

## Strategies of Raising the Quality of Higher Education and Attaining Equality of Educational Opportunities

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the research is to develop the policy and strategy recommendations to increase the quality of higher education in Russian Federation. The study examines the significance of equal educational opportunities and the influence of this factor on the educational systems of developing countries. Transformational processes in the domain of higher education have brought forth the problem of institutional strategies of attaining the equality of educational opportunities. The study outlines ways of using regional institutional mechanisms of ensuring the equality of educational opportunities in terms of access to high-quality higher education. The results of the research are designed in the way to be applicable in any developing country facing the same problem.

### KEYWORDS

University, transformational processes, quality of education, equality of educational opportunities, regional strategizing

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## Introduction

The problem of raising the quality of higher education in the context of modern transformational processes is a conceptual one, and is recognized as theoretically and practically ambiguous in view of the widely discussed notion of education of a country undergoing reform (Lebedev, 2007; Yarkova, 2012). As T.A. Hagurov (2010) observes, “the question of the quality of education becomes extremely important and can be formulated in the following way: “Does the education which is being reformed fulfill all of its most important functions (i.e. social reproduction and ensuring strategic competitiveness of society – parenthesis added) at a high level?”. This is accounted for not so much by the media coverage of the questions relating to the content and mechanisms of higher education reform as by its exceptional role in the social processes and resolution of present-day controversies.

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The quality of education is one of the most significant characteristics defining the competitiveness of both specific universities and the national educational systems on the whole. Russian researches of the trends in the development of education have noted more than once that only a new kind of mentality can create a new kind of culture (Gershunskiy, 1998).

The equality of the opportunities is often regarded as the most universally supported conception of justice (Roemer, 2002). It is the higher or tertiary education that indicates social status inequalities in developing countries as the difference between universities can be huge (Buchmann & Hannum, 2001). The causes of wage, social and even gender inequality can be attributed to educational inequality (Schütz, Ursprung & Wößmann, 2008).

## Literature Review

### *The quality of higher education and institutional mechanisms of its control*

B.S. Gershunskiy (1998) wrote at the end of the 20th century that ‘education is the answer to the challenges of the 21st century; this answer is capable of preserving civilization and requires from a human being a new mentality or social character; its new priority status in society is determined by objective needs of developing society’.

Simultaneously with the recognition by society and the authorities of the fact that new technologies require new university graduates with new personality traits, human resources are becoming increasingly important in the development of the country; therefore these issues have started getting considerable attention at various levels.

At the same time, in spite of the general recognition of the conceptual importance of the quality of education, this concept remains vague, which is a serious obstacle to identifying institutional mechanisms of transformational processes in the sector of higher education, since it leads to the possibility of endowing it with different kinds of substance.

Thus, in accordance with the UNESCO’s Policy Paper for Change and Development in Higher Education, quality of education is considered within the framework of an all-around conception, embracing all the principal functions and kinds of activity of a university, which also includes such an important element as its graduates’ ability to find employment promptly (UNESCO, 1995). The Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers of Education, which took place in Berlin on September 19, 2003, (“Realising the European Higher Education Area,” 2003) states that the responsibility for the quality of higher education lies with each particular university. In view of this, national quality assurance systems must include:

- 1) establishing the responsibility of organizations and institutions taking part in educational processes;
- 2) evaluation, both internal and external, of the universities’ programs;
- 3) a system of accreditation, certification and other procedures;
- 4) evidence of evaluation of international cooperation and network programs.

It was also proposed that standards, procedures and guidelines of quality assurance should be coordinated, which testifies to the emergence of a steady trend

of resolving the problems of the quality of higher education by introducing bureaucratic procedures.

Based on the outcomes of the Berlin conference, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) elaborated the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Gorbashko, 2011), which formed the basis of constructing a number of evaluation systems. According to this document, the main principles of guaranteeing the quality of education are the following:

- the interests of students as well as employers and the society more generally in good quality higher education;
- the central importance of institutional autonomy;
- there need to be efficient and effective organizational structures within which those academic programs can be provided and supported;
- transparency and the use of external expertise in quality assurance processes are important;

An attempt to specify the criteria of the quality of education is presented in the final Communiqué of the World Conference on Higher Education “The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development, paragraph 21 (UNESCO, 1995).

As the principal criteria of education, reflecting the comprehensive aims of higher education, this document lists critical and independent thinking, as well a capacity for life-long learning (Filippov, 2009).

