

Control and assessment in the education quality assurance system in Russia

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Abstract

This article focuses on dealing with the following tasks: is there any difference between the institute of control and the institute of assessment in the system of education quality assurance? Which of the two impacts the quality of higher education more? How do control and assessment co-exist in the Russian educational system? What are the prospects for the development of the education quality assurance system in the Russian Federation?

The article consists of three parts. The first part presents a brief comparative outline of control and assessment as the institutes of the education quality assurance system, the second one, based on the essence of different methodological approaches to quality (norm-oriented and value-oriented approaches), sets out the current types of assessment and control in Russian education; the third part describes possible ways of developing the education quality assurance system in Russia against the background of its integration into the European educational system.

Key words: education quality assurance; Russian educational system; higher education

Introduction

Against the backdrop of the increasing significance of the Universities in speeding up the development of the transforming world economic system, the stiffening

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competition in the global market of educational services, increased mobility of knowledge, people, capital and growing skepticism in the public opinion with regard to the quality of higher education in the conditions where it has become massively accessible², the issues relating to the education quality assurance have been becoming the challenge faced not only by certain educational institutions and countries, but are being grappled with on the level of the whole continents.

The key global tendencies in the area of quality assurance amount to the following (Baydenko (2004), Harvey L (2008), Motova (2004), Van Damme (2002) and others):

- shaping of transnational approaches to the issues of assuring the quality of education and gradual erosion of the national regulatory bodies;
- elaboration of common criteria and standards for education quality assurance of the European countries within the framework of the Bologna process and concurrent retention of the variety of the national systems for education quality assessment, which differ considerably in the makeup of the components with the recognition of the need to combine internal and external assessment;
- concentrating responsibility for the quality of education in the educational institutions themselves as a result of decentralization of the education quality management and expanded autonomy of the universities;
- putting in place national and international independent entities for education quality assessment, developing cooperation between them;
- shifting the emphasis from assessment of the procedural parameters of the education quality to its results as a consequence of active introduction of the competency-based approach to the training of professionals;
- elaborating and introducing quality management systems for educational institutions based on different quality system models.

The European system of education quality assurance constitutes a multi-level system, comprising a system for internal quality assurance of an educational institution, national system for external assessment of the education quality, external assessment of the education quality at the European level, and has, respectively, a two component structure, which connects the internal and external assurances.

The basis for the European quality assurance is the existence of a well functioning system for quality assurance at the national level (Vroyenstiyn, 2000), which should include (12):

- a description of the responsibility of the bodies and institutes involved;
- assessment of the programs or educational institutions as a whole, including the internal assessment and external audit, students' participation in these procedures and subsequent publication of their results;

² In Russia, in 1995, there were 189 students per every 10 thousand people, in 2000 – 327, in 2007 – 407.

- a system of accreditation, certification or comparative procedures;
- international participation, cooperation and networking.

Russia, which has joined the Bologna declaration, and Russian Universities are concerned with a quest of tools to assure and demonstrate the high quality of higher education and are in the process of checking the inventory of the devices available to them and adapting new devices. The structure and functions of the system for education quality assurance in the Russian Federation are laid down by the Law of the Russian Federation «On Education». According to the Russian Federation National Report (2007-2009), the systems for quality assurance in the Russian Federation have been harmonized with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and include licensing procedures (ex-ante) and accreditation procedures (ex-post). The term “peer team” has been legalized as well as the requirements applying to their special training and also the involvement of students and employers in the procedures of assuring education quality.

Thus, the system of education quality assurances at different levels (international, national, university level and others) is made up of the policy in the quality area, organizational structures, bodies responsible for quality, resource support of education, quality audit procedures. According to Harvey (1999), the education quality assurance procedures comprise such components as control, reporting and improvement. Bazargan (2002) regards the education quality assurances as a package of various types of assessment, audit and accreditation.

Without belittling the role of all the components of the quality assurance system listed above, in our paper we would like to focus on control and assessment, which is close to it, as the institutes of education quality assurance. The problem is that, first, given the change in the paradigms in the area of education, the concepts, traditional for the system, tend to acquire new meanings and require greater precision with their use, secondly, despite active discussion of the capabilities of education quality control and assessment in the foreign literature and the existence of conclusions in favor of the latter (e.g. Harvey, Vroyenstiyn), to this date in the Russian theory and practice uncertainty continues in understanding the essence of these phenomena.

