



POLICY BRIEF

QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF FACULTY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

(Yerevan State University case)

Higher education quality assurance mechanisms have been addressed in Armenia with a number of projects quality assurance mechanism was launched in higher education system of Armenia. Some of those mechanisms have just been introduced to meet the expectations of international donors, without taking into account local needs, peculiarities and premises. University departments often try to avoid from participating in such programs to elude unnecessary load, negative attitude towards the new and innovative means, and other reasons.

Since September 2011 Yerevan State University launched a programme to enhance the quality of Faculty. However, the efficiency of this programme has not been evaluated by an independent and external agency.

Participation in the programme is mandatory for the whole faculty (about 1000 professors of YSU), and the programme is designed for 5 years, which shall come to its end in June, 2016.

The program has 2 components - educational and research-methodological, overall requiring 30 credits for lecturer to complete the cycle. Maximum load available for educational component is 27 credits (10 credits of which are compulsory courses). This component contains the following 4 sections - general, pedagogical-psychological, vocational training and other forms of professional development. The maximum load for the research-methodological component is 20 credits (3 credits for compulsory courses). This includes the following 3 components – publications, conference participation and dissertation defense.

As we already mentioned, to successfully complete the cycle, a participant shall collect 30 credits within 5 years: 13 are composed of mandatory components of the program and 17 are constructed from electives. Otherwise, a participant shall not pass the final certification.

The number of credits and binding subjects and their content are the cause of numerous problems and complaints among the faculty. The most important questions are left open: to what extent these means are in compliance with the needs of the faculty (indirectly, with the students' needs) and to what extent they are effective / efficient.

The initiators of this study, being YSU professors, have concerns regarding the impact of the mentioned Faculty professional development programme on their daily teaching practice and professional development. The interconnection between the professional advancement and these measures is not tangible and clear.

The **goal** of this study is to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the quality assurance mechanism for YSU faculty.

- The effectiveness of the mentioned mechanism is analyzed based on several criteria (compliance to the needs and responsiveness, innovative teaching methods, content quality and actuality, applicability of knowledge, etc.);
- The programme is analyzed within a wider context of other mechanism and approaches for quality assurance;
- Recommendations are elaborated to enhance the effectiveness of mentioned mechanism, quality of faculty and quality of education.

The **practical goal** of the study is systematic presentation of the existing problems and their solutions. The research team acknowledges that only the direct beneficiaries' (faculty) inclusive participation in the programme design process may result in significant improvements of the program.

The study was implemented by IPP experts Arevik Anapioyan, Hovhannes Hovhannisyan and Avetik Mejlumyan with the full financial assistance of Open Society Foundations.

The research team members are YSU professors and have extensive experience in public policy research of various fields.

IPP studies and researches may be found on IPP web page (www.ipp.am) and on Facebook page (Institute of Public Policy).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Redefine the philosophy of quality assurance programme for the faculty.

The principle should be applied in practice that the project aims to advice and build capacity rather than to inspect and control the faculty. IPP shall pay attention to the environment creating activities. Such environment should be created where the motivational incentives for faculty development shall prevail to external suppressing mechanisms.

2. To ensure active participation of direct (faculty) and indirect (students) stakeholders in the review process of YSU faculty professional development programme and in redevelopment of the 2016-2020 programme.

This will be possible to implement if the process of programme development has bottom-up direction which means the development plans to be drawn up at the level of Faculties and Chairs, and afterwards to be included in the University program.

3. To review the binding nature of the program. If impossible, to decrease the mandatory components of the program and increase the number of optional components.

As the study of international experience shows, the most effective programs are those that are not binding and tend to establish healthy and vibrant academic environment. Therefore, it is desirable to avoid the compulsory elements and promote the mutual trust and establishment of healthy and competitive academic environment. At the same time, incentives should be elaborated (eg, bonuses, bonus points for faculty classification mechanism) to promote the participation in elective / non-binding components.

4. To raise awareness about the programme in the faculties and departments through informal but regular discussions.

5. To define the selection criteria for teachers of the programme courses and to ensure their transparency.

Although the courses for quality development tend to teach the contemporary methods and approaches, the majority of the applied methods is complicated to name modern. Innovative approaches for teaching are absent and the principles for student-centered teaching are ignored (the faculty has the status of “student” within the program). The modern teaching methods should be applied. The faculty should become the bearer for innovative teaching culture.

6. To develop principles for forming participant groups.

More attentions should be paid to the formation of the groups as the age difference, experience and other differences of teacher and “student” is a cause for tensions and conflicts.

7. To review the group of binding courses and the requirements for research-methodology component of the faculty.

The conditions and university technical infrastructure enabling the application of the obtained knowledge shall be studied (technical capacities of rooms, restrictions by regulations, workload of professors). It should be clearly stated that in case of absence of those conditions and infrastructure or insufficiency of those means the teaching of binding courses may be changed.