The national scientific discourse as regards the quality of higher education can be described as:

- a sum total of features and characteristics of educational services that provide for meeting both conditioned and assumed needs (Araşlanova, 2011);
- a sum total of features and characteristics of an educational service which allow to meet consumers’ demands for specific knowledge which is confirmed by a document of higher education (Traynev & Mkrtychyan, 2010) ;
- Projection of the quality of a graduate, which is considered in two dimensions: the degree of education of an individual and his/her competitiveness in market conditions (Khutorskoy, 2011);
- the relationship between the projected goal and the result achieved.

Aims and results are considered on the level “from the state to the individual”, and the means of their attainment include normative-legal environment, organizational-managerial mechanisms and social-pedagogical aspects proper. The latter include the content of education and educational technologies (Ushakov, 2008). Objectives can be formulated as follows: model of a university graduate or the kinds of activity for which he/she should be prepared.

It is acknowledged that a number of methodological problems exist related to the setting of specific objectives as well as to establishment of instruments and mechanisms of measuring the results achieved.

On the whole, a situation arises where none of the participants in the educational process are interested in the quality of university training. According to B.P. Yeliseyev (2010), the following strategy of the state is implemented nowadays: ‘to carry out the training of all the students present at a university within the fixed time and using the given material resources.

The main difficulties of evaluating the quality of higher education consist in the facts that “many outcomes of education are a) hard to ascertain; special research-based measurements, descriptions, characteristics and parameters are needed to establish them; b) fully seen only a few years after graduation when a graduate has already some employment record” (Chernova, 2012).

At present, the following quality assessment criteria are applied in the Russian educational space:

- the effectiveness of the university’s performance as an indicator of performance of all subjects of educational space;
- “enhancement of the development”, the trend towards the evolvement of all university subsystems (managerial, pedagogical etc.), as well as economic and material development of universities (Zhigalev, 2009).

The researchers of this topic (Chernova, 2012) identify some characteristics of the concept ‘quality of education’ while viewing education as a service: the multi-level system of end results, the invariance and variability of the process, polychromic characteristics of the quality of education, implying a combination of tactical and strategic aspects which are perceived differently by different subjects (e.g. consumers, clients etc.).

The research conducted (Astakhova, 2008) shows that the institutional model of education which has been pursued in the last two decades, is not commensurate to market economy, since its rate of development is considerably lower than the rate of social and economic development, and its elements, processes and technology are not focused either on the new goals of the country’s development or its prospects. Researchers note the following system challenges of contemporary social development that are inherent to the quality of higher education:

- inadequacy of the structure, content and forms of higher education to modern-day challenges;
- excessive amount of information to be processed by students as opposed to the data that meets their future professional needs, outdated curriculums;
- lack of a systemic concept of the integration of curricular and extracurricular activities that aims at solving the problems of students’ development (their critical thinking, analytical skills, communicative culture, culture of self-organization, motivation to pursue self-education, self-management skills etc.);
- negative reproduction of qualified teaching staff, resignation of part-time practitioner teachers (adjuncts), part-timers, focus on lecturers under 35 years of age, hence the expulsion of respectable, experienced (although not always certified) lecturers;
- lack of analysis and recognition of modern trends of choosing a university and of future specialization by school-leavers, as well as lack of professional screening procedures on part of employees;

Implementation of quality management principles as one of the components of an organization’s management is recognized as the most effective means of raising the quality of education services.

Fulfillment of this task occurs on the basis of such All-Union State Standards as GOST R ISO 9001-2001 (2001a), GOST R ISO 9004-2001 (2001b), GOST R ISO 9004-2010 (2011) as well as application of means and methods of Total Quality Management. The main principles that are presented in international standards and define the quality of education are: orientation towards consumers (i.e. students, employers, society, the state); leadership of management; involvement of

employees; process approach; holistic approach; constant improvement of an organization's performance as its invariable purpose; decision-making on the basis of facts; mutually beneficial relations with suppliers.

At the same time, these elements of the system of quality management, as implemented by a university, reveal a number of difficulties and contradictions with reference to educational systems (compared to other organizations). These difficulties proceed from the complexity of educational processes that cannot always be assessed quantitatively.

The effectiveness of a process is understood as the degree of implementation of the planned activities. It is determined by the fact 'whether the goal of the process is attained or not; how much the results of the process meet the needs and expectations of consumers, i.e. how much the finished product, or service, agrees with the project; whether the quality of the product or service is achieved by the timeliness of completion and the time taken for execution of the order (Orlova, 2013). The biggest difficulty is associated with measuring the effectiveness of the students' skills in view of the postponement of the result, i.e. their employment, and hence, the subjectivity of their assessment.

