

Self-evaluation or self-reporting? – a self-study in Russia's higher
education accreditation

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Dedication

Я хочу посвятить эту работу моей семье, в особенности кошке Миле,
которую я больше никогда не увижу.

Abstract

Quality assurance is at the forefront of higher education policy in Russia. This thesis examines the role of self-study in the state accreditation process. The question driving this research is whether self-study is a critical self-evaluation tool aimed at the improvement of the education process, or a formal self-reporting practice to account for the education process to the external agency. Document content analysis was utilized to explore the policy level of the quality assurance system. The relationship between policy and other macro-level agendas and institutional practices was investigated using a case study analysis approach.

Keywords: self-study, accreditation, Russian higher education system, force-field analysis

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List of abbreviations

EHEA – the European Higher Education Area

ENQA – the European Network for Quality Assurance

HEI – higher education institution

HSE – the Higher School of Economics

IQAS – internal quality assurance system

OECD – the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Rosakkredagenstvo – the Russia’s National Accreditation Agency in Education

Rosobrnadzor – the Russia’s Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Research

SESHPE – the State Educational Standard of Higher Professional Education

USE – the Unified State Examination

Introduction

Self-study is a self-assessment of an educational institution that is at the core of higher education accreditation procedures in many countries around the world (Harman, 1998). Self-study is a component in the state accreditation process in Russian higher education. This research will examine self-study in the Russian higher education context.

Higher education in Russia

Russian higher education is the main context of the current research. It has several unique features. In Russia, education services are mostly provided and financed by the government (Lugachyov, Markov, Tipenko, & Belyakov, 1997). In article 43.3 of the Russian constitution, adopted December 12 1993, free competition based higher education is guaranteed to all citizens (The Constitution of the Russian Federation, 1993). Free higher education training per education degree is granted to all applicants whose results on a Unified State Examination qualify for entry requirements to a particular higher education institution (HEI). Those who do not gain the required scores necessary for admission may wait another year to try again, apply to a less competitive program, or pay for their education at a state or private educational institution. The state executes its responsibility of providing free higher education by assigning a specific sum of money to every eligible student, which then goes to the specific state institution the student is admitted to (Gounko & Smale, 2007). As of the year 2005 there were 662

state and 409 private tertiary institutions in Russia¹, with 5860,000 students going to state institutions and 1024,000 to private ones (Статистика Российского образования [Statistics of Russian education], 2010).

Research problem and rationale

In the last two decades Russian higher education has experienced an enormous growth in the number of institutions and students. The vast expansion of the higher education system began in the 1990s through the creation of a large number of private institutions, diversification of the programs and wider access opportunities. Nowadays, the number of graduates produced by Russian universities and its equivalents is sufficient or even too high for the country's economy to absorb. But the quality of higher education is said to be "inadequate for the solution of Russia's economic problems and for the modernization" (Аврамова, 2010, p. 3). It has been publicly acknowledged that the declining quality of higher education poses a problem for the future of Russia and the issue of quality assurance became crucial in the mid-1990s and currently continues to be at the forefront of higher education policy (Chuchalin, Boev, & Kriushova, 2007; Zajda & Zajda, 2007; Кашлачева [Kashlacheva], 2006). A notable shift towards internal quality assurance practices happened in the accreditation system of Russia in the 2000s. The educational institutions were evaluated on the development of the internal quality assurance system (IQAS) during the comprehensive assessment of institutional effectiveness, which was introduced in 2000 to unite the processes of accreditation and licensing (Zajda & Zajda, 2007).

¹ Due to demographic and financial situation, the number of higher education institutions is

A significant move towards internal quality assurance in Russia is in concurrence with the worldwide trend towards more internally driven evaluation systems with the emphasis on self-study (Billing, 2004). At the same time since the Soviet era, Russia has had a strong legacy of external quality control in its education system (Smolentseva, 2003). My interest is to consider how the national tradition of external centralized control favoring accountability interacts with the new practices of internal quality assurance designed to promote quality improvement. A self-study is a focal component of any internal process of quality assurance and a mandatory step in the state accreditation process in Russia, so the self-study simultaneously exists in two dimensions: internal quality assurance and external quality control; it is supposed to be internally owned but it is externally mandated. By examining the self-study, I want to see how Russian HEIs are embracing the change in quality assurance policies.

The literature on quality assurance in higher education tends to fall into two categories. The primary strand of literature focuses on the changing social, economical and political conditions that have resulted in new approaches to quality assurance in higher education and in international convergence of quality assurance systems. The other strand of literature is practically oriented. The managerial scholarship provides recommendations on how to carry out a self-study or how to devise new quality assurance mechanisms at an educational institution, by referring to the experiences of particular institutions as best practice cases and not so much as a unit of a comprehensive analysis. The lack of empirical examination of existing practices of quality control has been recognized in the field (Serrano-Velarde, 2008). As quality

assurance systems have become mainstream practice in higher education around the world, there is a call to move beyond “learning on the go” (Jeliazkova & Westerheijden, 2002, p. 437) and to engage in analytical reflective inquiry to achieve a more “nuanced understanding” of quality assurance systems (Stensaker, 2008, p. 4). Acknowledging the abundance of the literature about quality assurance at the policy level and the scarcity of the empirically-based literature on real experiences of educational institutions, this research tries to address the gap in previous studies by focusing on how macro-level policies are represented in real university practices.

Given the importance of the higher education quality agenda in Russia and the lack of any analytical research on self-study, the purpose of this research is to describe and analyze the self-study at HEIs, and by doing so to contribute to the knowledge about self-studies in particular and quality assurance at Russia’s higher education institutions in general.

Theoretical approach and analytical framework

HEIs do not exist in a vacuum. Each educational policy and practice exists within a complex system that is shaped by various international, national, and local dynamics (Weaver-Hightower, 2008). Changes happening worldwide in quality assurance of higher education have “as much to do with power and values as they are to do with quality” (Brennan & Shah, 2000, p. 332). Even though a self-study might seem to be a purely internal affair, an understanding of the organizational environment and the larger cultural, economic, historical and political context is crucial for performing a self-study (Kells, 1995). Since self-study is a part of the quality assurance system, it is

therefore important to be aware of various actors in the higher education field who may have various views on quality (Westerheijden, Stensaker, & Rosa, 2007). To appreciate the embeddedness of the environment and the totality of the actors and power dynamics involved in the self-study, the two conceptual approaches of an ecology metaphor and force-field analysis were adapted for the purposes of this research.

Educational ecology emphasizes the relationship between a policy or a practice and its environments (Weaver-Hightower, 2008). Following an ecological approach, this study accounts for a self-study not as an isolated phenomenon but rather as a phenomenon embedded in diverse, complex, and fluid setting. Ecology of education also considers the education environments on various levels: as a micro-system, meso-system, exo-system and macro-system (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). I do not use this exact typology for my study because it specifically relates to learning environment; however, I use the logic of seeing a phenomenon's environment at different levels of its functioning. I consider what the macro-level environments of the self-study are (policies, powers, values, reinforced practices) and what the micro-level environments and practices are (at the level of the actual implementation in an institution). Elliot and Tudge (2007) have applied Bronfenbrenner's framework to analyze the change in Russian education after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They notice that "microsystems, where proximal processes (the everyday practices and interactions) occur, are profoundly influenced by the macrosystem within which they are situated" (Elliot & Tudge, 2007, p. 97).

A force-field analysis was used to operationalize the ecological framework, to highlight the power dynamics and to provide a tangible analytical tool by limiting the number of environmental factors to a feasible level for this research. Development of the idea of force-field analysis is attributed to Kurt Lewin. The technique is used to visualize and analyze forces that affect a situation or have influence over the implementation of change. Core to the force-field analysis is the assumption that any situation can be viewed as a state of temporary equilibrium that is supported by the balance of two types of forces: 1) driving, facilitating, positive forces or forces for change and 2) restraining, resisting, negative forces or forces against change. Both driving and restraining forces in relation to the institution can be external, internal or a combination thereof (Baulcomb, 2003; Kumar, 1999; Thomas, 1985). Willingness to preserve the status quo and a fear of change are usually the main internal restraining forces (Thomas, 1985). Levi and Lawn (1993) go one step further and claim that restraining forces exist primarily within the organization, while driving forces are often external.

Force-field analysis can be applied to investigating quality assurance in higher education (Thakkar, Deshmukh, & Shastree, 2006). In this research the force-field framework is used to express an idea that various stakeholders have different expectations of what a self-study should be and what it should assess. This idea is supported by the fact that different groups of stakeholders in Russian higher education see quality of education differently (Гладкова [Gladkova], 2007). The expectations various stakeholders have might be represented in the form of forces that might have

stronger or weaker impact on institutions making them follow or neglect the stakeholders' agenda for the self-study.

Returning to the ecological metaphor, the organizational ecology framework postulates that for any organization to survive the fit between an organization and its environment is necessary. In an attempt to achieve this fit, many organizations begin to look alike. Institutional theory explains this by a presence of coercive forces from the environment which impose standardization, or by a mimetic process that is reinforced by benchmarking and a desire to copy other organizations, or through normative pressures coming from professional community and exchange (Patterson, 2004; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). These phenomena are also called coercive, mimetic or normative isomorphism (Gounko & Smale, 2006; Watson, 2009). For the Russian education system in general, Gounko and Smale (2007) have concluded that international organizations such as the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have exercised coercive pressure on the Russian government through its dependence on their loans and technical assistance. In turn, the state government enters into coercive isomorphic relationships with individual educational institutions, and educational institutions enter into mimetic processes amongst themselves. This being the general case for Russian higher education, this framework would be applied here to analyze the relationships in the domain of quality assurance. By integrating this approach into the force-field analysis I consider the forces not only as restraining or driving, strong or weak, but also as to what their nature is (coercive, mimetic or normative).

The choice of the particular forces to analyze was conditioned by the following considerations. First, the general literature on Russian higher education refers to actors that can be categorized into three main force fields: 1) official or state forces (state accreditation, regulations, administrative framework etc.), 2) public forces (public accreditation, socio-economic situation, business sector, employers organizations etc.) 3) and international forces (international organizations, agreements, collaboration, consortiums etc.). For example, Gounko and Smale (2006) state that in Russian higher education “the federal government is the dominant field,” and the new actors such as “international organizations, nongovernmental organizations and foundations ... exert various degrees of influence in the field” of Russian higher education (p. 335). In some instances it is the interplay of the forces that results in the systemic changes. Zajda and Zajda (2007) claim that recent higher education reforms in Russia were driven by globalization and market forces and the development of the new generation of standards for higher education by Ministry of Education “was prompted both by Russia’s joining the Bologna Process in 2003 and by the labor market” (p. 21).

Second, the advancement of internal quality assurance practices can also be attributed to the influence of the three main forces. The system of internal quality assessment is not new in Russian higher education accreditation system, which was created in 1992, however the intensification of its advancement began since the 2000s (Кашлачева [Kashlacheva], 2006). Such drawing of attention was conditioned by several factors listed below (Антипов [Антипов], n.d.; Кашлачева [Kashlacheva], 2006; Наумова [Naumova], 2010).

1. The fact that education quality has drastically fallen has been widely recognized.
2. The newly introduced in 2000 comprehensive assessment of institutional effectiveness included the evaluation efficiency of the IQAS as an indicator.
3. The competition on the education market increased and higher education stakeholders, especially the employers, started voicing their demands for the quality of the education services.
4. In 2003 Russia has joined the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by signing a Bologna declaration, which presupposes the process of quality assurance processes unification.
5. The international ISO quality standards started being adopted by the HEIs.
6. Rosobrnadzor, the state accreditation body, started a regular competition “Internal graduates’ training quality assurance systems”.

The above influential factors promoting the internal quality system can be categorized into three forces of the institutional environments: the state (factors two and six), the public and employers’ community (one and three) and international influence (four and five). Students are also very frequently mentioned in the discussions on the shift towards internal quality assurance. The whole system of quality assurance is prompted to be more oriented towards the students’ needs and their active involvement

in quality assurance. But students can be considered more as objects of the change rather than the agents who have contributed to the change.

Research questions and methodology

The following research question will be explored in this study:

- How do the macro-level policies and agendas influence the way a self-study is performed at a HEI?

This question can be broken up in two sub questions:

- What are the macro-level policies and agendas of state, public and international agents in higher education?
- What practices of self-studies as a part of accreditation process exist at two HEIs?

A secondary research question is

- What rationale – external accountability or internal improvement – prevails in the conducting self-studies at two HEIs?

In rephrasing my research questions in the language of force-field analyses, I aim to identify the type (restraining, driving, a combination of thereof; coercive, mimetic or normative) and relative strength of the forces exercised by the state, international and professional communities over the practices of self-study at Russian HEIs. Additionally, I intend to identify the current situational characteristics of self-study practices and the desired positions promoted by different sets of forces. Whether current position coincides, overlaps or is very distinct from the desired ones, will be the ultimate question of whether policy level changes penetrate real university practices.

The current research is an exploratory study that uses qualitative methodology. Content analysis of 52 documents was utilized to answer the first sub question. Main policy and working documents from the governmental, professional and international domains were analyzed, as they are the main reliable and feasible source of information about macro-level of quality assurance in higher education. As macro-level constantly changes and consists of a wide array of opinion shapers, its current state might not always be timely and adequately captured in traditional documents, therefore the news pieces of Russian Information Agency (RIA-news) were also included in the analyses.

To address the second sub-question, two case studies at the Higher School of Economics National Research University, Saint Petersburg, Russia and at the Academy², Saint Petersburg, Russia were conducted. First the documents relevant to institutional quality assurance practices, including self-study reports, were examined. Information about the behind-the-scenes dynamics and about procedures of self-studies was gained through four in-depth interviews with the staff and faculty of the institutions.

Through the combined analyses of the data gained from the two main sources I was able to answer the main research question on whether macro-level policies and agendas are in congruence with real institutional practices.

Assumptions and biases

The main assumption of this research is that a self-study represents an important experience for an educational institution in Russia. Stemming from this assumption is

² I purposefully do not name the Academy, to preserve the privacy of the respondent from the Academy.

the idea to consider a self-study in the wider setting of the forces that interact with an institution. However there is a possibility that a self-study might be approached just as paperwork for purely bureaucratic purposes being carried out by a staff member without proper involvement of institutional management and without considering it as a business important to an institution.

This research discusses the issues of quality improvement by focusing particularly on the improvement oriented self-study. I am aware that “the use of the terms ‘enhancement’, ‘development’ and ‘improvement’ invest quality with a morality that is hard to contest. The language becomes self-propagating” (Morley, 2003, p. 49). In this respect the personal stance of the researcher in favoring the improvement rationale of the self-study over the accountability reasoning should be acknowledged.

Outline

The paper consists of six chapters. Discussion of the literature is presented in chapter two. The purpose of the literature review chapter is to situate the research in the relevant discourse. Chapter three also discusses the literature; its purpose however is to provide the historical and current setting of the research. Chapter four introduces the methodology of the research, while chapter five discusses the research findings. The conclusions and implications are presented in chapter six.

Key Terms and Definitions

Self-study is defined as the review and evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of an institution's own academic programs, staffing, and structure, carried out by the institution itself. Self-studies are usually undertaken in preparation for site visit by an

outside team of specialists as a part of an accreditation process. A self-study usually results in a self-study report (Hayward, 2001). In higher education a self-study can be initiated by an institution for various purposes. This paper considers self-study as a component in the quality assurance and accreditation process.