Brief comparison between control and assessment

Review of the literature in the area of quality assurance and management enables one to conclude that the most common is the notion of identity between education quality assessment and control as the tools for education quality management. Comparison procedure helps to see similarity between the two concepts: assessment means determining the significance, the value of an object for someone based on the comparison of its properties with those of a reference benchmark or equivalent, control presupposes comparison of actual performance indicators with

the planned targets (G.Utekhin, B.Mishnev). The Tempus (2001), Vlăsceanu , L., Grünberg, L., and Pârlea (2004), D. Blackmore (2004) treat the quality assessment as an educational equivalent of quality control and determine the place of quality assessment and quality inspection within the same control paradigm. Kenny (2006), Yorke (1997) view quality assessment in education as a method similar to quality control in manufacturing aimed at productivity inspection and corrections. We will beg to differ and disagree with such treatment of these concepts and in the next part of our paper we will justify our point of view.

Let us define the concepts employed in our article. By quality assurances we mean the responsibility of the education management subjects for assuring its quality as ability to live up to the expectations of the majority of users. Education quality control is a set of relations aimed at determining the conformity of the educational activity performance indicators with the norms applicable to their quality. The education quality assessment is a set of relations aimed at determining the measure of value of the education for an assessing subject.

Control and assessment provide a multitude of reasons for isolating them as different institutes of the quality assurance system (Table).

Table

Comparative description of education quality control and assessment

Grounds for comparison	Education quality control	Education quality assessment
Aim	Determining compliance with the education policy, existing law	Determining compliance with the requirements of the stakeholders
Functions	Administrative, stimulating, informational	Motivational, informational
Methodological approach	Norm-oriented	Value-oriented
Character	Absolute	Absolute, relative
Subject	A person or body authorized to exercise control by the subject of the educational system management	Any stakeholder interested in education
Object	Educational process and/or educational results	Educational process and/or educational results
Criteria	Established pursuant to the normative documents of the educational system	Established in line with the aims of the assessment subject
Indicators	Quantitative, qualitative	Quantitative, qualitative
Result	Compliance/non-compliance	Degree to which the stake-

	with the established norms	holders' requirements are met
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Common to education quality control and assessment is their orientation to gauging the ability of education to satisfy the users' requirements, however in the case of control, we are dealing with formalized requirements upgraded to the level of norms. In other words, the fundamental difference between education quality control and assessment is predicated by the degree to which the norm-orientation and value-orientation of their methodological approaches manifest themselves.

It is noteworthy that the norm-oriented and value-oriented approaches are not diametrically opposed phenomena, since norms are established as a result of formalizing the values of a certain society or its part.

The norm oriented approach implies orientation to a system of control parameters set by the education management subject.

The value oriented approach is a method of organizing, a method of engaging in an activity, of obtaining and using its results from the perspective of these or other values (Belikov, 2010). The relevance of applying the value oriented approach in the education quality assurance system is determined by the variety of value orientations of different groups of users and the need for them to be identified and subsequently satisfied. In Motovaya's opinion (2004), the value oriented approach manifests itself in selecting the education quality criteria as a system for assessing internal system indicators with priority selection of value oriented indicators which shape the system's reputation and the recognition by the external and internal environments.

Control and assessment of the education quality in Russia: what do we have?

We have made an attempt at determining a dependence between these two approaches to the institutes of the education quality assurance system under examination here. In Diagram 1 we have plotted different types of control and assessment existing in the Russian education system depending on the degree to which orientation to norms or to values of the stakeholders manifests itself. Let us review these elements of the diagram in greater detail.