### ***Educational inequalities in developing countries***

Educational inequalities in the modern world usually manifest themselves as restriction (or, sometimes, impossibility) of access to high-quality education. This inequality is brought forth by the formal accessibility of higher education. With time it has affected the quality of education, the status value of diplomas, the quality of the real output of intellectual capacity, the ability to turn the last two factors to advantage on the labor market. The western scheme of 'education-profession/job-income was reversed in Russia into the scheme of 'income-education-profession'/job', the first component being the key to obtaining education. Consequently, education in Russia has ceased to be a factor in upward social mobility (Kliucharev, 2011).

In this regard let us examine the inequality of initial capitals as a factor of social inequality in higher education. We will assume that the initial capital implies a resource pool, comprising the social status of a school-leaver's family (its belonging to a class/stratum, group); economic, cultural and vocational- educational function of the parents (Sholokhov, 2010); the area of living; individual, physical, intellectual and mental states; gender; seniority in the family (youngest, eldest, middle child); nationality (majority/minority) (Kliucharev, 2004).

The sociological tradition in the west (Giroux, 1983) presents multiple views on the factors or reproduction of social inequality, its invincibility, and ways of regulating it.

However, these researchers agree that inequality is inevitable, impossible to eradicate fully and can only be mitigated by using some compensatory mechanisms.

### ***Aim of the Study***

The aim of this study was to investigate the national scientific discourse of the quality of higher education, indicate opportunities for solving the problem of the quality of education, provide recommendation on the question of educational inequality.

## Research questions

The research questions of this study were as follows:

What educational policy is able to promote the quality of education while decreasing the level of educational inequality?

What should be recognized as the main quality criteria of contemporary higher education?

## Methods

Both theoretical and experimental methods were used in the research. Theoretical methods include:

- Holistic and statistical approaches;
- Method of scientific cognition;
- The state-of-the-art review of published works from Scopus and Web of Science databases.

Experimental - in October 2014 we conducted non-random purposeful survey of the academic staff of the Institute of Economics and Management of Herzen State Pedagogical University with a view to assessing the effectiveness of involving employees of enterprises, firms, organizations and administrations of the regions in university teaching.

45 lecturers took part in the survey.

They used a 5-point scale to express their views on the importance of involving the afore-mentioned managers and specialists in the teaching of practice-oriented disciplines. The grading was as follows:

- Extremely important (five points);
- Quite important (four points);
- Important under certain circumstances (three points);
- Low degree of importance (two points);
- Absolutely unimportant (one point).

84 percent of the surveyed noted the importance (five or four points) of practical experience in the system of higher education, taking into account such specialists' understanding of the real problems and ways of their resolution.

When responding to the request to gauge the degree of practitioners' readiness to comply with the requirements of teaching, 52 percent of respondents answered that such specialists do not meet the requirements of university teaching.

When replying to the questions: 'How do you think practitioners would respond to a university's invitation to become a lecturer?' and 'What can be their grounds for rejecting such an offer?', 56 percent of the respondents who supported the idea of such professionals' involvement said that their numbers would be small. They explained it by 'stage fright', lack of teacher training and the need to keep records as well as the use of an hourly wage rate. 1.8 percent of lecturers found the question difficult to answer.

When answering the question: 'What forms of interaction between employers and universities are possible?', 40 percent said that they consider practicums, on-the-job training and job placements more effective than practitioners' involvement.

## Data, Analysis, and Results

The interested parties in the activity of a business can be divided into five groups: consumers, the state, shareholders ('Board of Directors'), society ('the environment'), suppliers and company employees. For a university this arrangement is manifested, with certain reservations, as in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The parties interested in a university's performance

No	Name	Interested parties
1	Consumers	School-leavers, university students, parents (trustees), enterprises/organizations. Students are internal consumers, and enterprises/organizations are end users.
2	Shareholders	The Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation
3	Society ('the environment')	Administrations of the subjects of the Russian Federation, Council of Rectors of Regional Universities, employment, employment services, the mass media
4	Suppliers	Secondary schools and secondary specialized colleges. At present, the socio-cultural component of effectiveness and efficiency of universities is embodied fully. However, this direction has not been represented systematically, with due support of the state (sporadic surveys, conferences, other events, amateur associations, occasional reports by the mass media, etc.).

The indicators of equality in the access to higher education for various social strata and individuals living across the country are linked primarily to the effectiveness of education at the regional level. The social indicators of the quality of education are the need for labor force, compliance of the areas of professional training with labor market requirements, the dynamics of data concerning employment and the pursuit of advanced studies as well as the educational potential of human resources of regions. The latter includes the median level of education, periods and the level of enhancing one's education. This gives a certain picture of the resources of regions. However, it is difficult to separate the influence of education and its specific subsystems on human resources from the influence of other factors of social life. Therefore, these indicators cannot be direct evidence of the quality of education. Rather, they are evidence of social requirements of education and the needs of regions.