There is no significant difference in the dictionary definitions of the terms self-study, self-assessment and self-evaluation in relation to accreditation of an educational institution. However in United Kingdom there has been a “shift in terminology from self-assessment to self-evaluation as a way of encouraging institutions to move from a ‘checklist’, to a more reflective account of their quality management” (Crozier, Curvale, Dearlove, Helle, & Hénard, 2006, p. 11). However many languages just cannot regard such slight connotations. In the Russian language I have come across the two terms used by educational institutions and quality assurance bodies: самоанализ [samoanaliz; self-analysis] and самообследование [samoobsledovanie; self-inspection]. As a native speaker of Russian, I can hardly think of any major difference between the two terms or of any alternative term. I use the term self-study as a more neutral term throughout this paper. However in several instances I try to emphasize the difference between 1) critical evaluative process and 2) just data reporting. In these cases I try to convey the difference by contrasting two very distinct terms of 1) self-evaluation and 2) self-reporting, as it is done in the title of this paper.

Various educational systems around the world approach *accreditation* differently. In general accreditation is understood as “a procedure validating the status, quality, and accountability of an education institution” (Zajda & Zajda, 2007, p. 21). As

this study focuses on Russia *accreditation* is defined as the process of external quality review used in higher education that results in the formal government authorization given to institutions to obtain or preserve a status of a specific higher educational institution and to be able to grant degrees.

Quality assurance in higher education is defined as the activity that aims at maintaining and raising quality of various aspects of educational activities (Wahlen, 1998).

A higher education institution (HEI) in Russian is defined as “an organization providing higher professional education in accordance with state accreditation. There are three types of HEIs: ‘universities’ (multi-disciplinary HEIs...); ‘academies’ (focused on particular areas such as agriculture, health, arts, etc.); and ‘institutes’ (HEIs providing education services in certain narrow areas)” (Gokhberg, Kuznetsova, & Zaichenko, 2009, p. 121).

Main discourses of the study

How to use an external agenda in such a way
that it is internally beneficial?

Vaira, 2007, p. 140

The scarcity of the literature on the self-study as a part of higher education accreditation and specifically in relation to Russia has been acknowledged in the introduction chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to set my research agenda within a related context of scholarship. I present the main discourses in the quality assurance field that are relevant to the self-study. The goal is to support my research agenda by connecting it to the pertinent themes in education quality assurance. The ‘accountability versus improvement’ debate speaks to what the nature of a self-study is expected to be and to the external and internal motivations for a self study. The discussion on the international conversion of quality assurance systems presents the global developments of the systems that involve greater emphasis on internal quality assurance methods, such as self-study. And finally the policy implementation discussion addresses the issue of macro- and micro-level connection.

Accountability versus improvement polarization

The evolvement of quality assurance systems has been a process of perpetual seeking of balance between various agendas. Brennan and Shah (2000) notice that national developments in Europe have resulted in new forms of accountability that prioritize assessment and improvement rather than control and regulation. Governments are generally withdrawing from the direct control of educational quality. In its place,

new forms of holding institutions accountable are appearing, thus pushing governments to the so-called steering from a distance (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Huisman & Currie, 2004; Vaira, 2007). It might seem that steering from a distance allows unlimited freedom to the educational institutions, but in reality it entails political accountability, which might lead to “introduction of accountability mechanisms that for the most part count existing activities” (Huisman & Currie, 2004, p. 548). So the educational institutions are expected both to be accountable and to be more self-managing. Higher education has been under pressure of being more efficient and more entrepreneurial, thus facing the agendas of both accountability and improvement (Meek, cited in Rosa & Amaral, 2007).

Accountability and improvement are often discussed as two contrary agendas that can hardly successfully coexist in a united quality assurance establishment (Danø & Stensaker, 2007; Temple & Billing, 2003). Merging critical assessment for improvement purposes with accountability and reporting functions of quality control might entail “routinisation, bureacratism and window dressing” (Jeliazkova & Westerheijden, 2002, p. 434). It is claimed that it is difficult to achieve quality improvement through external quality control, as improvement can hardly be attained through inspection alone (Westerheijden, Stensaker, & Rosa, 2007).

Various national education systems occupy different positions on spectrum of quality assurance purposes, with some countries leaning more towards the accountability end of the spectrum and others towards the improvement one (Kells cited in Billing, 2004). Wahlén (cited in Billing, 2004) found that Swedish and Finnish education

systems prioritized improvement, while Denmark and Norway favored accountability purposes external to an educational institution. Kells (cited in Billing, 2004) also categorized the primary procedures of the quality assurance systems: from self-study to external peer review to reporting the indicators and ratings. He noticed that systems are gradually moving towards more internally driven concerns with emphasis on a self-study, or a self-evaluation as he names it.

Self-study is considered to be “a focal point for the promotion of institutional reflection and improvement” (Danø & Stensaker, 2007, p. 89). Scholars in the field of quality assurance generally favor the improvement rationales of self-study, while acknowledging that in real life accountability often takes over in many countries and regions. Kells (1992, 1995) is known for being a strong supporter of improvement oriented self-evaluation which can enhance the culture and infrastructure of self-regulation in HEIs. At the same time he notices that in its mature form, improvement driven self-study exists only in the systems of Canada, Chile and the United States. The Eastern and Central European countries, to which Russia can be approximated, have not yet developed a culture of improvement oriented reviews, and their systems of review “are but scratching the surface of a system of public and private institutions” (Kells, 1995, p. 7). However, Zaika (Заика [Zaika], 2007) claims that when Russian higher institutions have been practicing self-study systematically and longitudinally there has been a positive impact on performance of these educational institutions. And she specifically refers to self-study as a mandatory component of the state accreditation.

The self-study for future improvement is more favorable for institutions than the accountability for past performance (Elton, cited in Harvey & Williams, 2010).

However, in real life “the meaning of self-evaluation is becoming distorted by the pressure of accountability, and is now interpreted by some to mean ‘presentation of the self to external body’, and in the best possible light, rather than self-reflection” (Frazer, cited in Billing, 2004, p. 117). Thus accountability incentives have shifted the nature of a self-study from self-evaluation, a critical analytical study, to self-reporting, just providing information. Van Kemenade and Hardjono (2010) find that the distortion of the self-study initial purpose of self-reflection and improvement is so large, that it is even better to exclude the preparation of self-study report from a compulsory external quality assurance system. If used for a control purposes, self-study runs the risk of becoming just dramaturgical compliance, which is time and resource consuming and not a reliable control instrument. Instead it should “be used for internal quality management, where it can be a powerful instrument for improvement” (Van Kemenade and Hardjono, 2010, p. 257).

The accountability versus improvement discourse can be also approached from the position of distinguishing the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of educational quality (Geva-May, 2001). Giertz (2001) defines intrinsic quality as traditional academic quality that focuses on knowledge creation and student learning. Internal institutional motivation is directly related to the willingness to improve the institution (Kells, 1988). Extrinsic quality relates to demands of society directed towards higher education, including both market and state demands; driven by these demands there has been

happening a noticeable shift in higher education towards prioritizing external concerns over the intrinsic values (Brennan & Shah, 2000).

As a procedure self-study is by definition internal to the educational institution (Perellon, 2007). However, the agenda for a self-study can be determined by institution internally or can be externally imposed on it. Internal purposes include the benefits of the self-knowledge and self-improvement and in this case a self-study is mostly communicated to internal audiences. On the other hand, accreditation process often sets an external agenda for a self-study that might be very different from internal needs of self-analysis (Westerheijden, 2007). As in case of accreditation the self-study design and process is not fully at the discretion of the institution, there can be tensions between the internal needs a self-study is supposed to meet and external regulations about a self-study coming from the accreditation body.

Receiving accreditation is a very high stake issue for HEIs in Russia. As in the other post-communist countries, in Russia accreditation plays a role of quality control, rather than quality assurance (Temple & Billing, 2003). Quality control system checks for adherence to the predefined standards and tries to detect the defects, while quality assurance represents a comprehensive longitudinal system where defects can be not only detected but also prevented resulting in the enhancement of quality (Tam, 2001). Thus it can be expected that in Russia the self-study process as a part of accreditation will be more externally oriented for the purposes of accountability, rather than trying to meet the internal improvement needs.

It should be acknowledged here that some scholars find the tension between accountability and improvement illusory. Harvey and Newton (2007) argue that accountability and improvement are not mutually exclusive but belong to two distinct dimensions. They visualize that in the following way: “we have a two-by-two grid of opportunities: compliance/non-compliance by improvement/non-improvement. Whether it is possible to have a set of quality assurance conditions that simultaneously encourages action in the upper-left quadrant is a moot point: but an irrelevant one” (Harvey & Newton, 2007, p. 232). For my research, however, the possibility of finding a balance between an external agenda of accountability and internal needs of improvement is one of the driving questions. My reasoning behind this is that self-study has been introduced into the Russian education system to signify some change and to enhance quality. Self-study should not be just one more tool in the accountability toolkit as “addressing self-study merely as compliance would waste a valuable opportunity” of institutional development (Ewell & Lisensky, 1988, p. 30).

In relation to the discourses around accountability versus improvement and on external versus internal motivations for a self-study an important question for an institution is “how to use an external agenda in such a way that it is internally beneficial?” (Vaira, 2007, p. 140). External agenda for a self-study means providing accountability reports using the performance indicators to satisfy the accreditation agency requirements. But internally beneficial is the examination of the areas of institutional activities relevant to its mission and geared towards improvement rather

than reporting. So the question is whether academic communities can be empowered to “make, rather than take, the quality agenda” (Rosa & Amaral, 2007, p. 202).

International convergence of quality assurance systems

Quality assurance in higher education seems to be high on international agenda and is “currently a worldwide preoccupation” (Woodhouse, 1996, p. 357). The quality assurance conceptions and practices from North West Europe and the U.S. are becoming globally diffused (Harvey & Williams, 2010).

Jeliazkova & Westerheijden (2002) note that “often emerging quality assurance systems are based on a study of best practices in the frontrunner countries” (p. 433). There are many examples of policy and practice adaptation from one country to the other in the field of quality assurance. In its quality assessment system Turkey followed a UK approach of separating the research and teaching assessments (Billing & Thomas, 2000). The Austrian accreditation model of vocational higher education was also based on the British example (Pratt, 2004). In the mid-1980s Netherlands developed new policy for program review based on the U.S. model that includes self-study, peer review and self regulation. Later on the Netherlands’ model was adapted in universities in Denmark, Belgium and Portugal (Cabrera, Ratcliff, & de Vries, 2000).

The emerging trend towards similar quality assurance systems around the world includes several dimensions. One of them is the definition of quality. Quality can be defined as conformity to specifications, as excellence found in limited number of institutions, as continuous improvement, as agreed upon standard, as value for money or as value added (Bogue, 1998; Johnston & Chalkley, 1994; Tam, 2001). However, the

globally diffused definition of quality is fitness for purpose, the purpose being defined by the institutional mission. European Network for Quality Assurance sees the fitness for purpose principle as the core of the European quality assurance (ENQA, 2009).

The other feature of emerging global approach to quality assurance is that many countries around the world have developed similar quality assurance systems. Van Vught and Westerheijden developed a common model of converging quality assessment systems. The elements of the model are a national coordinating agency, institutional self-study, external evaluation by peers and published reports (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Jeliaskova & Westerheijden, 2002). Usually self-study is the first step in the quality assurance process.

Jeliaskova and Westerheijden (2002) tried to develop a theoretical model capturing the gradual process of the quality assurance systems convergence happening around the world. The authors presented a model of phases in development of quality assurance systems, by which they try to explain or predict changes and evolution patterns of quality assurance systems. Authors construct their model by identifying problem, role of quality assurance, information base and nature of external review for each phase.

Education system during *the first phase* is preoccupied with doubts about educational standards (Jeliaskova & Westerheijden, 2002). The role of quality assurance is to identify sub-standard program. The main question asked at this level is: “Does the institution satisfy the existing quality requirements?” The system is using descriptive

reports and performance indicators as an information base. The nature of external review is summative for the purposes of checking standards and reporting to the state.

The guiding problem during *the second phase* includes doubts about efficiency of the system and its institutions. Quality assurance is playing a role of public accountability and creation of quality awareness at institutions. The information base is represented by descriptive self-evaluation reports that cover performance and procedures, described by Jeliaskova and Westerheijden (2002) as “self-selling” aimed at several recipients. It is also not unusual for institutions to behave in a defensive way and to resort to window-dressing in an attempt to avoid budget cuts. External review is characterized by rankings, reporting to the state and institutions and identifying good practices.

The third phase is driven by doubts about innovation and quality assurance capacities of institutions. Quality assurance is supposed to stimulate self-regulation capacity of institutions. Public accountability also retains its role. Information base consists of self-study reports about procedures and performance. At this stage institutions themselves define what quality means for them and develop relevant quality assurances procedures. They are no longer solving the quality issues defined by the state; rather informing public about institutional quality becomes more and more important. External review is in the form of an audit report to the institution and to the state.

The quality assurance system in *the fourth phase* arises from the need to stimulate sustainable quality culture in institutions. Quality assurance is aimed towards

improvement based on self-regulation and public accountability. Information base is split between 1) self-study reports about processes and strategies based on SWOT analyses and benchmarking; and 2) self-reporting about performance indicators.

External review can take the form of either audit report to institution or verification of the data to be incorporated in public databases.

Coming back to the issue of accountability versus improvement in quality assurance models, Jeliazkova and Westerheijden (2002) note that

as long as external aims, such as identifying sub-standard programs (Phase 1) or public accountability (Phase 2) are dominant, institutions may refrain from being really evaluative. So-called self-evaluative reports will be then written strategically to gain maximum scores or assessment outcomes. However, getting acquainted with the 'language of evaluation' and with the group dynamics of self-evaluation process is a necessary pre-requisite for the step towards genuine self-evaluation and to maximum support for internal improvement processes in Phase 4. (p. 436).

The model demonstrates a gradual changing of the information base (the nature of self-study) that can be perceived in the terms of a production-function model³ as a move from reporting processes to accounting for outcomes and outputs. The nature of external review is also changing as the phases progress. External review can be seen in terms of what stakeholders are more powerful and consequently are reported to. In the first phase an institution reports to the state. During second and third phases it reports

³ Production-function model usually sees the education activity in terms of five elements: inputs (enrollments, financial resources, faculty qualifications etc.), processes (teaching, research and service), products (results that come back into system to contribute to outcomes and outputs, for example, courses that are completed to receive a degree), outputs or products of an institution (degrees, research papers), and outcomes or the effects of outputs for society (employment rates, life expectancy, civil society etc.) (Barnetson & Cutright, 2000).

both to the state and its internal audiences. In the fourth phase an institution reports to itself and to the wider society. There can be seen a vanishing importance of the state force and increased importance of the internal stakeholders and the public. The four phase quality assurance model is useful in evaluating the current stage of quality assurance system in Russia and its current position on an ‘accountability versus improvement’ gradation scale. If the system is demonstrating the elements that allow it to be classified as being in the first or second phase in terms of Jeliazkova and Westerheijden’s model, then it can be seen as leaning towards accountability end of the scale, while in phases three and four the systems are more indicative of improvement as the main quality assurance agenda.

Policy implementation and penetration

Policy penetration discourse emanates from the ecological framework of this paper. It is known that changes at macro-level “do not filter down to all microsystems at the same rate or with the same effects, mostly because old cultural patterns of activities (proximal processes) continue to exert an influence” (Elliot & Tudge, 2007, p. 98). Macro-level changes are mostly changes of educational policies, which oftentimes do not reach the level of their actual implementation: there is a “very limited ‘trickle down’ of policy concepts into the still highly autonomous ‘inner life’ of academe with regard to teaching and research” (Westerheijden, 2007, p. 73). The ultimate level of successful policy implementation is when policy values are internalized by institutional community, but this happens quite rarely and is a long-term process because culture changes slowly (Veld, 1991).

