

# QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITIES

**Dimitar Dimitrov**

University of Agribusiness and Rural development, 78 Dunav Blvd., Plovdiv 4003, Bulgaria,  
[uard@uard.bg](mailto:uard@uard.bg)

## **Abstract**

The paper makes a comparative analysis of the higher education in Bulgaria for the period until 1990 and the transition after 1990 till today. Science is considered as a special and specific type of business. The responsibilities of the academic community are presented in global and national context, and as well as inside the academic staff of the University of Agribusiness and Rural Development. UARD is directed to quality in all its activities which is a shared sustainable strategic orientation. On one hand, the high quality provides the University with a competitive advantage, and the other - improves the functioning of the internal processes and organization. The University's System for assessing and maintaining the quality of education and academic staff is built on the following principles: focus on students; orientation towards results; leadership and unswervingly follow the chosen direction; management by processes and based on reliable information; staff development and involvement of all to ensure and maintain quality; innovation and continuous improvement of education; building and developing partnerships; responsibility to society. The paper has been examined the following: factors affecting higher education; student motivation- "FOR" and "AGAINST"; the connection between fundamental science and the business; subsidizing science and education; intellectual and financial cycle; the quality of higher education today.

The issues of the international certification of quality of education and disadvantages of accreditation criteria system have been discussed. Conclusions have been made and recommendations have been given for the development of the higher education at the European and national level. Offerings have been listed on opportunities to improve the quality of education in Bulgarian universities.

**Keywords:** *quality, higher education, accreditation, academic community, business*

## Introduction

Globalization processes in the economy and labour markets influenced the higher education systems and they are facing new challenges. According to European Commission /Higher education in Europe/, Europe has around 4,000 higher education institutions, with almost 19 million students and 1.5 million staff. Some European universities are amongst the best in the world, but overall potential is not used to the full. Curricula are not always up-to-date, not enough young people go to university after finishing school and not enough adults have ever attended university. European universities often lack the management tools and funding to match their ambitions.

Between the six positions of the Bologna Declaration, which define the implementation by 2010 of the transformations in national systems of higher education and that are obligatory for all countries, signed the declaration, the issue of quality is given a relatively modest place "promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies " /Bologna declaration, 1999/.

In Bulgarian literature regarding the quality of higher education detailed definition gave Hristov and Hristova /2012/: "the quality is a complex multidimensional set of properties and characteristics of the higher education (university, specialty, curricula) that give it the ability to meet the determined or suspected dynamically changing demands towards education". Thus, a definition of quality of higher education puts emphasis on two important things: this conception includes characteristics that affect the basic elements in the process of higher education and continuous dynamics that this process is subject. The definition would be more complete if includes the quality of teaching staff, students' preparation and quality of infrastructure and learning environment. This addition is necessary to highlight the role of quality in education as a factor for increasing its competitiveness.

Today the quality is a leading factor that suggests sustainable strategic orientation. Universities are directed to quality in all their activities. In this respect UARD is a practical example of this tendency. On one hand, the high quality provides the University with a competitive advantage, and the other - improves the functioning of the internal processes and organization. The University's System for assessing and maintaining the quality of education and academic staff is built on the following principles: focus on students; orientation towards results; leadership and unswervingly follow the chosen direction; management by processes and based on reliable information; staff development and involvement of all to ensure and maintain quality; innovation and continuous.

This paper made a comparative analysis of the higher education in Bulgaria for the period until 1990 and the transition after 1990 till today. Science is considered as a special and specific type of business. The responsibilities of the academic community were presented in global and national context, and as well as inside the academic staff of the University of Agribusiness and Rural Development. The paper also has been examined the following: factors affecting higher education; student motivation- "FOR" and "AGAINST"; the connection between fundamental science and the business; subsidizing science and education; intellectual and financial cycle; the quality of higher education today.

The issues of the international certification of education quality and disadvantages of accreditation criteria system have been discussed. Conclusions have been made and recommendations have been given for the development of the higher education at the European and national level. Offerings have been listed on opportunities to improve the quality of education in Bulgarian universities.

## **Analytical overview of higher education in the years**

Regardless of our attitude towards the Communist system we should recognize that education was then put on a very solid foundation. Obviously communist leaders figured out the importance of the public sector. They sought to prove the advantages of socialism over capitalism by training good professionals introducing innovations in modern industries, especially through propaganda.

After the World War II totalitarian regimes were created, led by the Soviet Union in the so-called "communist" block. Universities in these countries / mostly known as institutes / proved in three ways:

- Create talent for their national skilled workers.
- Trained a large number of students from the so called. "Fraternal countries" / Africa, Asia, Latin America /
- Export of specialists to achieve important projects in the so called. "Third World"

These three manifestations of successful graduates of socialist universities lifted the prestige of the universities themselves.

### *Key features of higher education in the period from the World War II to the fall of the Berlin Wall*

#### ➤ **Planned state**

State planning was coordinating the staff need in all sectors, funding and providing education. Universities had pre- fixed numbers of people to accept. The competition to win one of these places was fierce and uncompromising.