An analysis of criteria and features of evaluating the quality of higher education in other countries shows that the educational process is an open system which is not governed by rigid criteria as regards its dynamics, but largely depends on social development and the reforms conducted in this field. At the same time it is conditioned to a large degree by the existent traditions of educational systems in various regions. This fact accounts for the existence of several kinds of quality assurance standards in western European countries (Motova, 2011).

Another important trend of transformational processes at universities is the granting of a certain status to the criterion of quality of the efficiency of the information space and the position of a university on the market of education services.

According to marketing rules, a company should promote its services, "so the 'packaging' of an education service, that is, the names of courses and topics, the

names and titles of lecturers, promised results, should be bright and captivating. It should attract the consumer and inform him/her, in a brief form, about the quality and convenience of using a particular service. Here everything depends on who the consumer is and what he/she wants” (Hagurov, 2010).

At this age young people are most oriented to achieving meaningful results in their professional activities, specifically building a successful career, self-fulfillment and realization of one’s potential, attainment of a high social status and material well-being. Moreover, they are aware of the fact that the existent mechanisms of higher education do not contribute to the quality of training for subsequent professional fulfillment.

Thus, we can assert that the following two main tendencies are observed in the context of raising the quality of higher vocational education:

- the evident discrepancy between employers’ expectations of flexible, technology-savvy, socially adjusted young specialists and the insufficient scientific-pedagogical basis for meeting these expectations at the level of technologies of adjustment and development of competences of young specialists under conditions of real production, social and business activities;
- the ever-increasing influx into the production sphere of new groups of university graduates, which requires additional costs for their adaptation to the standards of production and organization.

As Russia is undergoing an institutional transformation of higher education, the problem of ensuring equality of educational opportunities acquires particular relevance. We examine the latter in the context of global and national integration processes. This problem came to the fore as a result of the institutional ability of education to reflect new social realities and the fact that the possession of various kinds of capital predetermines different individuals’ positions in social environments.

In the context of transformational processes in the Russian higher education we are interested in such aspect of original inequality as the sluggishness of the processes of decentralization. This process remains relevant on a nationwide scale, which is illustrated by Graph 1 (data of 2010, but no substantial changes can be observed at present).

However, the problem becomes especially acute on the regional level, since the majority of the so-called ‘blue-chip’ universities are located in large cities and regional or republican centers. The gap between the center and the periphery of the national education space has started to expand, as manifested by major universities in the capital and in the regions.

In this connection, we are observing the phenomenon of territorial deprivation. By deprivation we understand the insufficiency of living conditions for acquiring high-quality education. In order to acquire high-quality and blue-chip education, school-leavers from villages and small towns must not only have good academic records but must also face the complex and cost-intensive problems of accommodation during their period of study, transportation to their hometowns, and subsistence. This is particularly true for Moscow and St. Petersburg universities. Table 2 illustrates the spread of universities across the Russian Federation (Pastukhova, 2010).



**Table 2.** Influence of universities on the development of the region

<i>Influence type</i>	<i>Manifestation of the Influence</i>
Political	The change in the political structure of population, its more active participation in political life, better organization of political processes
Demographic	Involvement of young people from other regions, increase in the number specialists in the region, influence on the population make-up according to gender and age, migration, and eventually, on the regional labor market.
Economic	Influence on the development of infrastructure of the territory, intellectual and technological development of adjacent sectors of the economy, increase in the flow of funds, development of small businesses.
Cultural	Development of libraries, museums etc., formation of cultural environment
Innovation	Implementation of state-of-the-art technologies, setting up of industrial parks or business incubators etc. on the basis of universities, training of prospective professionals, consultations.
Social	Resolution of employment problems, improvement of the social structure of a region

Access to higher education is becoming increasingly differentiated depending on the area of living of potential university students. The factor of a university's proximity to a school-leaver's hometown plays an increasingly important role for the overriding majority of secondary school-leavers in the Russian provinces. Therefore the territorial accessibility of higher education is restricted for most school-leavers by the area they live in or the administrative center of their region.

Furthermore, studies suggest that due to the peculiarities of Russian society, the possession of a university diploma of a regional university does not guarantee employment either in Moscow, where employers look down on such graduates, or in the depths of the country, with their stagnation and poverty, depressed labor markets and low, if any, demand for human assets. Some employers tend to reject applicants who graduated from local universities while at the same time complaining of the shortage of young professionals (Kliucharev, 2011).