It is clear that policy is of no consequence “if it does not yield the intended impact on practice” (Johnstone & Chapman, 2009, p. 131). According to Schneider and Ingram (cited in Barnetson & Cutright, 2000) there is a number of reasons why policies might fail to penetrate real practices. These reasons include “lack of authority, direction, incentives, capacity, agreement with policy, understanding of policy, or comprehension that a directive has been issued” (Barnetson & Cutright, 2000, p. 279). The reasons for failure of proper policy implementation might be located on different levels. At the level of institution a new state policy may be not translated into institution mechanisms and practices. But sometimes already at the macro-level, the policy is proclaimed without any real intention to implement it; governments might just appeal to policy rhetoric (Huisman & Currie, 2004). This might happen when states internationally borrow the reform discourses from other countries (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Another reason for the failure of international policy borrowing might be the fact that the level of educational institutions autonomy in the country of policy origin is different from that level in the recipient country (Tomusk, cited in Billing, 2004). In a situation when policy implementation is failing, but educational institutions still have to account for it, they might resort to ceremonial, window-dressing, cosmetic and dramaturgical compliance behavior (Barrow, 1999; Vaira, 2007).

Policy implementation issue is an interesting matter to think about in terms of Russia, as it has been in an “era of endless reforms” (Zajda & Zajda, 2007, p. 34) since 1991 but it is still the lingering question whether these ‘endless reforms’ touched only the surface of educational system or penetrated deeper into institutional practices.

Two studies have demonstrated that some of the recent policies in Russian higher education have failed to fully penetrate the institution level practices. HEIs have been encouraged to implement innovations in their research and management practices. Large innovation funds were provided by the government. But Gokhberg and colleagues (2009) came to a conclusion that there was a lack of awareness among university faculty about macro-level policy instruments and solutions for innovation activities at Russian universities. Authors also notice that various stakeholders, such as government, HEIs, business, science organizations, “still have different interests and different approaches and do not form a single network in the context of the third mission (innovation)” (Gokhberg, Kuznetsova, & Zaichenko, 2009, p. 125).

The new accounting principles, the so called management by results, have been introduced in Russian higher education system. But Timoshenko (2008) concluded that it has hardly penetrated the real university practices of accounting and finance management. He points out that “it is one thing to create a national initiative and quite another to succeed in its implementation” (Timoshenko, 2008, p. 136). The main conclusion of his research is that macro-level initiatives are diffused to university level in a hierarchical mode of learning and fail to penetrate university practices to any significant level. This research on self-study tries to see whether quality assurance policy at the macro-level is reflected in the real practices at institutional level.

Setting the stage of the higher education environment

[The state of Russia is] the main driving force of any change

Timoshenko, 2008, p. 141

This research operates in a specific context of Russian higher education system. In this chapter I am approaching my research agenda through synthesizing the literature on the three main force fields identified in the introduction chapter as state, public and international force fields. Before describing the current situation I analyze the historical development of the three force fields. The goal of this chapter is to see what the current power dynamics on the Russian quality assurance field is and how it has come to be this way.

State force field

The relationship between Russia's HEIs and the state can be described as a "love-hate" one (Kortunov, 2009, p.205). They have been and still are full of mutual dependency and mutual mistrust. Throughout the history Russian state was the main "funder, supporter, client, and source of legitimacy" for higher education (Kortunov, 2009, p. 206). Both in the Russian Empire (1724-1917) and in the Soviet Union until 1936 universities had no individual charters; instead all universities had to comply with one common charter developed by the government (Аврус [Avrus], 2001).

After 1991 Russia has been experiencing "a problematic transformation from the state-controlled system of higher education to autonomy" (Zajda & Zajda, 2007, p.26). In 1996 the Federal Law "On Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education" provided

for the autonomy and self-governance of HEIs. The Law allowed institutions to develop their own admission rules, but institutions still had to comply with federal regulations and the total number of students could not exceed the quota given by the institution's license (Zajda & Zajda, 2007). While HEIs were delegated many new freedoms, the state funding significantly dropped leaving many of them on the verge of survival (Bain, 2003). During the economic boom period of 2000-2008 the state returned to higher education with new financial incentives. Quality Education became one of the four Priority National Projects, resulting in the enormous flow of finances and resources into it, as well as public attention (Приоритетные Национальные Проекты [Priority National Projects], 2010).

The legacy of state power is still present in the higher education quality assurance system. Since its establishment in 1992 the system used to consist of accreditation, attestation, licensing and comprehensive assessment of institutional effectiveness. As of 2010 there are only accreditation and licensing procedures left. To start educational activities every institution applies for a license which is granted if education conditions, teaching staff, classroom environment, as well as other government requirements are met (Chuchalin, Boev, & Kriushova, 2007; Pokholkov, Chuchalin, & Mogilnitsky, 2002). During the graduation year of the first student cohort admitted into the program, an institution applies for accreditation. The State Accreditation Agency, which performs accreditation and licensing, evaluates an institution's capability to meet the lowest standards set for delivery of educational services and evaluates the institutional adherence to the State Educational Standard of

Higher Professional Education (SESHPE) (Bolotov & Efremova, 2007; Pokholkov, Chuchalin, & Mogilnitsky, 2002). The SESHPE determine the coursework structure for every educational specialization. Russia's Minister of Education Filippov holds the opinion that "the decisive link in the guarantee of quality in higher education in Russia is the strong adherence of the educational institutions to the State Standards" (Filippov, 2002, p.128). Accreditation is granted for the period of five years. State accreditation delegates the educational institutions with the authority to award state diplomas and defines or reassigns the status of an institution (e.g. whether it is a university, institute or academy).

All state institutions should seek state accreditation. Private institutions can exercise their freedom by not applying for state accreditation, but that would place them in a vulnerable position, as without the state accreditation they will not be able to issue state diplomas for their graduates (Tomusk, 2004). The state diploma is virtually the only type of diploma employers and students regard as a legitimate one, so even private tertiary institutions apply for state recognized accreditation (Suspitsin & Suspitsyna, 2007).

Public force field

The connection of higher education to the society has been rather weak in Russia. The history has numerous examples of universities "ignoring broader public interests and lacking vision" (Kortunov, 2009, p.205). Both in the Imperial Russia (1721-1917) and in the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (1917-1991) market mechanisms were almost nonexistent both in economic and in education sectors.

So HEIs could not rely on private sector to counterbalance the state; and “the specific feature of Russia has always been an excessively strong state ... and a profoundly weak society” (Kortunov, 2009, p.203).

The situation started to change after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As a result of the reforms HEIs can seek income from non-governmental sources and make decisions about the use of their revenues. Many private institutions were created; and in state institutions a large proportion of funding comes from tuition paying students and commercialized services (Timoshenko, 2008). Supposedly that should make Russia’s universities, institutes and academies more responsive and open to market and public needs (Timoshenko, 2008). Such a shift has implications for quality assurance as well. “If students have to invest heavily in their education, they naturally become more demanding in terms of the quality of services they got for their money” (Kortunov, 2009, p.215).

But still Russia’s higher education can be characterized by a noticeable “weakness of professional communities, which in other countries serve as a horizontal balance to the vertical university hierarchy” (Kortunov, 2009, p.206). Business links to higher education are very limited. University faculty and researchers report on the mismatch between interests of higher education and business community (Gokhberg, Kuznetsova, & Zaichenko, 2009). Business community is unanimously agree that the professional preparation of the higher education graduates is very low and something should be done about, but nevertheless the majority of the employers are passive in

undertaking any real activities besides voicing the problem (Красильникова [Krasilnikova], 2007).

Public opinion sees the importance of the state support for higher education, and only one third of the respondents acknowledged the significance of higher education's role in society and the need for further collaboration of tertiary education, employers', and other public organizations (Gokhberg, Kuznetsova, & Zaichenko, 2009).

In the field of quality assurance public domain is also scarcely represented. A number of professional organizations are establishing public and professional accreditation systems and thus are "laying the foundation for external independent assessment of the quality of professional education" (OECD, 2007, p.147). So far only the Russian Association for Engineering Education has an accreditation body that evaluates engineering programs across a variety of universities (Pokholkov, Chuchalin, Morozova, & Boev, 2004).

International force field

To establish a higher education system, Russian Empire invited scholars and lecturers from Europe and for a long time was oriented towards the West in managing its higher education (Аврус [Avrus], 2001). But in the Soviet Union international contacts were highly restricted; and the higher education system was quite self-contained (Kortunov, 2009). While protecting itself from any foreign influence, the Soviet Union itself became an important actor on international arena by providing support to some Latin American and African higher education systems and inviting students from these regions to study in the USSR (Steiner-Khamsi, 2006).

In 1990s Russia originated several reforms to “align Russian educational policies with global developments” (Gounko & Smale, 2006, p.320); reforms were mostly directed towards decentralization and privatization of the system. Gounko and Smale (2007) argue that educational reforms in Russia were immediately impacted by the World Bank and the OECD, whose policy recommendations “institutionalized international influences on education” (p.536). Western technical aid was mostly meant to compensate for the shortage of state support. It was the period when “in the West Russian universities were considered objects of influence but not equal partners in cooperation” (Kortunov, 2009, p.219).

In 2000s the international cooperation became more balanced in terms of power dynamics. Russia’s HEIs preferred to be involved in more complex individualized cooperation projects. Several universities were actively involved in research projects with their foreign peers, faculty and student exchanges were thriving and even some dual degree programs were established (Kortunov, 2009).

Joining the EHEA in 2003 was meant to “overcome the isolation of Russian higher education from Western Europe ...and to integrate into the global education space” (Zajda & Zajda, 2007, p.32). As a result of the Bologna Process the Russian higher education degree system has been restructured into two-tier structure (Bachelor and Master degrees) that are meant to replace the existing five year specialist degree (Gounko & Smale, 2007). Joining the Bologna process facilitated the mutual recognition of diplomas of Russia and European countries (Zajda & Zajda, 2007). Since 2003

development of the common education quality standards is also in the agenda of the Bologna process (Berlin Communiqué, 2003).

In the last decade many HEIs received an international certification of their IQASs. Usually these are the ISO 9001 certificates and MBA programs are definitely taking the lead in obtaining those (Зубкова [Zubkova], 2007).

To conclude, the review of the main force fields on Russian higher education arena illuminates both the historical and current importance of the state and only marginal and unsystematic involvement of public and international actors that, however, started playing a bigger role in the two last decades.

Methodology

Research questions

The main research question of this study is:

- How do the macro-level policies and agendas influence the way a self-study is performed at a HEI?

This question can be broken up in two sub questions:

- What are the macro-level policies and agendas of state, public and international agents in higher education?
- What practices of self-studies as a part of accreditation process exist at two HEIs?

A secondary research question is

- What rationale – external accountability or internal improvement – is prevailing in the conducting self-studies at two HEIs?

Research design

As the current research is exploratory in its nature, the research methodology dwells in a qualitative paradigm. “In a qualitative approach to research the paramount objective is to understand the meaning of an experience” (Merriam, 1988, p.16). This research primarily focuses on the discovery of a meaning of a self-study experience to an educational institution. A self-study as a part of accreditation in Russian higher education is approached from the need of interpreting the phenomenon rather than measuring it.

To answer the first set of questions document content analyses was utilized. Main policy and working documents, content of the web pages from the governmental, professional and international domains were analyzed, as they are the main reliable and feasible source of information about macro-level of quality assurance in higher education. The documents were chosen based on several criteria: they should be pertinent to the accreditation process as it existed in 2010, they should belong to an organization widely known in Russia and they should advance a specific agenda or opinion on quality assurance in Russian higher education or internationally.

As the macro level field constantly changes and consists of a wide array of opinion shapers its current state might not always be timely and adequately captured in traditional written documents. To compensate for that news pieces of Russian Information Agency (RIA-news) were also included in the analyses. This agency was chosen as it is the largest information agency in Russia according to 2008 estimation of citation in Russian media and foreign media reporting on Russia (“РИА Новости остается” [RIA News remains], 2008). The choice of the agency was also determined by the fact that its webpage has a specific section designated to education news, which contributed to the consistency of sampling. News pieces on higher education, e.g. legislation, precedents, quality assurance, were sampled from the news coverage in the education section (<http://www.rian.ru/education/>) for the period from 09/03/2010 to 02/25/2011. Total number of news pieces that were sampled is 71.

The documents both from the news agency and from state, public and international organizations were analyzed with content analysis techniques that utilized

coding with high inference codes that were clustered into themes. Analysis was performed at a content level, no discourse analyses was involved, however the language and particular choice of impressions were noted when those seemed to be important for the delivery of the message.

To answer the second sub question the research included two case studies at Higher School of Economics (HSE) National Research University, Saint Petersburg, Russia and at the Academy, Saint Petersburg, Russia. Case study methodology along with issues of generalizability pertaining to it is discussed below.

Through the combined analyses of the data gained from the two main methods I was able to answer the main research question on whether macro-level policies and agendas are in congruence with real institutional practices. The use of multiple methodologies also contributed to the triangulation of the data.

All data except for the documents from the international organizations was in Russian language. As the researcher is a native speaker of Russian, the data, including interviews, was collected and analyzed in Russian. The themes for content analyses were initially in Russian and then were translated in English for the purposes of presenting the data.

Case studies

I received expedited review approval from the Institutional Review Board: Human Subjects Committee (IRB) to undertake this study. The IRB Code number is 1011P92902.

Case study method was chosen because it allows a deeper understanding of a particular bounded system of a HEI (Merriam, 2009). The case study meets the goal of seeing the practices of self-study in the particular institutional setting that might allow drawing inferences between institutional setting and those practices. A case study method can allow for explanation of reasons for the problem, the background of a situation, insights into the causes of innovations failure or success as well as for discussion of alternatives chosen or not (Merriam, 1988).

It is acknowledged that case study method is problematic in allowing the generalization of the findings. Some degree of generalization can be achieved through studying the typical case or performing multi-site studies (Schofield, 2000). Neither of the two case studies institutions can be considered a typical site in Russian higher education. Given the immense diversity of Russian higher education in the dimensions of type, size, funding, specialization, geographic location, history etc. hardly any HEI in the country can be approached as a typical one. At the same time, two cases do not provide a maximum variation to be considered a multi-site study. However, given that the system of accreditation is centralized in Russia, the finding of this research can illuminate the general features of the accreditation system and process; thus the probabilistic empirical generalization (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster 2000; Lieberman, 2000) can be reached.

In case studies it is preferable to speak about the transferability of the findings in the similar context (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The relative contexts for the two cases are specified below. The process of choosing the institutions for the case-studies started by

specifying the location of institutions. Saint Petersburg was chosen mostly because of the site convenience for the researcher. At the same time, the location offers a unique setting. Saint Petersburg is one of the two biggest centers of higher education in Russia, the other one being Moscow. So both universities are in a big education and science center that attracts students from all over Russia, but at the same time they are not in the capital, which would offer a very distinct context from the rest of the Russia.

At the second step of institutions sampling the researcher asked one professor in a University in Saint Petersburg to recommend the institutions that are known in the academic community of the city as progressive in terms of quality assurance. He identified four institutions. Then I reviewed the web-pages of the respective institutions and chose the Higher School of Economics (HSE) as the case-study site, because there was information about the self-studies that happened in the institution in 2010. The second site for a case study was chosen quite randomly. I searched for less known institutions and looked for whether they had a recent self-study for accreditation purposes or not. As a result the Academy was chosen. Respondents at the HSE allowed me to publicize their names, positions and institutional affiliation. The respondent at the Academy preferred to stay unknown, so the Academy is not referred to by its full name. The identification of a specific institution by the word Academy seems unlikely as there are at least 14 Academies in Saint Petersburg (Вузы в Санкт-Петербурге [Vuzi in Saint Petersburg], 2010). The Academy can be possibly derived from the description below, however the attempts were made to camouflage the information presentation of which is necessary for the research purposes.