Each prospective student was striving to gain a place for the candidates at university. That was giving him two options: First, was ensuring workplace "by distribution". Meaning that he would be sent to work state where guided decide within the country. Second, after having higher education, he had a chance to grow in the hierarchy, if accepted as a member of the Communist Party.

#### ➤ **Uncompromising learning process**

Professors were uncompromising and did not allow anyone to pass a test without being prepared. Students also knew it. Therefore, while studying they were giving the most of themselves to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for high professionalism.

#### ➤ **The state was ensuring all the needs of universities.**

In the first years after the World War II, in the absence of investment funds, the first lectures were handled in the cultural centres, but that didn't deteriorate the quality of learning.

Later, on the state adopted a policy with priority in science and education, and found the necessary resources.

Laboratories equipped themselves with modern equipment. Teachers had good salaries and opportunities for overseas trips.

#### ➤ **Demand for higher education greatly exceeded supply.**

For a student's a place at university, depending on specialty, between 5 to 100 candidate students competed.

#### ➤ **Accreditation of universities was not held**

In the absence of accreditation, the following question is interesting: Which is the factor that ensures their high- professionalism?

Considering each one of the above factors allows bringing at the first place the moral and professional qualities of the professors.

It turned out that almost all of the professors appointed at the foundation of socialist institutions got qualified in prestigious universities in the West: Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Munich, London and others.

Many of these professors became academics, established schools and built new generation of professors who retired 10-15 years ago. They were also erudite.

The third generation of teachers can be called "Komsomol". Komsomol leaders of university students got the privilege to become graduate students immediately after finishing their studies then immediately began teaching and got an academic rank. These people had a day practice in the real sector. At this point quality in the socialist universities started decreasing. Once again it should be underlined that the biggest input in this first period for the higher education quality has the first professors who graduated in the West. They are the ones who transferred the academic ethics and perfection during the process of education.

#### *Main characteristics of nowadays higher education*

##### ➤ **Non-existence of planned state**

Coordination between public needs and the number of students in public universities is missing. This means that graduates has no guarantee working of a place. That also means that a certified professional can find realisation in another country. This is not good for the country in which he has studied. State has spent investment, finance, and energy and high-quality time to train. Taxpayers of the crisis and the government waste money on training staff to find its realisation abroad.

What happens to mediocre graduates? They are unemployed or working in low-skilled activities / waiters, drivers, hairdressers etc. /

The pre- scheduled by the state number of students is equal or exceeds the number of graduates from secondary schools in the country. There can't be more massive in higher education than this.

In this approach, it is obvious that there is no competition between prospective students to gain a place at university. And they can also study in a private university.

Public universities are interested to take any students because the subsidy is calculated based on the number of students.

##### ➤ **Compromising learning process.**

A significant number of students are not preparing seriously to achieve professionalism and strive only to receive a diploma, hoping that diploma will ensure their pay check. These students may be called "fans on the platform." Others, "players in the stadium," study seriously. This is not due to motivation at university, but motivation in the family.

They will be the leaders, managers, entrepreneurs, senators, ministers, mayors. Those from the platform will ask them for a piece of bread.

##### ➤ **The state is dearth more than two decades.**

Lack of sufficient state funding, mostly for science, is an important factor that characterizes this period of transition. But more importantly, the management of the university are not yet activated, like their colleagues from the United States to look after other sources of money / alumni clubs / through which they can double the budget.

##### ➤ **Demand for higher education exceeds demand.**

Often the positions in public universities, fixed for admission by the Government don't get occupied.

The need of planning is obvious. This will also save a lot of money to the state.

##### ➤ **Held accreditation of universities**

First, the following question is important: who wants to have a bad quality in Bulgarian university?

Of course, before all competing universities can be put. That is normal answer.

The best for them is if they are monopolies in a given region and even the country. They have a strong lobby in the legislation.

According the current law in the higher education relating to affiliates: Branch is given spatial structure of the university, which is created in areas where there is no relevant university structure to meet the training needs in specific professional fields.

Secondly: Engaged / corrupted / media, because:

They receive money to vilify certain university, which is the inconvenient competitor. More money they get to boast their University.

But their actions are not harmless. They influence the formation and deformation of public opinion, which in turn contributes to a lower or higher position in the rating system of universities. The rating does affect the size of the school budget.

Third: The State. It is interested to prove poor quality in a specific University in order to reduce government procurement, budget and the number of universities / public and private /. At least, competing institutions need to prove that the opponent has worse quality, and if possible to influence its degradation. Such opportunity is given by accreditation intervention: experts arrive from competitive university and give you advice which according to the Accreditation agency gives recommendations with a mandatory implementation. For them the Agency wants a written report to be presented on time. Could these recommendations contradict the policy of the accredited university? Could they serve the interests of the university, hence the accreditation? There is a high probability.

And more. Could accreditation experts learn many facts that should be company secrets?

Like any company, the university operates in a competitive environment. It is quite natural to have a confidential development: strategy, tactics, technology innovation, innovative ideas and approaches etc.

There is no guarantee that the information made available to accredited experts will be up to the leaders of the university where they work.