Thus, access of high-quality and blue-chip professional training remains a problem students in the regions. Without going into detail about the interdependence of access to education and the material status of school-leavers, let us investigate some ways of solving the problem of involving regional institutional mechanisms of ensuring equality of opportunities of high-quality professional training.

The resolution of the problem of effective management of the development of education and employment of graduates is directly dependent on elaboration and implementation of instruments or regional strategizing. This brings forth the necessity of *specification* for the regions of the issues of educational need, which, as a rule, can, be resolved only in general. They are as follows:

- criteria of socio-economic effectiveness of higher education in a given region (Glukhariova, 2012);
- assessment of demographic specifics and dynamics of staffing structures in the regions (Balabanov, 2007);
- evaluation and forecasting of the effectiveness of social partnership;

- the development of links with the entrepreneurial community, examining its needs and requirements with regard to the content and quality of education.

Satisfaction of the needs of the regional social system may, in our opinion, serve as the general criterion for assessing the effectiveness of higher education as a whole, whereas the nature of these needs determines the approach to the effectiveness of higher education as a socio-economic category. The review of financial plans, change of policy, reorganization, staff changes, active assistance in the strengthening of interaction on the 'university-enterprises-small/big businesses' axis, social and cultural measures are the typical managerial instruments used for the implementation of the strategy of development of the educational potential of the region. However, they acquire special relevance during transition periods, when questions of formation and development of markets and tackling crisis phenomena are especially relevant. The problem of activating regional institutional mechanisms of making higher education accessible is resolved on two interconnected levels:

1) objective consideration of the economic, socio-cultural and administrative potentials and the interests of the region;

2) development of attractiveness of a regional university, the effectiveness and prestige of attending it;

With regard to the first level, let us note that universities, being located in specific areas, should, on the one hand, take into account the conditions in their regions, and, on the other hand, can (and must) contribute to socio-cultural development, the development of local economies, ensure quality of life for the population of the region (Table 3).

It is evident that the varying degree of socio-cultural development of regions predetermines the difference in the opportunities for the development of the system of higher education, including entrepreneurial activities of universities. Therefore, the coordination and regulation by regional and local governments can play an important role in solving the problems of interaction between two markets, namely the labor market and the educational services market. This may be no less important for the regional and local authorities themselves than it is for the sphere of education, since the regulation of processes taking place in regional education is one of the ways of achieving long-term social stability.

At the same time, we observe insufficient efforts of universities in the resolution of the problem of raising their own status, accessibility of *high-quality* education for school-leavers of a given region.

The first possible way is *the creation, in conjunction with the regions' administration, of a multiversity*, which is the most up-to-date form of consolidating logistics, academic and human-resource potentials of higher and vocational secondary education, branches of institutes and laboratories, production and technical centers etc. A multiversity as an academic and information-technological center may become the basis for setting up a local analytical and research unit at the disposal of the regional authorities. Such aggregate potential would lay the basis

**Table 3.** The number of Russian universities by federal districts (%).

<i>No</i>	<i>Federal district</i>	<i>%</i>
1	Central	39
2	Privolzhsky	15
3	Northwestern	12
4	Southern	13
5	Siberian	10
6	Ural	7
7	Far Eastern	4

for conducting research for solving practical problems, expert evaluation of technical-and-economic as well as socio-cultural projects, technological modernization, creation of new small businesses, development of socio-cultural infrastructure etc.

In this connection, multiversity may expand their information and intellectual resource base. This implies:

creation of a network infrastructure of educational, scientific and innovation structures that would unite local area networks of a university, city or region;

organization of remote access to high-powered information resources, online cooperation, developing and using new online tools, creation of shared-knowledge centers and free access to them;

provision of all-around information-methodological as well as practical-experience support of the training process;

organization of career guidance work among graduates of secondary schools and secondary specialized colleges including their encouragement to pursue a career in areas that will be in demand in the future;

joint participation in international scientific programmes and events focusing on the study of common economic interests of neighboring countries and twin cities, finding optimal ways of fulfilling these interests;

examination of the positive experience of neighboring countries and twin cities in the economic, social and other domains with a view to tapping into it in the reform of the socio-economic situation of the region.

The possibility of employing specialists of enterprises, firms, organizations and administrations of the regions deserves particular attention in the context of setting up a multiversity.

Another way to solve this problem is to raise the level of prestige and accessibility of *high-quality* education for school-leavers of the region, i.e. *the development of socio-cultural and educational mobility*.