Although they share the same geographic location, the two institutions studied have many differences. The HSE University and the Academy represent two different types of HEIs in Russia out of the three existing: university, institute and academy. The HSE in Saint Petersburg is a branch of the National Research University – Higher School of Economics in Moscow⁴. Apart from Saint Petersburg the Moscow HSE has two more branches in Russia. The Academy is a head institution itself and has a number of branches in Russia. Both institutions are state ones, meaning that they receive a portion of their funding from the state and can admit the state financed students. HSE Saint Petersburg branch had total of 2666 students in 2010 (Аналитические материалы [Analytical materials], 2010). For the Academy the statistics is available only for the whole organization, in 2010 the number of students in its head institution and branches was about 20,000. The ratio of state-financed to self-financed in the HSE is about one to one, for the Academy the ratio can be roughly evaluated as one to ten based on admissions information on the Academy's website⁵. The distinction between the state-financed and self-financed students seems to be very important in Russian higher education as it will be discussed later; and the institutions represent examples from two different sites of the spectrum in respect to the basis of student funding.

Both institutions are specialized type of institutions, which means they do not offer the whole range of academic disciplines, but only the ones relevant to the specialization. For example, the HSE offers education programs only in the fields of

⁴ By the abbreviation HSE in the text I refer to the Saint Petersburg branch. The institutions in Moscow is identified in text as the head institution or the Moscow HSE.

⁵ I am not citing the source of information about the Academy to preserve the privacy of the informant.

economics, managements, law, and sociology. The HSE is a relatively young education institution, its history started in Moscow in 1992, in Saint Petersburg the branch opened in 1998 (Историческая справка [A note about history], n.d.). The Academy was also founded in the modern Russia, although it traces its history to the ancestor institution in Soviet Union times.

As a result of the sampling process the two institutions represent quite different examples of cases in terms of prestige and perceived progressiveness. The HSE was granted a status of an autonomous institution in December 2010 (Правительство Российской Федерации [The Russian Federation Government], 23.12.2010), which sets it apart from the rest of institutions in Russia and signifies the recognition of its being a high profile university. There are only three autonomous institutions out of the total of about 600 state institutions in Russia (Статистика Российского образования [Statistics of Russian education], 2010). The Minister of Education voiced an idea about the categorization of all Russian HEIs into three groups: 15-20 flagship universities, 150-200 major core universities and research academies, and other smaller institutions (Zajda & Zajda, 2007). The HSE can be confidently categorized as a flagship university, while the Academy seems to be belonging to a second group. The relative ranking of institutions is important as often it might incur different levels of state grant support and innovation funding, as well as it portrays the current situation of institutional aspirations. There is no comprehensive rating of Russian HEIs that would include both institutions researched. The ratings that exist confirm the leading position of the HSE in Russian

education, e.g. the rating of the quality of admissions into HEIs (“Рейтинг качества приема” [Rating of the admissions quality], 2010).

Case study consisted of two methods: document analyses and semi-structured interviews. Document analyses helps setting the framework for conducting and understanding interviews, while interviews produce a rich multifaceted data that goes beyond factual information from documents and enriches the understanding of dynamics underlying the process of self-study. Use of both document analyses and interviews also contributes to triangulation of the data and helps identify the discrepancies in publicly announced and real practices.

Documents utilized for content analyses as a part of case study were mostly drawn from institutional websites and partially were presented by the respondents. Documents examined were self-study reports, other reports dealing with quality assurance and development of the institutions, development plans, web pages of the institutions and their departments. The content analyses of the self-studies reports utilized the same procedure as later described for interview transcripts analyses. The rest of the documents were examined for information about the institutions’ missions, values or facts related to quality of education.

The self-study reports of the programs that went through accreditation in 2010 were analyzed in depth; the committee members listed in the reports were contacted via email with a request to grant an interview. In the HSE six invitation emails were sent, three committee members agreed to participate in the research. In the Academy six emails were sent, all members received them but as I was later told, the five people

received emails, and contacted the subordinate person to talk to me. As a result I got a response from the head of the quality control department who was requested to talk to me by the higher ranking administrators of the Academy. Total of four interviews with a duration varying from half an hour to two hours were conducted, three at the HSE and one at the Academy. All interviewees chose their working place to be a site for an interview. Three interviews were face-to-face and one was a telephone interview.

A semi-structured interview protocol was used and it can be found in Appendix I. The saturation of the topic was used as a criterion to finish the interview. All interviews but the one at the Academy were audio recorded and later transcribed. At the Academy the respondent preferred to stay anonymous and only allowed the researcher to make notes. All interviews were transcribed. Transcriptions were analyzed using both an inductive and deductive coding procedure. Inductive coding was used to identify the themes that exist in the data. Deductive coding was used to connect the theoretical considerations of the research to the real data. There were three main deductive codes – state, public and international actors and agents in quality assurance. Interview codes were organized into a codebook that is available in the Appendix II.

Findings

Force fields – macro-level document analysis

In this section the findings of the documents pertaining to the macro-level will be discussed. The main goal of this discussion is to see what agenda the actors of the three force fields are promoting, as it can potentially form the way institutions conduct their self-studies.

State force

The state is ... a guarantor of quality education programs and services

Министерство Образования Российской Федерации

[Russian Federation Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 2.3.

The government of the Russian Federation is the main actor in the state force field. The system of higher education governance at the federal level has been changing a lot. Prior to 2004 The Ministry of Education was responsible for accreditation of higher education (Zajda & Zajda, 2007). Then the Ministry of Education and Science became the main authority developing national education policy; and it had two subordinate agencies: the Federal Services for Supervision in Education and Research, and the Federal Agency for Education, which was annihilated in March 2010 (Федеральное Агенство по Образованию [Federal Agency for Education], n.d.). As of February 2011 the higher education accreditation is in the power of the Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Research, the Rosobrnadzor (Rosobrnadzor, n.d. a). Among the organizations that are subordinate to Rosobrnadzor there are two directly responsible for accreditation and licensing – Rosakkredagenstvo and IMTSA.

The national accreditation agency in education (Rosakkredagenstvo) supports the accreditation process by providing informational, methodological and technical assistance. It carries out an expertise of the education's conformity to the level and quality as stipulated by SESHPE and an expertise to define the institution's status (university, academy or institute) (Rosobrnadzor, n.d. b). Curricula of the programs to be accredited are submitted to a second organization – IMTSA (Information and Methodology Center for Analyses) (Rosobrnadzor, n.d. c).

Normative documents and legislature

Quality assurance procedures were changing quite significantly in the last decade. The self-study used to be a part of attestation, and then from 2000 till 2009 it became a first step in preparation to the comprehensive assessment of institutional effectiveness. Nowadays nor attestation neither comprehensive assessment exist any longer. Self-study became a part of accreditation, but the legislation seems to be unable to keep up with the changes happening in the system and the institutions are still recommended to use the 1997 attestation standards as a guide for conducting self-study (“Вопросы и ответы” [Questions and answers], 2010). The program of attestation of educational institutions of middle and higher professional education enforced by the state inspection on attestation of Russia's educational institutions March 20, 1997, defines the four goals of the self-study:

1. Determining if the HEI is ready for an outside attestation expertise
2. Development of the intra-institutional system of quality control of graduates' preparation

3. Formation of a centralized data base about the activities of education institution
4. Reduction of the expenses for the outside attestation expertise based on the sampling (at the discretion of the commission) of objects and indicators presented in the self-study (Государственная инспекция по аттестации учебных заведений [State inspection on the attestation of the education institutions], 1997).

All the goals except the second one relate to the objectives of the accrediting agency (or previously to the agency responsible for attestation) and seem to have no direct relation to the quality of education. The second goal, to develop an intra-institutional system of quality control, approaches the process from an institution point of view. The accomplishment of this goal implies a new structural component in the system – a system of intra-institutional quality control. Supposedly, the internal system should pay more attention to the issues of quality improvement.

The comparison of the self-study guidelines shows the rising importance of internal system of quality assurance. According to the 1997 standards, the institutions were not asked to discuss the internal quality system in the self-study report. According to 2001 methodological recommendations for the self-study, institutions were to specify whether an internal quality control system exists; and what its elements are (Государственная инспекция по аттестации учебных заведений [State inspection on the attestation of the education institutions], 2001). In 2005 the indicators of comprehensive institutional assessment of the institutional effectiveness prescribe

institutions to discuss the efficiency of the IQAS in their self-study reports (Rosobrnadzor, 2005). So the internal system was not mentioned at all in 1997, it was supposed to be present in some form in 2001 and to fully function in 2005. In 2001 the system was called quality control, but in 2005 it became quality assurance system as ‘контроль’ (control) was substituted by ‘обеспечение’ (assurance). To conclude, the trend towards greater emphasis on internal system and on assuring quality rather than controlling it becomes visible in the document analysis.

The situation when the development of IQAS is not motivated by the institutional needs but is prescribed by an external agency seems to be internally inconsistent. The Rosobrnadzor proposes to assess the efficiency of the institutional IQAS according to the three tasks it is supposed to perform: 1) assure the level of requirements for students’ admission, 2) effectively control the ongoing attestations, and 3) assess the quality of graduates’ training based on the results of final examinations and defense of qualification works. The three tasks mirror what is usually accounted for in the form of indicators to the external accreditation agency; they also lean towards holding the institution accountable rather than promoting its improvement. In such a form the IQAS does not seem to differ from just preparation work for an external evaluation. There is a need for a clear understanding of the internal quality control system – whether it is meant to be just an “embassy” of the outside control system inside the institution’s structure or it is to be a fully independent system owned in all respects by the institution itself.

The self-study report also has to include the discussion of the institution meeting the levels of the accreditation indicators. The indicators are mostly quantitative asking for simple information and not for qualitative assessment. For example, the demand for program's graduates is supposed to be evaluated based on percentage of the graduates that have been requested by the employers (Росаккредитация [Rosakkredaghenstvo], 1996). Usually such percentage is zero or very low unless students sign the contracts with organizations that support the costs of their education and require the employment upon graduation. It is especially hard to assess the labor market demand for the graduates of the new program given that the self-study is performed while the first cohort of students is in its final year of studies and there are no graduates yet. International relations are supposed to be assessed based on number of international conferences or seminars held at the institution, number of cooperation agreements, and indication of whether the Bologna declaration has been discussed by the academic council of the institution (Suspitsin & Suspitsyna, 2007).

Policy papers

Apart from enacting laws and regulations, the state also develops the education policy and promotes its vision and values in the education system. Such policy papers set the benchmarks or describe the patterns of expected behavior, and thus can be characterized as introducing mimetic isomorphism into the institutional environment.

The national doctrine of education through 2025 (Национальная доктрина образования в Российской Федерации [National Doctrine of education in Russian Federation], 2000) emphasizes the issues of educational accessibility and promises the

free higher education to every second school graduate, but does not mention anything about the quality of education. The theme of access is present in many policy documents, as provision of competitively free higher education is a constitutional responsibility of the state to its people.

The concept of modernization of the Russian Education through 2010 (Министерство Образования Российской Федерации [Russian Federation Ministry of Education], 2002) focuses on access to *quality* education. According to the document “the state is returning into education as a guarantor of quality education programs and services” provided by all types of institutions (Министерство Образования Российской Федерации [Ministry of Education of Russian Federation], 2002, p. 2.3.⁶). Quality is defined in terms of meeting labor market demands. The content and structure of education should meet industry’s requirements and employers should take an active part in education process. The theme of international competitiveness and international quality standards is also very prominent in the conception. In the State Council 2006 report on the progress of the educational modernization the two themes of labor market and international connections were discussed together (О развитии образования в Российской Федерации [On education development in Russian Federation], 2006). The need to create the universal continuous professional education corresponding to country’s needs and tendencies of world labor market was announced. Also, according to the modernization conception and to the priorities of the state policy higher education

⁶ All direct quotes in the Findings chapter were translated by me from the original in Russian language.

system will need to accept the new approach to quality based on the competences of students (“Приоритеты государственной политики” [Priorities of the state policy], 2007). The policy documents also promote the creation of the internal quality control at the institutions.

The benchmarking example of the state force is represented by the Rosobrnadzor’s competition “Students training quality systems in professional education institutions”. One of the goals of the competition is to “contribute to development of the quality assurance systems to carry out a self-study of the institution’s performance and to perfect the processes of graduates training quality control” (Rosobrnadzor, 2010, p.3). Interestingly, the criteria for the competition are quite different from the regular accreditation indicators, but the agency administering the competition is the same as responsible for accreditation. The criteria include: leadership role in assuring the quality, policy and strategy of quality assurance, use of the faculty, staff and students potential in quality assurance, rational use of resources, management of quality assurance processes, satisfaction of employers with graduates’ training quality, satisfaction of faculty, staff and students with their work and studies, and impact of the institution on society (Rosobrnadzor, 2010). Such competition self-study criteria presuppose a very different, more analytical approach than the accreditation self-study criteria. The competition criteria resemble the main principles of the quality assurance system as defined by ISO standards, which presuppose systemic approach to management; and where the goal of the self-study is to identify the areas where resources should be forwarded to improve the performance of an institution (Гуськова, Митрохин, Салимова, & Еналеева

[Guskova, Mitrohin, Salimova, & Enaleeva], 2006; Запрягаев, Караваева, Карелина, & Салецкий [Zapryagaev, Karavaeva, Karelina, & Salezkij], 2007).

To conclude, the main themes identified in policy papers were the need to integrate into international education system, to bridge the gap between contents of education and expectations of employers, to substitute the ready knowledge delivery with development of competences in students and integration of education with research. However these values hardly correspond to the real accreditation process and its indicators. In particular, Rosobrnadzor has different criteria for the mandatory accreditation process and voluntary quality competition: numeric mostly input indicators are to be reported on in the accreditation self-study, and the system oriented, qualitative, outcome and satisfaction level indicators are to be assessed in the competition self-study. It should be noted, that the system is changing fast, and the normative documents are capturing the current situation, while the policy papers envision the future. However, the analysis still shows that the messages coming from the state force field are not consistent, especially in the way an IQAS is promoted and in the way it is defined.

Public Force

There is a need for such quality evaluation system ...

that would contribute to the HEI's striving to advance the quality

Авраамов, Калашников, Рудченко, Сорокина-Исполатова, & Хохлов

[Avraamov, Kalashnikov, Rudchenko, Sorokina-Ispolatova, & Khokhlov], 2007, p. 57

Various public and industrial organizations express their view, mostly critical, on the higher education in Russia. But just a few are actively involved into discussing the

strategies for change, and even fewer propose their agenda or actively engage in quality assurance practices alternative to the state ones. The predominant theme in document analysis is the much emphasized need for cooperation of education and employers. This statement is found in the documents of e.g. Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Russian Federation and The Union of Employers and Businessmen. The Education Quality Assessment in Russia project (OKO, n.d.) claims that employers, students and parents are among the passive groups that have a large potential for quality assurance in Russia's higher education.

Just a few organizations have moved beyond discussion of the current problems in the education system. All-Russian public organization Business Russia has prepared a business rating of higher education (Деловая Россия [Business Russia], 2008). During the research phase of the rating development, it was found out that only 7% of the employers have various types of cooperation with educational institutions. The research also found out that education of an applicant plays the smallest role in the hiring; other factors being professional experience, personal traits, skills, problem solving abilities. The set of two criteria were developed: 1) collaboration of an institution with the employers, and 2) level of the pay for graduates of a particular institution. Rating was composed 'on the employer side'; companies were asked to report about their cooperation with education institutions and about the education of their employees, so the rating fully concentrates on the evaluation of the educational outcomes. Being an independent public project, Business Russia education rating is still seeking

legitimization from the state, both President, Dmitry Medvedev, and Prime-minister, Vladimir Putin, are referenced a lot as the ones to whom the rating was presented.