The content requirements to publications should be clarified. For example, what kind of thematic relation and direction should they have with educational activities of the faculty; is the use of scientific outcomes in teaching process important? What are the requirements for conferences or if the printed version of report is a sufficient proof for having participated in a conference?

8. To introduce an electronic management system for the programme.

The introduction of electronic management system shall provide the full availability of information on the programme starting from the syllabi and schedules of the courses to the individual plans of and collected credits by each professor. The professor having access to this system shall have more flexibility to plan their participation in the program.

The electronic system shall enable the professors to upload all documents required - articles, certificates, etc. The electronic exchange of information and decrease of physical presence shall enable to save time for faculty and staff involved in the faculty professional development programme. quality assurance program.

9. To localize and adapt the experience of other Universities (Armenian and foreign) in the process of faculty professional development.

It would be preferable to involve professors from foreign Universities in the process of faculty quality assurance. This shall promote the input of elements of cultures from foreign Universities, exchange and enrichment of experience. The quality assurance of other Armenian Universities is also very important. The results of quantitative survey showed that the YSU professors are not aware about the experience of other Universities. The information about the quality assurance mechanism of different Universities is not available and it is rather closed(classified), while the open and transparent communication shall promote the development of quality culture at Universities.

10. To conduct needs assessment of YSU faculty before the development and approval of the programme for 2016-2020.

The structure and elements, regulations and principles of new programme for quality assurance shall be based on the needs assessment at institutional as well as at individual level. The comprehensive needs assessment, self-assessment, assessment by colleagues and Faculty/Department management shall be provided. The needs assessment shall save time and other resources for trainers and faculty and shall make the teaching more target oriented.

11. To conduct needs assessment for jobmarket of YSU alumni and students before the development and approval of the program for 2016-2020.

The needs assessment of jobmarket for each profession and students is very important. The results of needs assessment shall be directly and indirectly reflected in the process of quality assurance for the faculty.

12. To enable the chairs and departments to develop components of faculty professional development programme.

13. The majority of the programme elements/courses (trainings, courses, etc.) may be transferred to the Faculty level where the development and teaching of the course shall be more flexible and effective.

The Faculties may implement more effective needs assessment which shall enable the development of more flexible courses and solve administrative issues.

14. To promote the peer-to-peer education to establish the teaching culture of non-formal courses.

One of the best teaching practices for the faculty is the teaching process through horizontal links by peers. This kind of education may supplement and sometimes substitute the courses of quality assurance programme. The potential of horizontal teaching can be implemented on the level of chairs and departments.

The knowledge sharing among colleagues shall promote the self-development of professors and shall establish an open culture for communication and mutual assistance. This shall promote also the accountability of professors in front of academic and professional society.

The decentralization shall result in increased number of professional courses and shall consider specificities of each discipline while drawing up the courses. Speech culture or art of rhetoric's courses shall pay more attention the Armenian terminology of each discipline. The courses of modern teaching methods shall pay more attention to the methods applicable to the teaching of the discipline in charge. Certainly, the control over the proper implementation of the measures on this level shall be

strengthened, as the decentralization shall bring forward new risks for the programme management.

15. To reconsider the current evaluation system for the academic achievements of the professors. (professional development). Currently the evaluation is more mechanical and quantitative.

The evaluation system for different disciplines shall be diversified. For example, the time and other resources for writing an academic article of the discipline shall be taken into account.

16. To develop a clear and proper regulation to assess the knowledge and capacities of the course participants.

The situational assessment should be avoided, which usually has the form of testing the group based on the responses from some participants, and other subjective approaches.

17. To develop assessment mechanism for the course and other relevant tools.

It is also very important to have on-going assessment of the knowledge and capacities obtained after the end of the course. After the completion of the course the participants shall reserve the right to assess comprehensively the quality of the taught material, compatibility with their needs, teaching methods and other issues through filling out questionnaires or other tools.

Feedback is important to understand the impact of the program as well as for providing ongoing advisory support for the faculty. On the other hand, the information provided by the faculty shall enable to review and improve the courses.

*The Open Society
Foundations is a
private operating and
grantmaking
foundation, that aims
to shape public policy
to promote democratic
governance, human
rights, and economic,
legal, and social
reform.
For more information
visit www.osf.am*

The author of the opinions and recommendations embodied in this report is “Institute of Public Policy” (IPP) think tank which is solely responsible for the content of the material. The analysis expresses the opinions of the authors and is not approved by Open Society Foundations-Armenia or its board and consequently does not represent the positions and opinions of Open Society Foundations-Armenia. The content of this study may not coincide with the positions of Open Society Foundations-Armenia.

This report was published by full financial assistance of Open Society Foundations-Armenia., Grant N G18911.

Public Policy Institute

info@ipp.am | www.ipp.am

093 43 99 44 | 094 88 99 84