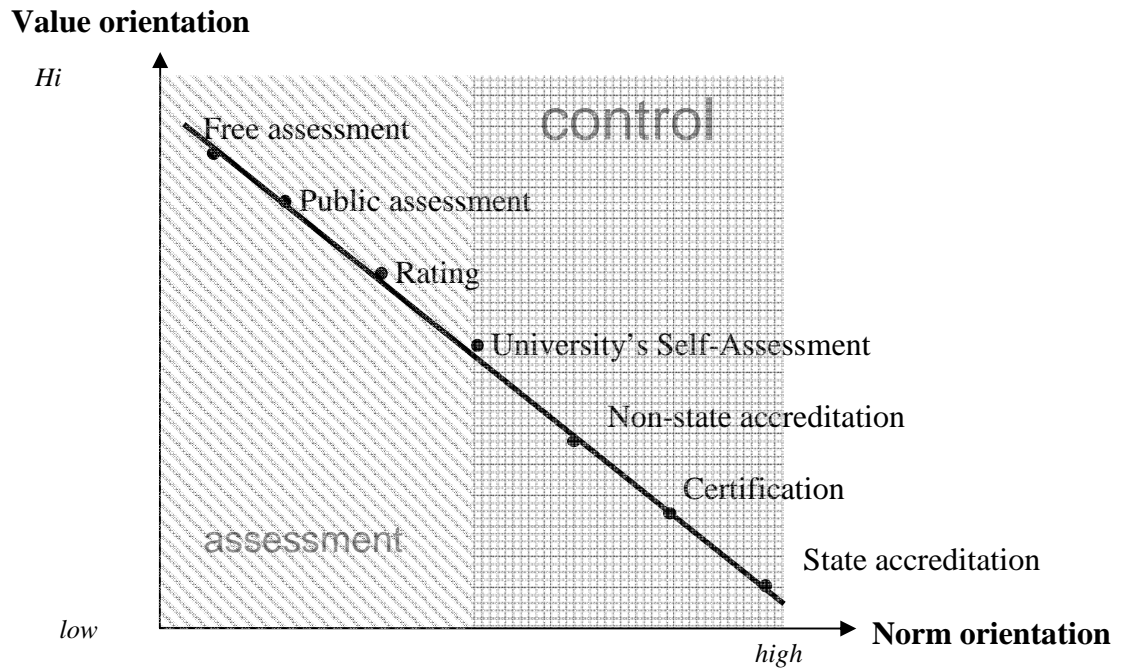


Diagram 1. Dependence between types of education quality assessment and control on the degree to which the orientation of the methodological approaches manifests itself

Control is characterized by a high degree of norm orientation as in its essential aspect it presupposes comparison of existing indicators with the normative ones. A high degree of norm orientation manifests itself in the institute of accreditation, as a result of which official confirmation of the quality compliance of the educational services provided with certain norms of the accreditation authority is given. The accreditation authority guarantees to the stakeholders interested in the quality of education that the accredited program or institution deserve their trust in the quality of the products.

Undoubtedly, the highest degree of norm orientation is typical of the state accreditation as a form of state control which transitions to supervision over compliance with the requirements laid down by the government. Therefore, the government does not only guarantee the quality of education at the existing universities, but it guarantees the quality of the national educational system at large, blocking access to it for the institutions which fall short of the minimum requirements applicable to the quality of education.

Russia is currently sticking to the so called «French model» for quality management of higher education. The government quality control is exercised by scheduled and unscheduled audits carried out by control and supervision authorities in the area of education to inspect the conformity of the content and (or) quality of training provided to the students and graduates of the educational institutions to the requirements of the federal state educational standards or federal state requirements (Article 38 of the Federal Law on Education).

At the present time, due to transition of the Russian higher education system to a three level system of training professionals, third generation standards are being introduced which have been devised by the country's leading Universities and commissioned by the Ministry of Science and Education.

From our perspective, the external control, despite considerable success in normative developments and scientific justification, is oriented to sporadic collection of quantitative indicators, which does not allow significant problems and achievements to be ascertained or education quality improvement to be planned. The Russian pedagogical science in recent years has tended to differentiate between systems aimed at the development mode or functioning mode (V.I.Baydenko, N.A.Selezneva (1998)).

If the control procedures consisting in ascertaining whether the educational results or current educational process results meet or do not meet the government requirements, support the functioning mode, then what institutes of education quality can be instrumental in the University's development? Harvey (2008) claims that in the countries with a significant public sector the governments are trying more and more to control the unbridled growth in the area of high education through quality monitoring and accreditation. External review is used in order to make sure that the principles and practices of higher education are not eroded thus undermining the quality proper of the university level education and scientific research, however there is no proof showing that the external quality control influences the improvement of the quality of training (Harvey, 1997).