Expert Club of Industry and Power Economy has developed the conception of an independent accreditation of higher education programs in Russia (Expert club, 2007). The criteria for evaluation of the education program are subdivided into two steps. First, the program should meet all state standards. And then the program is assessed towards a set of indicators directly related to the involvement of employers into education process: presence of a board of regents, involvement of employers in setting the study tasks for students, involvement of students in solving a practical task set by employers, the number of students studying along the individual plans created with the help of employers, the ratio of graduates employed by the requests of employers, presence of the graduates' data base and so on. At the final stage the accreditation commission evaluates the program in the dynamic perspective; paying attention to what was present five years ago, what is now and what the future developments are. The dynamic nature of expertise presupposes the aspiration for improvement. I am unaware if the Expert Club has actually accredited any education program so far.

According to the 1992 Federal Law "On Education" the accreditation in Russia exists in the form of state and professional accreditation. Professional accreditation is run by public professional organizations (Chuchalin, Boev, & Kriushova, 2007). Nowadays in Russia only engineering education has developed professional accreditation association, the Russian Association for Engineering Education, that has been in place since 1992 (Chuchalin, Boev, & Kriushova, 2007). A self-study is a part of

the accreditation process by the Russian Association for Engineering Education (Ассоциация инженерного образования России. [The Association for Russian Engineering Education], 2008). The criteria have three types of requirements – a must, an important factor and a possibility. For assessment of a Bachelor's degree in engineering there are nine criteria: 1) each program must have clear goals, 2) the content and labor intensity of the program should correlate to Bologna requirements for a Bachelor degree, 3) education process should guarantee the attainment of the education results for all students; students should have industry internships, among other requirements, 4) there are specific requirements for the composition of the faculty, 5) engineering students should possess specific competences and skills; and the last four criteria are infrastructure, information support, finances, and alumni. Comparing such standards to the state accreditation ones, one might see a greater emphasis on various levels of standards that presupposes development and improvement rather than the fixation of the current situation. Professional development is emphasized and majority of indicators presuppose a qualitative analytical approach to a self-study rather than reporting on numerical indicators.

To conclude, the agenda promoted by the public organizations and employers community is to involve the employers into education process and to assess educational quality based on this criterion. The organizations that have developed an independent accreditation process emphasize the importance to assess the students' competencies, and they propose a systemic approach to quality, seeing the assessment as a dynamic and multi-level process. The independent professional accreditation positions itself in

contrast to the state mechanisms, it is evaluating the achievements of a HEI rather than determining if it meets the minimal standards.

International force

The fundamental responsibility for quality rests with the world of academia.

(ENQA, 2009, p.4)

The criteria for choosing the documents to analyze was based on the premise that the document should have a wide impact and should play an important role for a particular Russian HEI. As participation in international quality assurance practices is fully voluntary for the Russian institutions, it is hard to identify the organizations to be analyzed. So I reviewed the documents of the organizations that were mentioned either by interviewees or in the relevant documents from their institutions. Below I refer only to those documents that had some ostensible stance towards quality assurance issues.

The most notable international development in Russian higher education was the joining the EHEA in 2003. Russian HEIs had to restructure their educational programs in accordance with Bologna education cycles – Bachelor and Master levels. In 2003 the Ministers of the Bologna Process declared beginning on the work on agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance. In the Berlin Communiqué the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) was delegated the authority to develop such standards (ENQA, 2009). Development of the standards was guided by the following principles. Educational institutions have the primary responsibility for the quality of their education programs. The interests of society in quality of education should be secured. The quality of the academic programs should be developed taking

into account students and other stakeholders. “Quality assurance for accountability purposes is fully compatible with quality assurance for enhancement purposes” (ENQA, 2005, p.13). So ENQA sees improvement and accountability as two parallel processes rather than conflicting ones. The main purpose of the ENQA standards is improvement of education programs in the educational institutions in EHEA.

Seven sets of standards for internal quality assurance within higher education were developed by ENQA (ENQA, 2009).

1. Institutions should develop clear policy and procedures for quality assurance. Policy statements should cover strategy for quality, responsibilities of institution’s units, involvement of students in quality assurance etc.
2. Institutions should have mechanisms for approval, review and monitoring of their programs. Quality assurance of such programs should include development of intended learning outcomes, participation of students in quality assurance, feedback from employers and labor market organizations etc.
3. Students should be assessed by published criteria using consistently applied procedures.
4. Teaching staff should be competent and qualified.
5. Student support resources should be adequate and appropriate.
6. Relevant information should be collected, analyzed and used for management purposes.

7. Institution should regularly provide both qualitative and quantitative information about the offered programs.

According to the above standards, quality assurance is a systemic process and every HEI should develop its own policy for the quality assurance. The involvement of students and employers is given a larger importance than in the state accreditation standards of Russia.

To conclude, the main values or propositions of the international force field, mostly represented by European Bologna process, are the core role of educational institution in assuring the quality, unity of improvement and accountability rationales, importance of institutional quality assurance policy, vital role of students and other stakeholders and openness of the process to the public.

News findings

Russian HEIs have nobody to teach right now

RIA News, 12/10/2010

Analysis of the news revealed predominance of the state force as a news maker in the higher education. Some news articles were also coming from the professional community and just a few related to the international domain. Analysis of the news helped identify the most current discourses about higher education development, that were not present in the traditional documents, but that help attain comprehensive understanding of the current situation in quality assurance.

The recurrent theme in the news is that there are too many HEIs in Russia which quality standards are very low. In the current demographic situation many institutions

just do not have enough applicants to make admissions process competitive. Private institutions are expected to disappear on their own due to the lack of students and low paying capacity of the people; the quantity of state institutions will be regulated by the state and by 2012 their number will be cut by a third. Partly such regulation will be accomplished by the revised accreditation procedures. It is acknowledged that the existing system is unable to assure the quality of education but can only guarantee the minimum standards. The solution proposed are the same as described earlier in state and public documents: greater involvement of employers, competences based education standards and public participation.

According to Krushalin, “the state accreditation regulations [will be reconsidered] in order to reduce the number of poor quality institutions in Russia” (RIA news, 03/09/2009). A notice should be taken about the logic behind this proposition. The regulations are reconsidered to cut the number of institutions; they are not changed to enhance the quality in existing institutions. I see the reason for such logic in the following. As it already has been noticed and will become even more evident later, the quality assurance system is targeted at controlling the inputs. Once the number of school graduates has significantly decreased as the cohort of children born at the times of the Soviet Union collapse became the primary student population, the inputs oriented quality assurance system became unbalanced. The number of the institutions should be cut so that the admissions process can becomes competitive again and thus ensure the quality through the high quality inputs. I arrived at this hypothesis by seeing in the news that discussion of the need to decrease the number of institutions is always accompanied

by the reference to the insufficient number of students. The flaws of the current accreditation system are discussed only as a secondary reason or rather as a means to deny the licenses and accreditation to institutions. According to the head of Russian National Accreditation Agency “many institutions will not be able to support their status in 2010” (RIA news 10/11/2010), thus even creating the impression that the cuts are somehow planned.

The inputs oriented quality assurance system emerged into one more cluster of the news coverage. Upon the request of the Civic Chamber of Russian Federation a rating of the Russian HEIs based on the admissions data was prepared. One parameter was the transparency of the admissions process. Another was the mean of the Unified State Examination (USE) points of the admitted students. USE is a state wide exam that serves both as a school leaving and higher education entry examination. The rating is one of the few, if not the only one, comprehensive rating of Russian HEIs. But what it actually shows is the institutions where the most talented and knowledgeable school graduates with the highest USE points apply. It does not assess the actual education process in such institutions, but claims to be the rating of the quality of institutions. There is some indirect linkage between where school graduates apply and the perceived quality of education they might have heard about and may be looking for, but the relation of the two factors does not seem to be causal. What this rating and especially the fact that it was developed shows is the already emphasized reliance of the system on inputs and the idea that the more competitive the admissions process is the higher education quality of the institution is. The admission rating attracted a lot of criticism

and Krishtall, rector of Togliatti state university, worded the idea that actually rating has little to do with the quality of education.

The new accreditation requirements are another big theme in the news analysis. The newly formed Association of the leading HEIs of Russia proposed to develop an external expert structure with invited international expert that would assess the quality in Russian institutions and to institute a peer review process where the leading institutions would constitute a core of the system. Another development was proposed by the Rector of Moscow State University, Sadovnichy, who advocates for institutions to “take on themselves the responsibility for the quality of their graduates” (RIA news, 12/01/2011). The Moscow State University will award its own diplomas starting in 2011. Being one of the three state autonomous institutions in Russia, it can develop its own education standards, choose not to follow the SESHPE and award its own diplomas for such programs. However the majority of the state institutions in Russia does not have such an opportunity and continue to delegate the quality responsibility to the state.

The involvement of employers and general public into higher education and into quality assurance in particular is highly discussed in the news. Educational institutions are expected to work closer with businesses and to provide research for the needs of business; businesses are to share their infrastructure with education. The Ministry of Education and Science is proposing to involve business and public in the quality assessment in higher education. According to Fursenko accreditation should be carried out by professional organizations together with employers. It has been also widely discussed that institutions should prepare more specialists that are needed by real

Russian economy rather than graduating “endless lawyers” (Medvedev, RIA news, 15/02/2011).

Case study findings

Discussing the case study findings I will first present the document content analysis, and then will explore the themes identified in interview transcript analysis. Documents from two institutions will be discussed separately, but the interview themes were overlapping in both institutions, so for the sake of comprehensive representation they will be discussed together.

The Academy

The mission of the Academy is to prepare the specialists in its specific field⁷. One of the priority tasks is to create an effective system of quality management. The Academy has both the Department of Quality Control and the Quality Council, which are quite recent in its structure. The policy of quality development includes eight tasks, the first three are: 1) staff and faculty development, 2) enhancement of education process, and 3) methodological support.

The three main values of the Academy are quality, professionalism and openness. The strategic plan for the period of 2006-2010 included quality as the fourth main objective. The main goals were to continue the work on the quality management system, modernization of the planning system, systematic performance assessment in accordance with state requirements and indicators, development of the student rating

⁷ I purposefully do not cite the documents of the Academy, to preserve the privacy of the respondent from the Academy.

system and so on. The plan is composed in a form of a table and does not provide any details on every item.

The Academy has developed a department self-study guide. The document was created as a part of the effort to document the quality management system in the institution. The power of self-study to contribute to the departmental improvement is emphasized. The accreditation is mentioned on a side note and not as a rationale for carrying out a self-study but rather as a supportive instrument, as the united criteria help see the departments' activities holistically. Among the main advantages attributed by the guide to the self-study are: systematic improvement oriented approach; objective evaluation based on facts and not on the personal perception; discovery and analysis of the processes that can be improved; and an opportunity to advance the best practices. The discourse of the improvement is prevailing in the document, and setting the priority tasks for improvement is envisioned as a result of the self-study. Majority of the criteria to be assessed during self-study refer to the input measurements such as number of the lecturers who hold Doctor or Professor Degrees, mean age of lecturers, level of department and library's equipment, amount of research funds, enrollment competition etc. Some of the criteria assess the process component, including the assessments of involvement of students into research process, career guidance to the students, computer classes services and efficiency of the department quality control system. The actual learning and teaching quality is assessed in the form of outputs such as the results of final examinations and percentage of the graduates with guaranteed employment. After the assessment of department's performance commission should assign a number from

zero to ten to every indicator. Above presented indicators are very similar to or even the same as state accreditation indicators.

In the very end of the manual, in a short note, commission is also advised to examine the role of leadership in the department; improvement planning; use of the employee's potential; management of the processes; satisfaction of the customers with the quality of the department's work; satisfaction of the staff with their work for the department; department's influence on life inside and outside of the Academy. This set of indicators signifies a very different analytical approach to the self-study and orientation towards improvement. This set of indicators, or rather areas to be explored, is mostly process or outcome oriented and there are no directions given how to assess this parameters, e.g. there is no clarification what exactly is meant by department's influence on life outside of the Academy.

The manual finalizes with reiterating the point about improvement being the main outcome of the self-study. One of the advantages of the self-study according to the manual is that the assessments can be more honest as there is no need to protect some parts of information, as it happens in the situation with outside controllers. It can be implied that the manual proposes to differentiate the self-study for internal improvement needs and self-study report for the outside controlling agency.

Another document of the Academy that is relevant for the self-study is the model plan to improve the department's level and quality of performance. The manual is encouraging to approach quality as a process and to continue the work even after the completion of work on official plans. Quality advancement is promoted as a style of all

activities and self-study is defined as a foundation for objective understanding, analysis of the causes and attempts to tackle the problems. Self-study is approached as foundational element of the internal quality system.

Comparing the two manuals, one might notice that the proposed measures to improve the quality in the improvement manual are detached from what is supposed to be assessed by indicators in the self-study manual. The improvement manual clearly demonstrates a managerial approach to quality and seems to be following the ISO standards in such approach. The indicators listed in the self-study manual signify an approach of complying with state standards; they are mostly meant to assess inputs, some processes and few outputs. According to both manuals, self-study is meant to serve the basis for improvement work. But for example, the improvement manual refers to advancement of the individual student work in acquiring the new knowledge as one of the actions to be taken, however, none of the self-study indicators deal with individual students' work, so it cannot possibly assess the current state of affairs and propose the strategies for improvement. Given that the indicators to assess the quality are mostly input oriented, one might ask a question as to how the faculty is supposed to improve such quality when it mostly deals with education processes. The fact that both manuals were enacted the same year makes me think that they were supposed to form an integrated strategy, but they are very different both in the definition of quality and in the ways to approach its improvement.

To be accredited in 2010 the Academy started preparing in December 2008. According to the preparation plan the self-study process has taken almost a year. The

self-study commissions have been set up with the involvement of public and state organizations, customers and other stakeholders. One step in the process has been holding of meetings with students to explain them the process of the comprehensive institutional assessment. Apart from such meetings the students have taken part only in the survey on the so called character building. The process should be finalized with the development of the improvement strategies. The institutional self-study report is a one hundred page long document organized along the structure proposed by Rosobrnadzor with minor changes in the order of the chapters. The document presents numerical information on every indicator and then concludes that Academy's performance on a specific indicator corresponds to the levels established by Ministry of Education and Science.

The self-study report provides in-depth information on the admissions process at the institution and ascertains that the high prestige of the Academy's diploma determines the admissions competitiveness. The education process itself is approached from the positions of meeting the SESHPE requirements. The inputs are assessed by evaluating the level of competitive enrollment requirements, processes are assessed by evaluating the level of requirements in interim examination of students, outputs are measured according to the results of final examinations and feedback on defense of student's thesis, and outcomes are assessed in the form of employers' opinions and data from the regional unemployment center.

The self-study report gives an account of the Academy's performance with just a few instances of proposing the improvements. It is recommended to facilitate the

individual work of students and to catalyze the creation of electronic textbooks. The quality of the students' training is assessed on several criteria. Students are extensively tested both for the accreditation commission and for internal purposes. The self-study report cites data on testing of students' residual knowledge. It seems hard to reveal problems and areas where improvement is needed based just on the examination results. So the document is encouraging the involvement of students into quality assurance at the Academy.

To report on outcomes of the education process the self-study represents the long list of graduates who hold high public or business positions, however, their graduation year suggests that most of them have graduated the Academy while already occupying the high position and thus this information cannot be regarded as evidence of the quality of education in the Academy.

As prescribed by the state accreditation requirements, the last chapter in the self-study report is devoted to the remedial action taken on the problems revealed by the past accreditation. The majority of the recommendations from the previous accreditation are worded as "to continue the development of something" or "to continue the work on something", which means that the work is already being done in respect to some issues and the commission just recommended to go on. One of the recommendations was to advance the organization of the individual student work. The action taken in that respect was the development of the methodological procedures and instructional materials, and twelve computer classes were fully equipped for students' independent work. However, as already mentioned the current self-study report still refers to that issue as to the area

of improvement. It is not very clear to what extent the goal to facilitate the students' independent learning was met for the past five years and what is still left to be done.