In spite of the existent stereotypes, we can state that the potential of students' mobility both in terms of the first higher education and additional education in the country and small towns is not lower, and often higher, than in the regions. Of course, institutional (formal) education is less accessible in rural areas than cities (Desjardins et al., 2006). However, the percentage of people who compensate for the inaccessibility of formal education by means of independent learning is high in rural areas (according to various data, from 11 percent to 14 percent) (Liubovnyi, 2013), including the use of opportunities of distant learning via the Internet. This new and promising trend testifies to the ability of rural population to become an actor of modernization of Russian villages and small towns. Moreover, the number of people who have learned a new trade is higher in regional centers, which is apparently accounted for by the fact that it is easier to find a job in one's specialization in large cities, and not expend energy and time on retraining. By the way, quite a large number of village inhabitants are involved in the system of additional education in countries like the UK, the USA and Finland, which have no social difference between village dwellers and city inhabitants (Yuzhaninov, Rykun & Abramova, 2012).

This testifies to the need (and opportunity) of setting up centers of additional education on the basis of regional universities, which also includes involvement of

specialists of the regional and federal levels. National and regional universities can be connected by a network of agreements on cooperation, whereas professors may be obliged to teach at universities of both types so that regional universities can acquire new knowledge about high-end technologies. This should become part of the all-state system of socio-cultural, intellectual and innovational mobility.

Remarkable investigations have been conducted in this regard by a group of authors on the basis of which we may assume that three main strategies of professional and social mobility are characteristic of the economically active population:

‘Conservative’, which is oriented to ‘dedicated work in an old job’ (27 percent of respondents); such orientation can be explained, among other things, by the state of the market, its specific segments, the restricted number of attractive vacancies;

Innovational and upstream strategy, which is a position of social activism, typical mostly of youth and oriented to acquiring additional education and raising one’s professional qualification (21 percent of respondents);

Strategy of horizontal mobility, embodied in the wish to ‘find another job’ (29 percent) and intentions to migrate (‘change one’s place of residence’ – 14 percent, ‘go abroad for work’ – 4 percent). This strategy can, to some degree, be considered as an activist one, but it presupposes maintenance of the existent qualifications; it is also typical of young people.

In the period of complex transformational processes, the transition of higher education to a multi-level structure, the question arises increasingly often as regards the need of gradual increase of academic freedom offered to the student.

On the one hand, systemic and task-oriented development of academic as well as professional mobility acknowledging the trends of modernization of Russian education and innovational activity of universities is a necessary prerequisite for training a future professional, as required by modern economic conditions and capable of learning adjacent kinds of professional activity depending on market conjecture.

On the other hand, the potential of the mobility of higher education depends on the shift in the professional and social requirements of higher education; scientific validity, situational and long-term educational policy of the state and consequently, on the intellectual and volitional efforts of a student, ‘which fact is determined, to a large degree, by the intellectual and moral state of society and social values cultivated in it.’ (Rakhmanin, 2009). It is worth noting a negative trend related to the emigration of young scholars and innovational specialists.

The annual survey conducted by the National Association of Innovation and IT Development among the graduates of 51 Russian universities from 11 regions of the country demonstrated that from seven to 10 percent of recent graduates go abroad for the sake of continuing their education or pursuing their career (Kokoulina, 2012). The proportion of specialists who graduated from universities three to five years ago and are leaving the country is approximately 18 percent and keeps increasing. Such countries as Germany, France, the UK, the Netherlands and Switzerland are gaining popularity as new places of residence and career.

A possible solution for reducing this brain drain could be active development of transnational academic mobility, which has been described as ‘internationalization of education’ (Barakhtenova, 2013).

The main principles of the comprehensiveness of developing this process are:

- unity of the content and process;
- unity of the theoretical and practical training;
- combining training with professional activity; the correlation between the integration and differentiation of goals, content, methods and means;
- integration of curricular and extracurricular activities.

The imperatives of the state politics of Russia are based on the recognition of international principles of cooperation and are oriented at the same time to upholding national interests. The process of internationalization is actively investigated from the viewpoints of the economic and political sciences, whereas 'the economic context of internationalization informs the establishment of stable international relations in the productive-economic sphere. The social context is established by its close links with education.

When we analyze various approaches to evaluation in education, we can identify three main groups of indicators of the quality of education:

- 1) indicators of quality inside an education system;
- 2) indicators of quality of education of subjective character (consumer views, social-pedagogical monitoring data, public discourse etc);
- 3) indicators of equality of access to higher education for various social strata of population and for people living in different areas.