The orientation of the Russian Universities to compliance with the state accreditation criteria only does not guarantee recognition of the quality of education by the labor markets and educational services markets, let alone international recognition (Gorbashko, 2008). Inclusion into the state accreditation commissions of experts from the local community, other universities and employers introduces into the procedure elements of the value oriented approach, however with state requirements given the priority, the participation of the general public still continues to be more for form than for value.

The role of the guarantor of education quality may be played by non-state (public and professional) accreditation which also possesses a considerable degree of norm-orientation, as its procedures culminate in the accreditation of the program or educational institution as a whole. The bodies of non-state (public and profes-

sional) accreditation have evolved their own systems of education quality requirements, which act as benchmarks in assessing the quality of education.

Under the existing Russian law, the educational institutions may acquire accreditation from national, foreign and international educational, research, public and other organizations. In Russia this institute is represented by the following few agencies: Agency for Public Control Over the Quality of Education and Development of Career (AKKORK), Russian Association for Engineering Education (RAEE), The National Center of Public Accreditation (NCPA).

By the present time it is only RAEE that has achieved not only national but also international recognition, having put in place a system of professional accreditation for educational programs in the area of technology and processes compatible with those that have international recognition. One of the principal reasons why the others have failed to do the same has been the low level of interest on the part of the Universities resulting from the agencies' unsatisfactory methods which, to a great extent, duplicate the effort of the state accreditation authorities.

Many experts believe that the development of the institute of the education state accreditation should be pursued by instituting mechanisms to account for the results when the state accreditation is carried out, however it is our opinion that, given such an approach, the public entities would not operate as guarantors of the education quality to the stakeholders, their functions would be reduced to preparation of the information for the state accreditation.

One of the types of non-state control over the education quality is certification which is actively penetrating into the education sphere while the concept of "new managerialism" is playing a prominent role. Certification is a procedure of confirming compliance by which an organization, independent of the manufacturer and the consumer, certifies that the product complies with a specific standard (international, national, industry standard).

Certification of the universities in Russia is primarily developing along the lines of the university's internal management of the education quality based on the following modules:

1. TQM Model (Total Quality Management).
2. ENQA Model (the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education).
3. IWA Model, underlying which is ISO/IWA 2:2007 International standard "Quality Management Systems – Guidelines on the Application of ISO 9001:2000 in Education".
4. Quality Management Model based on the requirements of ISO 9001:2008 standard.
5. Education Quality Assurance Model created by the order of the Ministry of Science and Education of the Russian Federation. This Model is often referred to as "Type Model". Advanced Universities in Russia took part in

its creation, while underlying it are the principles and requirements of ISO 9001:2000 international standard and the principles of the Bologna process.

609 Russian universities³ hold confirmation of compliance with the quality system of the educational institution of the chosen model (15).

All the above mentioned elements of the education quality assurance system use in their procedures, self assessment of the educational institution which is of transitional nature from control to assessment as it is «self assessment that shows how to abandon control and start to be responsible for one's own quality» (Gorbashko, 2008, p.70).

The communique of the European Conference of Ministers responsible for higher education, (Bergen, May 2005) urges universities to carry on with their efforts aimed at improving the quality of their activities by systematically presenting their internal mechanisms for assuring quality and directly correlating the internal schemes with the external quality assurance system. The degree to which orientation to values or norms manifests itself depends on the purpose for which the self assessment is made: when self assessment is made in order to obtain accreditation or certification, the level of orientation to the norms of the decision making authority is high. As we know, in the EU countries self assessment is used in 68% of the countries during accreditation and in 94% during assessment proper (Kiss, 2005). In Russia preliminary self audit of the university for compliance with the norms of the state standards is a mandatory condition for the passage of the state accreditation procedure.

Recently one of the popular types of education quality assessment has been the rating. High level of orientation of the ratings to value is conditioned by the fact that they, while basing themselves on a set of separate attributes, reflect preference for one assessed university or object program to others rather than compare their indicators with the norms. The guarantor of the education quality in the public perception is not the ratings themselves or their authors, it is the position or ranking of the university in the rating. Of course, this is true only in the case of public recognition of the rating systems themselves, such as the ratings of The Times, the British newspaper, or the rating of the Institute of Higher Education of Shanghai Jiao Tong University. In Russia there are also ratings published by independent agencies, employers' associations, various mass media, however their results do not have a strong impact on the public opinion. The most trustworthy is the activity of the «ReutOR» Agency, which structures its ratings on the basis of its own sociological surveys and government statistics.