The self-study reports of two departments that went through accreditation in 2009 were also included in the analysis. The first department followed the self-study structure very rigidly and did not provide any information that is optional, but only presented the data on mandatory indicators. Because the main body of the self-study report did not identify any problems in the department's performance, the recommendations –that are mandatory to include in the report – seems to be detached from the main discussion and the need for the improvements proposed was not explained. The second self-study was on the particular faculty, meaning a school or a college. The faculty has its own work on quality assurance and follows the ISO9001 requirements; it incorporates the so called “entrance control”, that is high level of enrollment requirements, ongoing quality monitoring, and final control, that is final examination of the students. Both self-study reports make an impression of just complying with accreditation requirements and are not very evaluative of the performance, so the recommendations seem to be ‘coming out of nowhere’.

The Higher School of Economics

The State University Higher School of Economics was granted autonomy by the 1109 resolution of the Russian Government on 23rd December, 2010 (Правительство Российской Федерации [The Russian Federation Government], 2010). It became the National Research University ‘Higher School of Economics’. The Saint Petersburg branch is a part of the university. The university now owns property and assets that used

to be federal. The document does not mention any aspects of quality assurance, and whether the institution still has to meet the SESHPPE and obtain state accreditation.

In 2009 the Conception of Quality Assurance System was ratified in the HSE (HSE, 2009). The document defines the development of the quality system as the priority goal for the institution. The HSE has adapted the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education definition of quality and refers to quality as “the totality of indicators that describe the level of students’ professional training, degree of satisfaction of the needs of various education process participants with the education delivered” (HSE, 2009, p.2). Later in the document the academic quality is referred to as guaranteed attainment of minimal standards, the ability to attain goals with the existing input indicators, the ability to satisfy the requirements of the stakeholders and to use the creative potential of employees, students and partners of the HSE.

The HSE’s mission is to provide quality education that meets the requirements and expectations of all stakeholders – students, employers, society and state - and to exceed these expectations (HSE, 2009, p.3). Quality assurance is proposed to be everyone’s job at the institution. The quality system is said to be embracing the feedback both internally from students and externally from public and employers.

According to the document, the quality assessment system incorporates both the internal and external evaluations. The indicators used should correlate to the Russia-wide system of quality control and should be prone for quantitative measurement. Students’ knowledge assessment is performed in a way of examination, including testing of residual knowledge. The quality of the faculty is guaranteed by setting a minimum

ratio of certain degrees holding lecturers and by taking part in continuing professional education no less than once in five years.

The Department of Quality Control and Development was created at the HSE after the recommendation by the accreditation commission in 2003. According to the 2009 – 2010 report, the main activities of the Department of Quality Control and Development included assisting in the licensing of new programs, accreditation of the programs that expect the first graduating cohort, external control of students' residual knowledge, development and implementation of the quality control system, and correction of the diagnosed problems (HSE, 2010). Only the last two tasks directly relate to the development of quality, while the majority of the tasks represent the quality control mission of the department.

The report refers to the system of teaching quality assessment, which goal is “not just to record the results, but to define the directions of the future activities of the institution in relation to teaching quality” (HSE, 2010, p.15). One of the methods used in the HSE to enhance teaching quality is the system of lessons visits by the faculty. Nowadays it has mostly controlling function when the lessons of young faculty are visited by experienced lecturers, but the report appeals for establishing more visits with the goal of improvement and best practice sharing. The report states that the prominent principle of international quality systems which is merit recognition is also underestimated in the institution. The quality department report is distinct from the other examined documents due to its critical approach. It states explicitly the unresolved problems and what should be done to accomplish the goals.

The HSE went through institutional self-study in 2008 while the comprehensive assessment of institutional effectiveness was still in force. The institution was accredited the same year. The self-study took only four months from January to April of 2008. The report is a 170 pages long document with appendixes that follows the state accreditation proposed structure. In the respective chapter the report describes the changes in the labor market and analyses the demand for the type of specialists the HSE is preparing. The quality of the programs is defined as adherence to the state standards. A distinctive feature of the report is that apart from just reporting numerical data on the indicators it provides extensive descriptions and examples.

The philosophy of the HSE in relation to education process is that every student should be an active subject of his or her own learning process, active individual work should be continuous and to that end the institution organizes its education process around short modules rather than semesters. The report discusses several instances of students' opinions being taken into account as a part of quality assurance process, for example quality of teaching is partially assessed by students' opinion surveys after the completion of the course. A wide range of projects aimed at enhancement of students' extracurricular activities is functioning at the HSE. They are described in the section on character building, which is a mandatory part of the report by accreditation standards.

Discussing the quality of students' preparation, the report draws a direct relation between the quality of graduates and the high level of requirements during the enrollment process, thus emphasizing the input side of quality. Again testing of residual knowledge of students is referenced as a measure of education quality control. Another

measure associated with quality of students' preparation is based on the surveys of the organizations where students undertook an internship.

The Department of Psychology accredited its Bachelor and Specialist programs in 2010. The department was created in 2005. The conception of the creation and development of the Department of Psychology is a 21 page long document providing the justification for the need to open a department (HSE, n.d). The document states that on the measure of labor market saturation with psychologists Russia is way behind the rest of the industrialized world, which was used to justify the opening of the department. According to the conception, "the opening of the Department of Psychology, given that the HSE has the highest ratings in the country and good standing in the world, predetermines the provision of the high quality education for future psychologists" (HSE, n.d., p.1). The niche the department was going to occupy was the newly state approved specialization of organizational psychology that is poorly represented by the education institutions in Saint Petersburg, but the labor demand for which is said to be rising. The wide societal goal of the department is to oppose "the wave of psychological charlatanism" with the provision of high quality specialists. The document enlists what the future graduates of the department should know, have skills in, and have experience in. So the department is striving to give not only knowledge but also competences to its future graduates.

The self-study report of the Specialist program in psychology is a 35 page long document. The self-study was originated in January 2010 and the program was accredited in the summer of the same year. The tasks of the self-study included

obtaining objective information about education process, determining the conformity of the program's content, level, and quality to SESHPE, revealing the positive and negative tendencies in the performance of the program and determining the sources of the problems and the ways to solve them.

The information on the department's relation to the labor market is conflicting. The report cites the letter from the Federal Department of Employment to provide evidence on the regional labor market needs as a reason for opening the department. However later in just one sentence it states that in 2005 "the opening of the programs was associated with the needs of the regional labor market. Since 2009 there is no longer any admission to the discipline 030301.65 "Psychology" due to overproduction of the psychologists in Saint Petersburg" (Отчет по результатам самообследования отделения психологии [Report based on the self-study results at psychology department], 2010, p.13). There is no explanation of such rapid change in the span of four years and it is hard to see why the labor market became oversaturated or why the initial estimations of the labor market demands were wrong.

The links of the department with the labor market do not seem to be strong, as the self-study also reports on the lack of the organizations that are willing to cooperate with the department on a long term basis in respect to the organization of the students' internships that are required by SESHPE. The main recommendation of the self-study were about solving the internship problem, also the self-study commission recommends the department to continue the work on publishing textbooks and to develop international cooperation.

The Department of Applied Political Sciences went through the accreditation and self-study in the same time period as the Department of Psychology in 2010. The department was created in 2005. The self-study report of its Bachelor program is a 67 page long document that follows the general structure but has a noticeably longer chapter devoted to the content of education. The goals of the self-study were to determine the level of conformity to state standards, to analyze the work of the faculty members in preparing the graduates, and to define the possibilities and resources for advancement of the quality of education, methodological and research work at the department. The self-study report demonstrates a relative freedom of the structure in terms of presentation of material, for example, a detailed vision of the future structural changes of the department is presented.

The report encourages paying more attention to the admissions process. The continuing outreach work aimed at attracting strong applicants resulted in the high competition rates and enrollment on a self-financed basis, but more work needs to be done for the development and expansion of the department. In the chapter on education content the individuality of education process is emphasized. The discussion on use of diverse and innovative teaching methods is supported with numerous examples. The improvement cycle is said to be functioning in the department. The education program is being constantly updated based on the new developments in the field of applied political science, in the Russian society and in official legislature, and on the feedback from students. One of the recommendations of the report is to establish a system of monitoring the demand for department's graduates. The Department of Applied Political

Sciences also faces the problem of finding the organizations to accept students for internships. At the point of the self-study students have had only one internship out of the two required, and the report cites a very positive feedback from employers.

In the chapter on character building my attention was drawn by the statement that there were no drug users identified among the students. The fact is interesting not due to its content but as a fact showing the flexibility and the degree of freedom the self-study commission has in examining and presenting the issues it finds important. Although all self-study reports were found to follow the same structure, the structure itself broadly covers all possible activities an educational institution might have, thus the self-study commission has the discretion to pay more attention to some issues and to formally report on the others. All the reports examined from both institutions showed a substantive variation in presenting the material.

Main themes and other interview findings

In this section I describe the findings gained from the interviews analysis and provide the discussion of the findings. The two case studies are not meant to be compared to each other, but to provide a richer descriptive data and details on various issues and approaches to self-study. The same themes were identified in the analyses of the codes of both sets of data, so they will be discussed conjointly. I mention the particular context in cases where it is important.

In the discussion of the findings the head of the Quality Control Department at the Academy will be referred to by a fictional name M. Ivanova. The respondents from the HSE will be referred to by their real names as they gave their permission to do so

after being interviewed: Yu. Vasilieva, the head of the Department of Quality Control and Development; O. Golubkova, the chair of the Department of Psychology; and A. Sungurov, the chair of the Department of Applied Political Sciences.

Who is doing the job of the self-study?

According to the chair of Department of Psychology the biggest amount of work and writing for the self-study she did herself with the help of her assistant (O. Golubkova, personal communication, January 18, 2011). The report was reviewed by the head of the School of Management to which the Department of Psychology belongs. The head of the Department of Quality Control and Development provided counseling throughout the process of the report preparation and she also edited the final version. The business representative did not take any part in the process and just signed the final report according to O. Golubkova. The recommendations, which are a mandatory part of the report and are meant to contribute to the improvement of the program, were based on the valuable remarks of an outside expert from the Saint Petersburg State University. He, however, is not mentioned as a member of the self-study committee. So in the case of the Department of Psychology self-study one might see that on the one hand, a committee member, employers representative, did not contribute in any significant way to the work on the report; on the other hand, the outside expert, whose valuable remarks constitute the basis for main outcome of the self-study, is not a member of the appointed committee. Hardly, the work of a committee organized this way can be effective. The logic behind the contribution of the members seems to be quite random.

The chair of the Department of Applied Political Sciences described the process of the self-study preparation as just a formality to meet the accreditation requirements. He indicated that he was not actively involved in the process. So it seems that the process was lacking leadership due to the fact that it was regarded just as a paper work type of activity.

In the Academy the process of the self-study is orchestrated by the Quality Control Department. The department requests the needed information from the academic departments and then composes the self-study report.

Uncertain times

All respondents referred to the current situation as a time of transition, and stressed the uncertainty over the future in terms of the accreditation and quality assurance. The accreditation procedures are very fluid in Russia. During the last 15 years the Academy went through three different types of quality control by the state. First, in 2000 it complied with the procedures of separate accreditation, licensing and attestation. Then in 2005, it went through a comprehensive assessment of institutional effectiveness, that united accreditation and licensing, and through two separate accreditation and licensing procedures in 2010. And the requirements and practices will significantly change again in 2011 after the new law on education is passed. So the legal framework of the quality control is very fluid and to some extent unpredictable.

Interviews were conducted in January 2011 and that was the time when the new Education Law has just been enacted, or rather was in process of being enacted, as the information on it was very confusing. Both heads of the quality control departments

voiced concerns about the uncertainty of the situation and confessed that they do not know how to prepare for the next round of program accreditations, which is coming in four months.

The chair of the Department of Psychology expressed a positive view on the changes in Russian higher education. She noticed that the system became too “stiff” and the time is calling for creativity of people to introduce positive changes into the system (O. Golubkova, personal communication, January 18, 2011). At the same time, it was the Department of Psychology that happened to be in the troublesome situation, although the reasons for it lie in the institutional practices of HSE. The current situation of the department is very tricky. It is in the process of being closed. The reason is that there were no freshmen admitted to the program last year. In Russian higher education prospective students apply directly to the programs they will graduate in. The focus of the program determines the types of the entrance examinations. In case of the HSE the Moscow head institution determined the list of entry examinations for the program. As the institution is endorsing the internationalization policy and promotes introduction of courses taught in English, English was set to be one of the entry examinations for all programs at the HSE. All of the applicants for the Department of Psychology failed the English examination, and in year 2009 there were no freshmen admitted into the program. After that a decision was made by the HSE to close the Department of Psychology. There is also some inner dynamics to the event of the closure, but the chair identified it as just her personal ideas.

However, the situation when all applicants failed in the English examination was not completely unexpected to the chair of the department; she mentioned that for several years the program has had a similar problem, it was just not the full cohort of applicants that failed the examination. And the very first cohort of actually enrolled students was “random people” according to the chair (O. Golubkova, personal communication, January 18, 2011). The problem with qualified applicants seems to be a systemic issue for the department, but it was not identified as such in the self-study report and there was no coordinated plan of actions proposed. In comparison, the Department of Applied Political Sciences’ report presents a detailed discussion of the efforts to attract qualified applicants and to widen the base of the schools that cooperate with the department on that issue.

The event of the programs closure exemplified a case when the institution’s desire to internationalize its education process might bring about the unintended consequences. Fluency in English does not seem to be a core competency of a psychologist and the applicant might be not good in it, especially given that there are many other foreign languages taught in Russian secondary schools, such as German or French. But the English exam could have cuff off the applicants really talented for pursuing a psychology education. The complexity of the issue is magnified by the fact that the HSE seems to be heavily relying on the inputs into education process as a guarantee of the high quality education. That is the reason for the admissions process to be so highly competitive. But some particular features of the admissions, like English examination, might actually corrupt the logic of quality control by inputs.

It seems that the self-study report was lacking the discussion of one more issue central to the operation of the Department of Psychology. The department was created in 2005. The decision to do so was quite spontaneous. The director of the HSE met a rector of a former Institute of Human Biology and Psychology. At that time, the institute was on the verge of closing and the only way for it to survive was to be absorbed by another institution. And just in three months the Department of Psychology was created at the HSE using the basis of the former Institute of Human Biology and Psychology. The chair admitted that the decision to open the department was taken “on an emotional level” (O. Golubkova, personal communication, January 18, 2011). So the department seems to have been facing some kind of internal inconsistency that might hinder its successful functioning and could have actually contributed to the decision to close it. The internal inconsistency relates to the labor market.

Employers and labor market

Him I never saw. [Speaking about the employers’ representative]

O. Golubkova, personal communication, January 18, 2011

The chair of the Department of Psychology was very unsure if the labor market in Saint Petersburg really needs the graduates of her department. She expressed a desire to see the results of some kind of research that would assess the labor market demand for the industrial psychologists. This issue is so important for the department that it even tried to get a grant research on it. Indeed, there is a lot of inconsistency in the way the chair and the self-study report discussed the labor market demand for the graduates of the program.