Another vicious practice is this of “logrolling”. In other words: “Colleague, beware what accreditation will do, because in a month I will do an accreditation of your university”. It is clear enough that the accreditation system could serve as a repressive instrument to assaulting the competitor.

### **Who sincerely want quality in a university?**

#### **First: Families of students**

There is no doubt that 99% of the families want for their child an excellent education. Parents best realize they need to grant at least two things to their children:

- Teach them independence.
- Educate them well enough to not live in poverty - have a good job granting them sufficient income.

If parents understand that their children don not get the necessary education but are wasting their time, they get worried and they pass the alarm button.

Moreover, wise fathers and mothers know that if their child does not engage in student assignments, it get lazy. And laziness is the father of the vices - drugs, alcohol, gambling etc. The following example can be given in this regard: This is hard to prove. But by control examinations in Greece it is easily proved, that the majority of young people after graduation,

returned to a homeland the same "empty head as they come" / quote parents from Greece in informal discussion/.

Many of the students took the path of vices: alcohol, gambling, nightlife. When a student was asked how to justify such spending of money in front of his father, he arrogantly replied: "I say that money is asked from nagging professors in order to allow me to take the exam!" Here's another contribution of corruption's fame. Then the Parental Committee turned to the Greek authorities for the academic recognition of foreign diplomas /DIKATSA/. The result was that this university no longer let Greek students either.

Parents know the best the price of time, money, professionalism, most care about their children's future, real values should be integrated into them.

**Second: The University.** It is the second spiritual parent of young people. Beyond all doubt the University is interested students to succeed for their own sake, but mostly because of the university image. This affects its prestige and authority and builds trust with prospective students.

If the evaluation of these indicators is positive, then the university has a future.

It can be summarized that by caring about the quality of its students, the university is actually making a real effort for its survival and development.

**Third: Businesses.** Businesses says: "Give us good professionals and we will do a prosperous business, create new jobs and inject more money into the state, but will also to earn more." The willingness of business for talented workers should not be questionable, as its desire for greater profit. UARD has a good example in this case. When the University offered to business representatives to attend profiling exams, they eagerly accepted the invitation: free recruitment casting, a large selection, objective assessment, option for extra interview and negotiating a scholarship and then work.

**Fourth: Students.**

During its 20 years background UARD has been conducting anonymous surveys about the quality of teaching. Each teacher is evaluated. And students are the direct consumers of the educational product. Because of that market research are similar to those conducted by retailers.

Achieving quality in higher education, both at macro and micro level should be consistent with the belief that education is a systemic, integrated concept, which in any case is not limited to mechanical sum of its elements. According to the staff of UNESCO such elements of higher education are /UNESCO, International Conference of Education, 1989/: quality of teaching staff, quality of curriculum, quality of education methods, quality of the objects of education, quality of infrastructure, internal and external environment. Today searching effective ways to solve the problem of the quality in higher education has become one of the most important conditions for educational system development /Dimitrova, 2011/.

#### ➤ **Establishment of private universities.**

In Bulgaria there are 51 universities, 14 of them are private. The subsidy they get from state is 0. Their accreditation procedures are identical to those of the state. Council of Ministers determines the number of admission at private schools, thus interfering in the competitive environment.

In May 2010, there was a conference, held in Bulgaria which included reports from accreditation agencies of Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania. It has been pointed out that the processes of quality management in private universities influence positively the processes in the state.

## Conclusions and recommendations:

- The European Union needs a new approach to higher education in the newly joined countries. This also applies to those who were also in totalitarian regimes, and are on their way to join.
- Factors that positively influence the quality of higher education: the parents of the students, the university, businesses and students. Factors that adversely affect quality in a university are: competitive universities / which aren't accredited /; involved / corrupt / media, state, type of accreditation "You to me – me to you".
- The introduction of international accreditation will undoubtedly contribute to progress in European higher education.
- Professionalism, moral and academic ethics of professors influence in a significantly stronger way than accreditation on the quality of teaching. European universities are in a competitive environment among themselves, as well as in a global competitive environment. This means that besides the transparent segment, each university should have a segment that is a company secret. In this segment should be stored strategic management, marketing approach designed to implement innovation know-how, etc. It is therefore unacceptable accreditation agencies to require full transparency and reveal of university researches. This applies to any company operating in a competitive environment.
- National planning and coordination between public needs and number of student seats for admission is necessary, especially in times of economic crisis. This can reduce the number of students, with a state subsidy and increase the number of students paying by themselves.
- It would be useful to incorporate best practices from American universities for additional funding.

## References

Bologna Declaration, European Commission,

[ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf)

Hristov, Hr., Hristova, M., "Factors for quality of higher education in competitive environment", *IBS, 9<sup>th</sup> International scientific conference "Challenges facing today's economy"*, June 22-23, 2012, p. 1066

UNESCO, International conference of education, 41<sup>st</sup> session. *Policy and strategy in the field of higher education and its diversification*, Paris, 1989.

<http://www.unesco.org/en/wche2009/resources/conference-documents/>

Dimitrova, V., *Strategic management of higher education in a globalized world / Doctoral dissertation/*, 2011, p. 108

European Commission, Education and Training, Higher Education in Europe [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/higher\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/higher_en.htm)