³ As at the end of 2009 in the Russian Federation there were 1114 universities (http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b10_13/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d2/07-01.htm)

Other types of public assessment (for example, assessment of teaching quality by students, assessment of customer satisfaction, etc.) are not oriented to comparing assessment objects with norms but are oriented to compliance with the values of the groups of educational services users and the results which are the least formalized. Russian universities are trying to implement the principle of «customer orientation» not only in their pricing policy but also in the shaping of the policy in the quality area, therefore they are using various forms of involving employers, applicants and their parents⁴, current students in quality assessment.

We feel it would be appropriate to refer, for example, to part of our research of the students' perceptions of the high education quality which were investigated with a view to identifying the attractiveness factors of the universities for the students. Participating in the study were third year students majoring in economics and pedagogy of whom were 270 students at Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University (Russia) and 204 students at Bologna University⁵. Without going into the details of the study methodology, we shall now give here some of the study results. In the opinion of the students of the two universities, the quality of higher education is determined by the contents of educational process, the quality of teachers and the interaction of a higher educational institution with potential employers⁶. Insignificant country related differences were observed only in terms of prioritizing these criteria within the group. The most important criteria for the Italian students were: quality of teachers, followed by the contents of educational process, interaction of the higher educational institution with potential employers; for the Russian students the criteria were ranked as follows: quality of interaction with potential employers, quality of the contents of training specialists, quality of teachers⁷. Such studies allow one to obtain assessment of the quality of education with a high degree of reflection of its users' value orientations.

Low norm orientation is typical of the so called «free assessment», whose characteristic feature is «lack of formalized description of assessment indicators and methods of obtaining the final judgment» (Motova, 2004, p.58). Motova believes

⁴ Our research has shown that 52% of applicants choose their university under the parents' influence.

⁵ The author wishes to thank all the colleagues from Bologna University for providing their support during the study, special thanks go to prof. Antonio Genovese (Faculty of Education), prof. Morena Cuconato (Faculty of Exercise and Sport Sciences), prof. Carlo Boschetti, prof. Daniele Ritelli (Faculty of Economics).

⁶ In addition to these, students were asked to rate the importance of the following criteria for the quality of education: Quality of requirements for admission, Quality of teaching methods, information and library support, Quality of scientific and research activity, Quality of material and technical base, Quality of extracurricular activity, Quality of training process management, Quality of servicing.

⁷ More detailed results of the study will be presented in our further works.

that this type of assessment is based on involving in assessment highly qualified experts and on absolute unreserved trust in their judgments. Referred to the same type of assessment is, from our perspective, the public opinion as an unformalized type of assessment, personal assessment of the education quality by certain users and all cases where “peer review” is applied.

The problem with the application of «free assessment» is the possible subjectivity of the results: «The visiting peer-review team at the heart of the ubiquitous approach to quality assurance is another attempt to democratise quality assurance. Peers, it is argued, are insiders to the sector, provide insight, understand issues and are, therefore, supportive and sharing. An alternative view suggests that they are biased, prejudicial, and amateurish: evidence provided by people having been peer reviewed suggests that, rather than supportive, peers can be destructive and pernicious» (Harvey, 2008, p.6).

Concluding the review of the elements of the quality assurance system in Russian education, we can establish the existence of inverse dependence between the user value orientation and orientation to norms in the institutes of control and assessment (ref. the descending straight line in Diagram 1.).

It is our opinion that it is precisely the assessment, rather than control, which is based on the value oriented approach, that shapes the «poly-subject concepts of the quality assurance with the involvement of different parties» (Baydenko, 2004). In any case, the assessment is made in the interest of certain individuals whose value orientations «are expressed in their conscience and emotions as the needs which drive their present behavior and program the future one» (Kiryakova, 1996, p.49). Control, which is directly linked to reporting submitted by the educational institutions, is not the guarantor of education quality for all the stakeholders (parties interested in education) as it only confirms the “safety level” in the sense of the mandatory facilities being available for pursuit of educational activities, rather than the level of quality.