In the self-study and in the conception of the Department of Psychology creation, that are discussed above, the demand for the professional psychologists was identified as the reason to open the department. And when speaking about the opening of the department, O. Golubkova mentioned that the department was going to occupy the specific niche on the education market – to prepare organizational psychologists for small and medium business, and the department is unique in Saint Petersburg in that niche. She also mentioned that the positioning was good and the department was “successfully going in that direction” (O. Golubkova, personal communication, January 18, 2011). However about one hour later, speaking about the upcoming closure of the program, she made a guess that there might be too many HEIs in Saint Petersburg that prepare psychologists and may be the labor market is oversaturated by such specialists. Also she added that the modern Russian business might not understand the value of hiring an organizational psychologist or might have not enough resources for that. So it seems that the self-study report did not address this vital issue lying at the very root of departments’ existence, but instead the report seems to sugar-coat the situation. Supposedly the ‘showing the best’ strategy was assumed to be more beneficial to the department than the honest analysis of the situation. Involvement of the employers’ representative in the work on the self-study could have brought a valuable perspective into the self-study report and help approach the vital issue of the labor market demand. But as I already mentioned the representative participated in the work of the commission just nominally. When pointing at the name of the representative in the committee list in

the final self-study report O. Golubkova said: “Him I never saw” (O. Golubkova, personal communication, January 18, 2011).

According to the HSE regulations a representative of employers should be included in the commission of the self-study. According to Yu. Vasilieva, the head of the Department of Quality Control and Development, it is logical to do so, because the employers’ representative will be serving on the external accreditation commission. All HSE self-study reports were signed by a representative of employers, usually by a head of the company that works in the field related to the branch of study being accredited. The staff of the program under accreditation review or the Department of Quality Control and Development tries to find the employers to participate in the self-study; as the employers are usually very reluctant to engage into the self-study, HSE has to make arrangements with them. Yu. Vasilieva assessed the involvement of employers’ representative as a purely formal procedure. Representatives rarely take active part in actual work of the committee. She worded it like this: “If this person is conscientious, he [or she] for sure would not sign the self-study report just as it is, but would also work on it” (Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011). And even if the employer takes part in preparation of the report, the head of the Department of Quality Control and Development still would not characterize him or her as a “full subject of evaluation” of an academic program (Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011).

One more domain of employers-institution collaboration is the organization of the internships – the two internships are required by SESHPE as a part of any education

program. All respondents, and all self-study reports, mentioned various degrees of difficulty with finding businesses and organizations that would like to take students for an internship. In case of the Department of Psychology most of the students intern at the City Center for Employment because O. Golubkova has a personal friend at this center. Employers are not reimbursed for taking a student and during internship there is a lack of supervision and guidance given to students. Comparing the current situation with the Soviet Union times, Yu. Vasilieva noticed that nowadays involvement of employers in education is “somehow artificial” (Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011), while in the situation of the planned Soviet economy there was a practice of ‘distribution’ of the graduates to work for a number of years in the assigned organization or industry, which made employers interested in training the future employees as early in their education process as possible. It seems that the state force was focal intermediary in the employers-education cooperation, and once the state has withdrawn from the field, the cooperation ceased working efficiently.

As can be seen from the document analysis on the public field in the previous section, business and industry community is voicing the concerns about the education quality and invents the new ways – such as accreditation or institution ratings – to become an influential agent in the education field. However, the case study findings show that they are very reluctant to participate in the activities that are already present for them in the education system. Yu. Vasilieva made a guess that lack of employers’ motivation to actively involve both in the education process and in quality assurance might be explained by the fact that not all alumni can find the job in their profession,

and so employer has a wide choice of whom to employ and relies on his or her ability to find the right person; thus employers do not see the necessity to invest time and effort in working with tentative future employees during their education period. As a possible solution to the problem Yu. Vasilieva even discussed a possibility to pay organizations for providing guidance to the intern-students. In my point of view, such solution reveals a very special understanding of the role of employers as of somebody who provides a service to the educational institution. Successful businesses and organizations would hardly see income from HEIs as something to go after. To attract the genuine interest of employers in education process an equal partnership is needed. Finding more employers willing to take students for an internship and signing long term contracts with them is the most often recommendation found in the self-study reports of two institutions. However none of the self-study reports addressed the issue from the employers' point of view. True involvement of the employers in the self-study process could have revealed the factors that hinder employers' involvement. I assume that currently the internship process is organized to better meet the education needs, but not the motives of employers. The whole cohort has an internship at the same time, while employers might prefer to accept the interns one at a time to have consistency of this position in their structure, or to invite interns not at the times scheduled by HEI but during the labor intensive projects at the employers' site.

Monitoring the employment paths of graduates is one more effective way for an HEI to assess the quality of the education from the employers' point of view. In HSE the work is being done in establishing a long lasting system of monitoring the employers'

opinion about the alumni. At the Academy the information about graduates is collected in two categories – first, the information about the alumni who hold high positions in the government or in business is obtained; second, data about unemployed graduates is received from the state employment centers. The data is stored and can be used for analyses. The Academy self-study report however included only the information about high ranking graduates.

Apart from the issues of graduates' employment and students' internships, the labor market influences the performance of the education programs in one more way. The chair of the Department of Psychology complained that almost all full-time students work. She expressed her greatest concerns with such practice, as it really interferes with the academic progress of the students and several students were expelled from the program in the past. When a full-time student works, he or she would miss classes and as a result fail in several of them, which ultimately lead to being expelled. This important problem was not acknowledged in the self-study report and, consequently, no solutions to the organization of the education process were proposed.

The state and quality

The larger theme of the state's role in quality assurance includes the discourses on the state financed students, state's accreditation practices and the state's central role in defining what quality is. In general, the role of the state has been positively assessed by respondents.

The state is involved in the quality assurance of the education in two ways. First, it is indirectly influencing the quality by providing the financing for some students.

Second, it has a direct impact through the accreditation and licensing processes. Russia has a system of free competition based higher education, which means that the education of the students most successful in the entry examinations is financed by the state. So there the state-financed and self-financed students are distinguished. Public opinion regards the state-financed students as diligent smart students, while self-financed students are considered to be poorer achievers. First, for some reason they failed the entrance examination or chose not even to apply for state financed type of education. And second, supposedly, in the institutions they are considered to be like “a hen bringing golden eggs” so the institutions do not expel them even when their performance is poor (Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011). The system of quality assurance of higher education in Russia seems to be very much input oriented. So the ability to admit state-financed students is seen as a guarantee of quality. It creates competition of the admissions process. The HSE sees its favorable position of not depending on the funding from self-financed students as one of the strongest factors contributing to high quality and prestige of its education. The institution can afford to admit only the strongest applicants and to expel poor achieving students. The practice of assuring the quality by the process of expelling was mentioned by all respondents at the HSE, where the ratio of state-financed students to self-financed students is one to one. Such practice was not mentioned as important factor in quality assurance in the Academy setting, where the same ratio is one to ten. By the head of the HSE Department of Quality Control and Development, the high selectivity of the students during admissions and the education process was directly correlated with the quality outcomes

of the education process. The logic behind such view is that only the best will complete their education, and the same qualities that helped them during the education process would contribute to their success in the working place.

The second way the state is assuring quality in higher education is through the state standards. All respondents identified adherence to the SESHPE as a guarantee of the education quality, such position was also stated in the Department of Psychology self-study report. Adherence to the SESHPE is one of the state accreditation requirements. To be eligible to issue state diplomas, institutions and programs have to follow the education structure proposed by SESHPE. It includes federal, institutional, and program components in the course structure. The institutional and program components allow the programs to distinguish themselves and to occupy a specific niche, according to O. Golubkova. But at the same time she mentioned the rigidity of the submission of the curricular process as a part of accreditation. Institutions have to report via a special Internet enhanced system all their curricula. Trying to be competitive institutions might provide more classes on a particular subject than required by the SESHPE. For example, the HSE provides almost twice more hours of English classes than required by the foreign language requirements in SESHPE; but the electronic curricula submission system would not allow all the hours to be submitted and then the fewer amounts are officially reported. The chair of the Department of Psychology also referred to herself as a 'mistress' meaning that she can organize the education process the way she finds it appropriate and introduce the courses she finds important, but when the information is presented for accreditation she makes it fit the SESHPE requirements,

mostly such changes concern the redistribution of academic hours (O. Golubkova, personal communication, January 18, 2011).

Fatalism

The interviews with the head of the Quality Control Department at the Academy, M. Ivanova, and with the chair of the HSE Department of Psychology, O. Golubkova, revealed a slightly fatalistic attitude towards the quality assurance outcomes.

At the Academy the administration seems to have been prepared to the failures in implementation of its strategic plan from the very beginning. Speaking about the concluding the work on the five year strategic plan of the Academy, M. Ivanova noticed that “human factor is everywhere. We can plan something, but then if it is not done, we can plan it again” (M. Ivanova, personal communication, January 14, 2011).

The chair of the HSE Department of Psychology concurred in the opinion that you can plan one thing, but when the action begins “the chips will fly⁸ and there are nuances” (O. Golubkova, personal communication, January 18, 2011). When asked about the usefulness of a self-study process, the respondent digressed on a subject of the qualities of the department’s graduates. She acknowledged that the faculty did their best, but

there is still personal factor. Somebody will be a good specialist; somebody still will be a bad specialist. And somebody will never work in psychology, and may be that is even good – he or she will bring less trouble, if he or she recognizes that it is not the right place for them; and may be psychology will help them in their private life. (O. Golubkova, personal communication, January 18, 2011)

⁸ Part of a saying “You can’t chop wood without making the chips fly”.

Such extreme expression of the fatalistic approach to the quality of the future graduates might have been triggered by a general unpleasant situation of the closing of the program and the personal feelings of the department chair. But still, the inadequacy of the quality assurance of education is revealed by such confession. According to the HSE logic, the system of expelling should have worked in the case of the students who might even do some harm during their professional practice. Consequently, the system of expelling the underachievers either did not work well in that case or it does not guarantee the quality of the graduates.

International connections

The discussion about international issues was a part of all interviews, but mostly it related to the general questions of institution's development. The HSE is trying to integrate into international education system; especially into American and European systems. The university promotes international exchange for its students and faculty; just recently it won a grant to invite famous international professors to teach at the university. But speaking about the quality assurance, Yu. Vasilieva noticed that the integration of international accreditation into Russian higher education practices is hindered by the lack of qualified experts that are proficient in English and have enough expertise in both Russian and international quality assurance fields.

The Academy has less international connections than the HSE, but it is developing its quality assurance system based on the international ISO 9001 standards and according to M. Ivanova the international standards prescribe a more flexible approach and allow institutions for more freedom than the state standards do.

It is possible to include an international expert or representative into the self-study commission, but that was not the case in all self-study reports examined. However, the HSE had two cases of involving the international experts into assessment of university's education quality. The both instances were informal and somewhat unplanned. First, the university got to know that a group of international experts were in Saint Petersburg participating in a conference. And the HSE asked them to informally assess the education quality to the extent they were able to do so in their limited timing. Those experts visited several programs and presented their recommendations. The second case happened when the representative of a Finnish university volunteered to evaluate some aspects of the education at the HSE, as he was interested in Russian universities that have close cooperation ties with Finnish education. He visited several lectures and university events, talked to students, faculty and administrators. He left several recommendations as well. The recommendations of the group of external experts were published, "contemplated" and discussed by administrators and the faculty (Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011). So far they were not incorporated into any university decision making, but the delegation from the Moscow head HSE institution, that recently visited the Saint Petersburg branch, mentioned that it is planned to incorporating those recommendations into the long term development program of the institution. The respondent from HSE characterized the involvement of international experts in university quality assurance as undocumented and not institutionalized, but she acknowledged that the HSE "is open for such contacts and in

Russia in general there are such tendencies” (Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011).

The role of students

Based on the interviews and self-study reports, it can be concluded that the students are involved into quality assurance system mostly in the role of the assessment objects. As a preparation step for the self-study report, students are extensively tested, mostly by the residual knowledge testing tools. According to the accreditation requirements, the results of the students surveys about the conditions of the so called ‘character building’ practices (extracurricular activities) at the institution are included in the self-study report.

Both institutions have the elements of the students’ opinion feedback loop in their system of quality assurance; however, such practices exist separately from the main documented quality assurance practices. In the HSE at the end of every course students fill in an evaluation report that assesses their satisfaction with the teaching, content and delivery of the course. Results of such student opinion survey are said to be taken into consideration by departments and result in the learning process modifications, as for examples the redistribution of lecturing and individual study hours. Rector of HSE has proposed to use the results of students’ evaluation of teachers when there is a contentious issue of teachers’ promotion and rewarding. However, that initiative is resisted by the teachers themselves and there is also no legal basis to support such practice.

At the Academy students' opinion survey are administered every year. The questions in the survey vary every year, so it is impossible to analyze the dynamics. The questions are about students' free time, admissions process, teachers and infrastructure. The respondent noticed that generally in the academy "they like asking students, but do not like to document that or to make it a systemic practice" (M. Ivanova, personal communication, January 14, 2011). This fact is especially prominent knowing what a great importance is given to documenting of everything at this institution.

There seems to be some cultural issues underlying the role of the students in the education process. When asked specifically about the students' role in the quality assurance process, respondents tend to assure me that students are very important to that process and are active agents of it. But when discussing the general educational issues, the respondents tended to refer to students as the 'objects on whom the quality should be imposed' and discussed the issues of expelling. Talking about the practice of expelling, Yu. Vasilieva noticed that "it will somehow organize the student" (Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011). The chair of the Department of Psychology said the following about the students: "it is very rare that he or she will sit and work independently, it should be a very high motivation or just hard requirements like this expelling" (O. Golubkova, personal communication, January 18, 2011). When asked directly about the form of students' participation in the quality assurance process, O. Golubkova digressed into the issue of how comfortable students are in approaching any faculty if they have problems and compared the atmosphere in the department to a family one. Several times during the interview she used various expressions for children

to refer to students, which means that students are considered as not equal partners and hardly can be fully-fledged subjects of quality assurance any time soon.

A self-study structure allows the inclusion of students' opinions on the quality of the education process in the report, and most of the reports call for the active involvement of the students into quality assurance practices. However, neither of the institutions does document the information about students' opinions, notwithstanding the fact that they both collect that data with varying degrees of consistency and organization. Students' feedback is a very potential tool for improvement oriented quality assurance systems. However, in the system, where the inputs quality control still prevails, and where expelling practices are meant to guarantee the quality of the education outcomes, there seems to be not much space left for the students' concerns to be heard. The poor achieving students will just be expelled and no examination of the roots of their poor achievement would be undertaken, consequently, no changes would be implemented in the education process. The issue of student's failure is more considered as a defect of the incoming product rather than a problem in the system's functioning.

Documenting

The theme of documenting seemed to be central to the interview with the head of the Quality Control Department at the Academy, M. Ivanova. The Academy is preparing its quality system in accordance with ISO9001 standards. All the current documentation practices of the Academy need to be revised and the new documents need to cover the areas that were not documented before. The quality system in academy includes a

quality council at the institution level and quality commissioners at the department level. The whole issue of quality assurance in the Academy is seen through the lenses of preparing the quality system in accordance with ISO9001. When asked about plans for the future in terms of quality assurance, M. Ivanova said that they will continue preparing the necessary documents for the system to be finally certified by ISO9001 and did not mention any other objectives.

The way the Academy is evaluating the institutional performance on the strategic plan goals also involves the exchange of the documents. As the time has come to evaluate the results and to reflect on what is still to be done, the Quality Control Department started sending out the informed letters to departments responsible for particular tasks of the strategic planning and asked them to submit a report on the completion of the task. M. Ivanova did not mention any final meetings where the results can be collegially discussed and reflected upon. So the process of strategic planning seems to be lacking active involvement of institution's leadership.

The self-study process at the Academy also seems to be centered around documents, as well as in the HSE. Describing the way a commission for a self-study is formed, the head of the Department of Quality Control and Development mentioned that those faculty members of the program under accreditation process are invited to be self-study committee members, who can work with documents. People are needed who can derive the pertinent information from documents and represent it in the form of a document following an expected structure.