Indicators of quality inside an education system are used to evaluate quality on the basis of qualimetry, i.e. they establish the quality of a process on the basis of such characteristics as efficiency and effectiveness.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In 2015 the Institute of Economics and Management of Herzen State Pedagogical University conducted a survey of employers of St. Petersburg of entitled 'Investigation of the labor market and employment of graduates' (2015). Directors of state-run and business organizations, industrial and tourist-oriented enterprises as well as hotels took part in it. These included: State Centre "Test - St. Petersburg", Petersburg Oil Terminal, OJSC Balt Trust, Story-invest group 'Soyuz', 'Russian Register', OJSC 'Baltica', CJSC 'Ecoflon', OJSC 'Aprel', travel company 'Aksioma', Mozaika hostel, Taiga hotel and Nekrasov teacher training college No. 1, St. Petersburg City Palace of Youth Creativity, the Information Expertise Center of Primorski district of St. Petersburg, School No. 547 of Nevski district, Schools Nos. 53, 106, 113 of Primorski district, Education Center No. 650 of Pushkinski district, and Nevsky Institute of Language and Culture.

The survey demonstrated that on the whole employers are satisfied with the level of basic training of graduates. However, they have a lot of complaints about the quality of knowledge and skills in specialist disciplines. Thus, they note low level of IT knowledge, insufficient communicative competence, lack of organizational culture and responsibility for a common goal, lack of readiness to take independent decisions, lack of analytical skills and team skills, and most importantly, unreasonably high expectations relative to employability, and some others.

As a result, the researchers concluded that the existent system of university education is not on par with employers' expectations as regards the training of young specialists.

In our opinion, in order to achieve maximal approximation to objectivity, it is necessary to consider a number of factors:

- 1) quality of knowledge, expertise and skills, research carried out by the student;
- 2) social-psychological characteristics of a student (degree of determination to pursue a chosen career, a sort of social-psychological portrait of a student);
- 3) feedback factors, i.e. employers' opinions of the graduates, their views of the training acquired by the students, whether working within their specialty or not.

However, we may state that factor 2) is not represented (or only sporadically represented) within quality evaluation systems at universities, whereas factor 1) needs a more thorough methodological substantiation, and factor 3) is just beginning to be taken into account in terms of employment within one's specialty and after being included in university rankings.

In accordance with the kinds of education within the framework of which this or that set of competences may be formed, individual criteria of quality of university training make up the following groups: 1) theoretical knowledge obtained at lectures and independently; 2) professional skills (knowledge reinforced in tutorials); 3) practical skills (knowledge and expertise applied in circumstances most closely resembling a future job: simulation exercises, project work, practical training, industrial placement; 4) research skills and creativity (students' research).

Be that as it may, given that theoretical knowledge is measurable, practical professional skills remain quite vague, need specification and measurable certainty. For instance, Prince George's Community College in Washington D.C. formulated the outcomes of its Effective Communication course as simple understandable aims. At the same time, they are concept-based criteria:

- clear and concise formulation of subject;
- cohesive text;
- clear and concise thesis statement;
- using evidence and examples;
- clarity of written expression;
- use of appropriate means of speech.

The example we have cited is a simple and clear one. However, in order to solve the problem of specifying professional skills and expertise, Russian universities have a large potential in terms of involving professional communities.

At the same time, Western European universities use multiple mechanisms and instruments, including associations and networks, when elaborating common criteria and approaches in their topical areas. Here are some of them:

- the European Society for Engineering Education (SEFI);
- the Conference of European Schools for Advanced Engineering Education and Research (CESAER);
- thematic networks set up under the SOCRATES programme in the domain of physics;
- the European Mobility Forum; FEANI Index; Washington Accord in engineering education;
- the European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA);
- the European Law Faculties Association (ELFA);
- the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD).

This list also includes EQUIS, the European accreditation system in the field of higher education in management and business administration. The following two aims of this initiative are of interest: 1) promoting a common vision of standards of quality in this topical area (skills profile); 2) organization of the accreditation process of the EC standard.

Taking into consideration European experience, the Russian government demands that the system of higher education should establish intra-university systems of quality assurance as well as a system of objective evaluation (monitoring) of its effectiveness. At present, the effectiveness of this system of assuring the quality of education is one of the main indexes of a university's accreditation. However, the question arises concerning the criteria of measurability of the effectiveness of university education, which has now transformed into the notion of 'effective/ineffective university' in formal, bureaucratic terms, i.e. the number of students, the number of degrees earned and theses defended etc.).

In spite of quite a high level of development of the theory of continuing education, which was declared back in 2004, a new meaning was acquired by this concept at present as that of incompleteness of education under conditions of the high rate of information updating, obsolescence of information, and life-long learning. In Russian society there is no such concept as 'incompleteness of education', whereas the concept of life-long learning is frequently understood as supplementary education which, to our mind, is an outdated interpretation.