Discussions about the relationship between education quality control (reporting) and assessment were actively going on in Europe in the late 1990-s and swung in favor of the internal quality assessment as confirmation of the responsibility of the educational institution itself for the quality of the education provided.

In the course of such discussions Harvey (1997) pointed out some «scepticism» among academics with regard to external reviews focused on reporting. The quality which is covered by control and controlling mechanisms is intrusive on academic autonomy and quality per se. The study of education quality, to his mind, is not necessary so much for results or determination of superiority of some universities over others but for the process of dialogue and transformations. Yorke also indicated that what is to be managed at the national level and the level of the institute is improvements rather than the form of reporting: «requirements for the fu-

ture call for a more circumspect approach in which improvements come first while the form of reporting comes second» (1999).

Education quality control and assessment in Russia: what comes first?

In the situation where in the European educational environment the assurances of education quality are shifting in favor of the university's full responsibility while the governments play an auxiliary role, in Russia the development of the institute of the education quality assessment which assumes voluntary participation of the educational institutions may alleviate certain issues of «tension» for the universities finding themselves «between Scylla of quality improvement and Charybdis of reporting» (Vroyenstijn, 2000).

Unfortunately, despite the need for public involvement in the running of education declared by the Russian government, a review of the Russian experience does not allow one to speak of the sufficient development of the institute of assessment in the system of education quality assurances. The prevalence of the institute of control in the Russian system of education quality assurances is a consequence of the previous political situation: « When the purpose of quality assurance is control of the sector, or checking compliance with government policy, or ensuring accountability (usually for taxpayers' money) and the methodology involves some form of inspection, albeit in the apparently benign form of peer review, then there is not much sign of democracy» (Harvey, 2008, p.8).

Among the other reasons for the existing situation one can mention the strongly ingrained traditions of state governance, the deep-rooted paternalism mentality inherent in Russian citizens and the public's immaturity for participation in the running of the social sphere, lack of well established mechanisms for implementing such participation.

It is worth mentioning that we are talking about immaturity of the forms of public assessment as the institute of education quality assurance rather than about the lack of them: examples of these forms were given above.

The key problem with the assessment is that it is not always and not all the universities that are interested in a straightforward and in-depth investigation into their problems (especially if the investigation is voluntary and is carried out on the part of the users who have no authority in the education sector) and in subsequent presentation of the results to the general public. The development of the institute of assessment should be based on the observance of the principles of autonomy and independence of the educational institutions, ideological and methodological integrity of the assessment system, preparedness of all the stakeholders to participate in the assessment procedures and the growing quality culture at the universities.

Examination of the latest information pertaining to the area of quality assurance in the Russian Federation (draft of the new Law on Education, statements by gov-

ernment officials, proceedings of conferences and forums) enables us to project the development of the following tendencies:

1. Continued strong government control in the form of government regulation consisting in licensing, accreditation, control and supervision over education. On the one hand, control is expected to be liberalized by introducing infinitely valid licenses to engage in educational activities and extending the validity period of the state accreditation up to 6 years. On the other hand, post-licensing control procedures (a year after licensing) and post accreditation control are being put in place.

2. Growing value orientation of the state accreditation concurrent with growing autonomy of the universities due to the reorganization of the structure of the higher education system in Russia. The Universities which have been granted the special status (Moscow University, St. Petersburg University), Federal status (there are 7 of them) and national status, are entitled to implement educational programs based on independently instituted standards and requirements. As V.I. Baydenko (2004) wrote, a University standard must be oriented to different types of markets and «to this or that level of quality: elitist, populist, residual, cost related».

3. Systemization of the forms of quality assessment for all levels of education based on a uniform conceptual and methodological foundation by establishing the All-Russia System for Education Quality Assessment. At the present time, following a lengthy experiment, only one element of All-Russia System for Education Quality Assessment has been introduced, i.e. – the general government test which Russian school leavers take after completing the grades of basic and general education whose results are considered during competitive selection for enrollment by a higher education institution.

4. Development of the non-state accreditation system for educational organizations. Setting up a system of professional and public accreditation for educational programs and a system for certification of professional education institution graduates. The terms of reference on the establishment of the system for independent assessment of the professional education quality approved in 2009 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation and the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs envisages the openness of the assessment system and the participation in the assessment procedures by any organizations, hence, poly-component models of assessment are expected to be constructed oriented to the values of a broad segments of users.

