality management system of the higher education institution. Conclusions and the concept of the higher education institution are the basis for the decision on its certification by the Board of the AQ Austria.

Conclusion. Higher education institutions in Austria need to define a policy and related procedures that would ensure the quality and standards of their educational programs and diplomas. They also should openly declare their intent to create an atmosphere and practice that acknowledges the importance of quality and its assurance. For the sake of achieving this goal, educational institutions must develop and implement a strategy for continuous quality improvement. Strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. An audit confirms that a higher education institution established its quality assurance system pursuant to statutory provisions and supports the higher education institution in improving their internal quality assurance system.

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