The most comprehensive interpretation of the quality of higher education was outlined by the following framework of concepts: "Leadership. Teaching. Personnel. Self-esteem. Participation of the labor market. Participation of the state and accreditation. Information systems. Counteracting corruption." (European Commission, 2009).

The experience of universities in other countries (Varlamova, 2013) shows that their success depends to a large degree on the orientation towards the consumer by means of creating their own systems of quality management. Major universities in industrialized countries have departments responsible for institutional research, which is an area of work covering the university's activities (Pravdina, 2009).

### Implications and Recommendations

The implications and recommendations for the future research are as follows: Quality of education can be examined as a social category since it is related to meeting every individual's need for effective socialization, i.e. for acquisition of means and ways of positively building his or her personal, professional and social life in given social conditions.

It is possible to assume that quality of education is a question of social agreement about what is currently believed to be the most important components of public, private and professional activities of an individual. Therefore it can hardly be an objective characteristic.

The quality of education largely depends on the system of managing a university. Specifically, it depends on the creation by the educational program management of a set of conditions necessary for achieving projected results, formation of preparedness for their constant improvement and correction in compliance with the set strategy and the ongoing changes in the country. It is quite obvious that the quality of education aims at ensuring provision of social services for society and the state as regards the level of graduates' competence. This is directly

linked to the reproduction and development of not only human resources but of the socio-economic system as a whole. Therefore the problems of quality of education and consequently, its evaluation are becoming the focus of discussions not only in education but in society as a whole.

Undoubtedly, universities bear the brunt of training future professionals, although other interested parties, for instance, businesses, are playing an increasingly important role in this process.

The use credits as a measure of labor intensity of programmes of higher education resulted in a sharp reduction of the number of hours allotted for many courses that are not compulsory in accordance with the Federal State Educational Standard. Moreover, contemporary education standards require that lectures constitute not more than 40 percent of university hours, whereas at least 20 percent of classes must be seminars or other interactive study activities.

In spite of the fact that evaluation of the quality of education is based on day-to-day, midterm and final assessments, students receive uniform diplomas of higher education. Strange as it may be, a university graduate is considered fully qualified even if he/she has never got more than a C (or an equivalent grade).

Students who graduate with distinction enjoy no privileges in the employment screening of state-run organizations and are not awarded a higher job class when employed by such an organization.

The academic teaching staff does not assume measurable responsibility for the quality of preparation of graduates in view of the lack of correspondence between education proper and the level of students' competences as its result.

In connection with this, it seems expedient to state that evaluating the quality of education is one of the most complex and at the same time very important problems without the resolution of which it is impossible to ensure real competitiveness of universities. The complexity of the problem is accounted for by the fact that assessment of a university lecturer's performance should be reliable, i.e. scientifically grounded and take into account the usefulness of this performance while recognizing the quantity and quality of the labor input.

The problem of the quality of education is resolved by involving practitioners, research scientists, businesspeople, industrial experts etc in the process of university teaching. Practitioners can really introduce some real-life professional challenges into the curriculum, such as, for instance, case-studies. In this way they may address the problem of information overload, which contributes to formation of professional competences. At the same time these categories of lecturers have little knowledge about the organization of training activities, which reflects on their effectiveness. Furthermore, their remuneration is lower than usual, and this kind of employment is often likened to volunteerism.

In the recent years, which saw enhanced optimization of universities' activities some problems emerged related to the redundancies of external part-timers to which category such practitioner lecturers belong. It is possible to say that universities have lost the support of these lecturers. In view of this, at present the problem emerges of raising the competence of full-time academic teaching staff. This problem can partially be solved by means of practical training of teachers in business structures, at enterprises of prospective graduates' employers as well as organization of students' industrial placements and internships.



Raising the quality of higher education is correlated with the demand of substantial increase in the share of students' independent work and the increase in time allotted for it, which also testifies to the need for carrying out necessary changes both in the organization of training and in the methods of evaluating the performance of the academic teaching staff.

Institutional mechanisms of solving the problems related to the quality of higher education are linked primarily to the establishment of the status of higher education as a service. The quality of this service is one of the decisive competitive advantages of universities. This refers to the understanding of aims, the socio-cultural role and socially important functions of higher education and raises issues related to its content.

In the system of market relations, the very notion of quality is examined from the viewpoint of its correlation with consumers' expectations. In view of this, approaches are changing as well as the very concept of 'the quality of education', which strives to respond to technological and human challenges.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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