5. Development of the institute of independent experts in education. The Ministry of Education and Science, APCQEDC, RAEE, already have their own expert bases; 2006 saw the foundation of the Guild of Experts in the Area of Professional Education.

Therefore, analysis of the capabilities of control and assessment leads us to believe that their further development as the institutes of education quality assurance in

the system of Russian education is likely to proceed concurrently by way of mutual complementation of the strengths of each of the two and compensation for the weaknesses of each other. The Russian educational system will be in a position to assure the quality of education compliant with the requirements of the Bologna process, mature orientation of the institutes of education quality control and assessment to the users' values while retaining a sufficiently high degree to which the norm oriented approach will manifest itself. The task of these institutes is to achieve direct dependence between orientation to users' values and orientation to norms and to combine in a reasonable fashion these two methodological approaches.

In Diagram 2 we have reflected the projected trends in the development of the institute of assessment and control in the Russian system of education quality assurances.

Value orientation

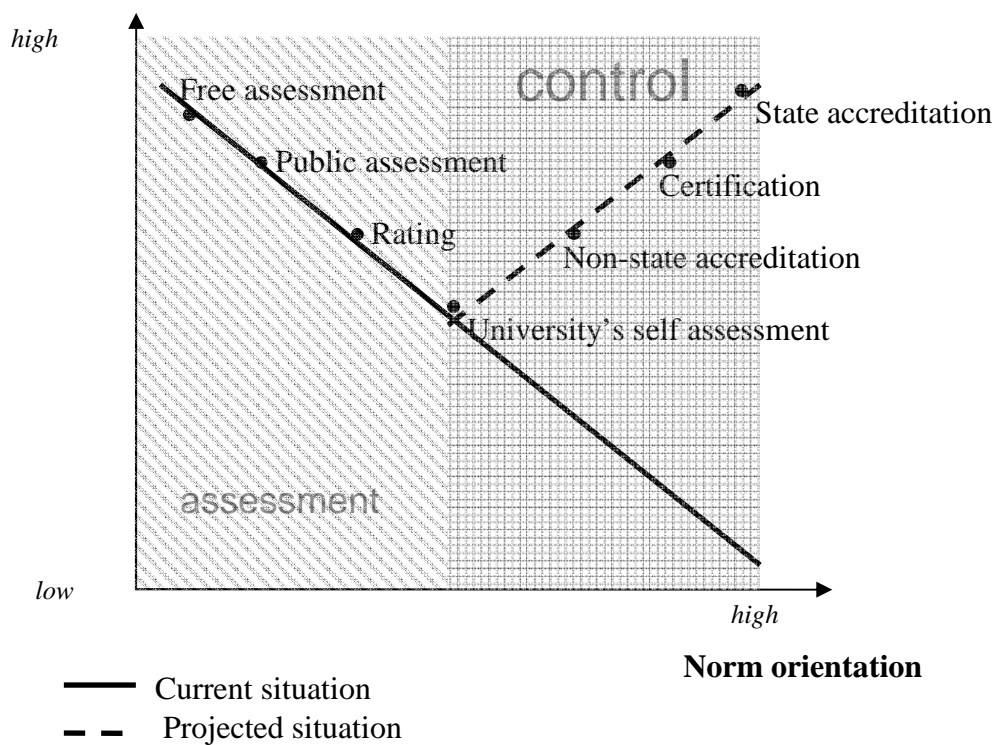


Diagram 2. Dependence of the types of education quality assessment and control on the degree to which orientation of the methodological approaches manifests itself (projection).

Conclusion

We have ascertained that the factor which determines the difference between assessment and control as the institutes of education quality assurance system is the predominance of one of the two methodological approaches: norm oriented approach or value oriented approach. Control which has a high degree of norm orientation, prevails in the Russian educational system. Higher education quality assurances cannot be based on external control only on the part of the appropriate authorities, they must be assured by the institutes of external and internal education quality assessment. Under the new conditions in the existence of Russian universities in the environment of the European requirements applying to education quality assurance, the development of the education quality assurance is deemed to be possible along the path of combining the strengths of assessment and control with the latter being increasingly oriented to the values of all the stakeholders interested in education and with their increasing empowerment in managing the quality of education.

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