Accountability versus improvement

[Faculty] realized that instead of a formal report they better do a serious analysis

Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011

The head of the Department of Quality Control and Development at the HSE acknowledged that a self-study is more of a reporting process than an actual discovery of something. If the system of information and document exchange is working well, then while preparing a self-study report, there will be no need to search for additional information. And so the process becomes rather formal and might lack analytical approach. Having acknowledged the fact that a self-study usually comes down to documenting and reporting, Yu. Vasilieva said that the process still has some positive impacts beyond accreditation goals. For the period of the past six years of her employment for the HSE she has noticed a change in faculty attitudes towards a self-study. Six years ago when the HSE was going through a major institutional accreditation, everyone approached the self-study very formally, with the only goal in mind of “getting the desirable certificate, and to continue doing what we thing is needed” (Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011). But because the accreditation involves numerous cycles of reporting that goes almost continuously, “people get drawn in, get used and realized that instead of a formal report they better do a serious analysis, and later on it will be you whom this report will help to perform tasks and to solve problems, that you as a head of a department or as a member of a department see” (Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011). So

nowadays the self-study report started being seriously discussed at the chair meeting that was not at all common before. How seriously the faculty approaches the self-study still varies among the different departments. The most progressive self-study commissions not only report the facts about their program but try to analyze its performance to identify the positions where improvement is needed.

However, according to A. Sungurov, the chair of the Department of Applied Political Sciences, the preparation of the self-study report was a rather formal procedure at the department. The chair of the Department of Psychology provided dubious response on the accountability or improvement issue. She spoke about a self-study as a tool that helps analyzing the activities of the department, but she mostly refers to the observance of the standards and how self-study makes you do this activity, which otherwise is neglected. O. Golubkova was positive about the fact that there is a structure of the self-study report; otherwise something might be forgotten to report. She mentioned that the self-study is actively discussed in the department meetings, that faculty are comfortable sharing their concerns and problems. However when being prompted to name its performance improvement related issues, she identified two reasons for the self-study. The first one was that graduates will receive a legitimate diploma, a state accredited diploma. The second reason was that “somebody there in Moscow might look at it” (O. Golubkova, personal communication, January 18, 2011). In this statement she referred to the Moscow head institution and expressed the hope that positive presentation of the department through a self-study might change the decision to close the program. None of the two reasons relate to the improvement of the education

process component of a self-study they were supposed to exemplify. The first goal was to account to the accreditation commission; and the second objective was to impress the head institution.

‘Showing the best’ was also a prominent theme in the discussion of the self-study by the head of the Quality Control Department at the Academy. M. Ivanova said that the self-study report is produced to show the best the institution has. “Bad sides can be kept silent” (M. Ivanova, personal communication, January 14, 2011). The goal is to show the best, and even when the results are very impressive, it is better to show the progress made on the way to achieve the results than the unfortunate current state of affairs. However, like her counterpart at the HSE, the head of the Quality Control Department at the Academy noticed the positive changes over time. Since the quality ceased to be only the Quality Control Department affair and there are quality commissioners at every institutional unit, faculty and staff developed a better understanding of the quality idea. The positive impact of self-study was acknowledged as well, M. Ivanova referred to the analytical part as a valuable component of a self-study and the one having a potential for improvement. However, the issue of the analysis raises some concerns. As mentioned earlier the academic departments just submit the required information to the Quality Control Department, which later prepares the self-study report. So it seems the final stage of analysis is detached from the faculty and staff of the academic department that is supposed to benefit from the analytical values of the report. This factor might explain the fact that in the self-study reports of the two units of the Academy analyzed earlier, the recommendations did not arise from the main discussion of the unit’s performance.

A change in the self-study procedure might be recommended to the Academy, and to have the people closest to the actual work of the program perform the analysis of its performance, thus the improvement potential of the self-study can be fully used.

Internal quality assurance system

The state as if let us go, the dog lead is long but it is still a dog lead.

(Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011)

The two institutions exercised different approaches and hold various conceptual understanding of quality assurance systems. The HSE's stance is that education is not a product but rather a mixture of service and value, so the institution has rejected the approach of using business models of quality management such as ISO standards. The Academy, on the contrary, is developing its IQAS in accordance with ISO9001 guidelines. The introduction of the ISO certified IQAS was promoted by the state. The Academy started the process of establishing such a system when its presence at the institution was included in the state accreditation indicators. There were rumors among the HEI community that presence of such a system would make the accreditation process for such institution "cursory" (M. Ivanova, personal communication, January 14, 2011). In 2005 the state accreditation commission noted in its final resolution that the Academy has elements of IQAS system and is on the right way to achieve its full functioning. That was a very positive factor for the accreditation. However, the situation in 2010 was drastically different. At that time the Academy had developed its IQAS even better, but this fact was totally neglected by the accreditation commission. Such change enormously perplexed the staff of the Academy as it was a clear signal from the state

that the IQAS is no longer a priority. The academy is still going to continue its work on ISO9001 certified IQAS system just because “once started now it is a pity to abandon it” (M. Ivanova, personal communication, January 14, 2011). Also, the presence of such system can be considered beneficial in the contacts of the Academy with international partners. It seems that the state force has withdrawn from promoting the IQAS but the institution understands that presence of such system is favored internationally.

The HSE was never striving for a certified IQAS, but the other facet of the issue of the state position towards the IQAS is very important to the institution. The HSE was granted autonomy in December 2010. Autonomy gives an educational institution a number of benefits, including the economic independence. However, it is not clear yet what autonomy would mean for quality assurance at the HSE. On the one hand, autonomy allows for the freedom to develop independent education standards instead of following the SESHPE. On the other hand, if the HSE would not follow the SESHPE, it will not be able to meet the accreditation requirements that directly connect the quality of education to the pursuance of the standards. So the only way for the HSE to have its own educational standards is to have standards higher than the SESHPE, what the institution is already doing to set itself apart from competitors. So the autonomy does not seem to change the situation much. The HSE is waiting for the new legislation to be released. The positive scenario for the HSE would be if the state backed up its trust to university by allowing the institution itself to monitor its quality and to go through some checkups by state accreditation agency, but not as often as every five years; or if the state recognized the international certification of quality the institution might obtain.

Otherwise, “the state as if let [the HSE] go, the dog lead is long but it is still a dog lead” (Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011).

As the quality of education process is defined in terms of adherence to the standards, the whole conversation about the autonomy was framed by the head of the Department of Quality Control and Development at the HSE as an internal quality control issue. As she explained, the notion of quality is worked out at the level of federal government, and it is captured in the accreditation indicators. These indicators are the orienting point for the internal quality assurance at the institutions. According to Yu. Vasilieva, it is unclear how the state wants institutions to develop their own internal quality systems but at the same time to continue following the state standards of education.

The understanding of the quality following the state standards that was fostered by the state itself poses the problems for its new initiative of promoting IQAS. However, it seems to me that both institutions under research already have the elements of the IQAS. They independently monitor students’ opinions, enhance instructional practices, invite international experts and try to cooperate with employers. All these activities can be regarded as part of the quality assurance system if quality is understood in terms of the satisfaction of the needs of education stakeholders. Institutions can still set their own goals of quality assurance and work on their attainment. In this case the discourse about internal quality would be less centered on standards, but would concentrate more on such issues as, for example, quality of teaching, quality of educational materials, services; and the main audience of the quality assurance reports would be internal and

external stakeholders (faculty, staff, students, employers etc.). In the best case scenario it is advisable to develop an independent curriculum and to grant institutional diplomas instead of state ones.

Sharing the experience among the HEIs was identified as an important factor in promotion of the IQAS. The heads of the quality departments at both institutions regularly participate in the seminars that are organized by leading institutions, such as for example the Saint Petersburg Electrotechnical University “LETI” and National University of Science and Technology "MISIS". By visiting such seminars, the HSE administrators just want to be aware of the recent development in the field and to take note of the best practices, however, they are not eager to implement them in their institution. The Academy is usually looking for the best practices that it can adopt or adapt.

Conclusions and implications for policy, research and practice

The analysis of the findings will be presented in two steps: first I will discuss the macro-level environment. Second, I will evaluate the current system of quality assurance through the prism of self-study practices at the HSE and the Academy. It should be acknowledged that the case study method poses some limitation for the generalization of the findings, but as the state accreditation system is uniform across Russia, the concerns revealed by examining the two institutions might have implications for the system as a whole.

Before going into the discussion of conclusions, I would like to point out the two factors that make the below analysis legitimate. First, self-study is meant to cover the whole range of institutional activities and the committee exercises a particular degree of freedom in deciding the discussion of which issues to prioritize, so the self-study report can be indicative of the institution's approach to the quality assurance. Second, both employers' representatives and international experts can be included in the self-study commission. Representatives of employers are always present in the external accreditation commission, and it is logical to invite them to the self-study commission as well (Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011). Thus it is appropriate to speak about the presence of all three force-fields in the institutional environment when conducting a self-study.

The force-field analysis can be performed towards either the current situation standpoint or towards the desired situation standpoint. One of the goals of the self-study is to contribute to development of the IQAS. So the force-field analysis will be

performed towards the desired point of the fully functioning IQAS and the improvement driven self-study. The assumption is that the internal system is motivated by the improvement rationale, rather than by an external accountability one.

The state seems to be the strongest force in the educational institution's environment. It is also a focal intermediary in the employers and international actors' relations to the HEIs. At the macro-level the state force is not consistent. On the one hand, the development of the IQAS has been gradually introduced into the self-study indicators, thus exercising a coercive driving force towards its establishment. By holding the competition for the best IQAS administered by Rosobrnadzor, the state has also engaged into mimetic isomorphism. Both forces are quite weak as the competition is voluntary, and the active promotion of the IQAS soon gave way to neglect of its existence in the work of accreditation commissions.

On the other hand, the state exercises a quite strong restraining force hindering the institutions from effective development of the IQAS. First, the current accreditation indicators can hardly promote the assurance of quality, as they mostly focus on input measurements. Second, the state proclaims itself the main guarantor of the quality in higher education. The issuing of state diplomas virtually means that an institution delegates the responsibility for the quality of its graduates to the state. From the standpoint of both the state and the institutions, the quality is defined as adherence to the state standards. In such situation the very notion of the internal quality becomes problematic. So the internal quality assurance seems to be in reality the assurance of external quality by internal means. The situation where the state has "outsourced" the

observance of its quality standards to the intra-institutional system reminds the concept of ‘steering from a distance’ described in the second chapter. The same state of affairs has been characterized by Yu. Vasilieva as “the state as if let us go, the dog lead is long but it is still a dog lead” (Yu. Vasilieva, personal communication, January 13, 2011).

The international force is setting a benchmark and thus exercises a mimetic power. It is a driving force for the IQAS, because ENQA stipulates that the institution itself is the main guarantor of the quality. The example of the Academy demonstrates that institutions understand the value of IQAS for their international relations. The strength of the international force is weak as self-study is usually performed without international experts and its results are not meant for international audiences. Interestingly, some institutions reserve to the use of international experts for the informal assessment of their education quality. It is an issue for further research to examine the reasons for not including such experts in the self-study, given that such opportunity is provided by the legislation.

Public field favors the systemic, improvement oriented approach to quality assurance and can be categorized as exercising the driving normative force on the institutions. Peer educational institutions that share their best practices and organize seminars on quality assurance are also included into the public normative driving force. At the macro-level professional and employers’ organizations are very active in voicing their concerns about the education quality. However, the institutions report difficulty of attracting the employers into self-study commissions. So the reluctance of the employers to enter already existing quality assurance processes might exercise a restricting power

on the establishment of an improvement oriented IQAS, which needs to evaluate education outcomes and to work closely with employers to be effective.

Figure one was created to visualize the above analysis.

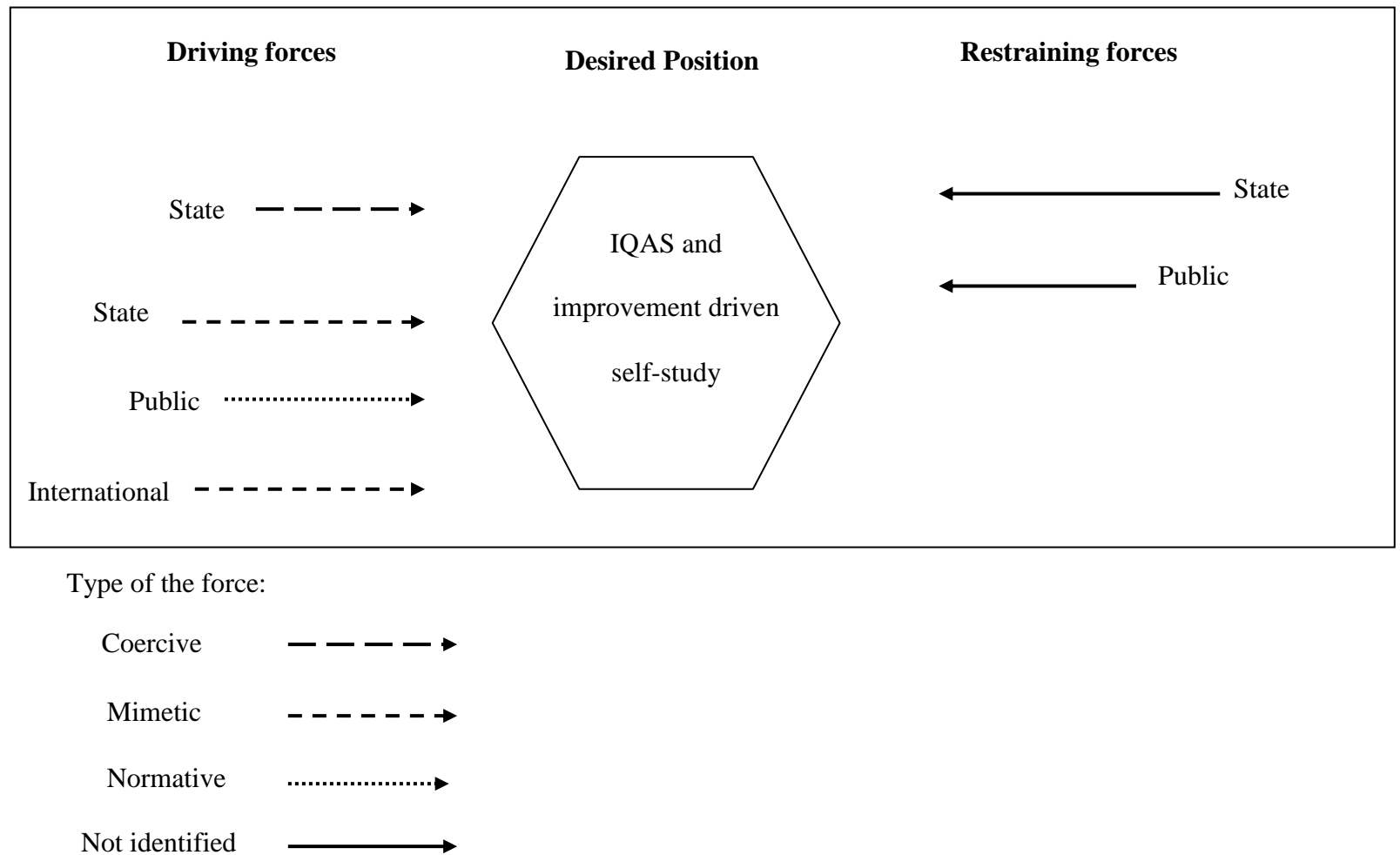


Figure 2. The force-field analysis. Relative length of the arrow is meant to illustrate the relative strength of the force.

All estimates are probabilistic and are just meant to serve a visualization purpose.

Jeliazkova and Westerheijden's (2002) model of national quality assurance systems' development was presented in the second chapter. The above discussion of the Russian system allows me to categorize its development as pertaining to the second phase. The guiding problem during the second phase includes doubts about efficiency of the system and its institutions; both the document and the news analyses revealed that the Russian system is in a transition period, the inefficiency of the existing system is widely acknowledged. Jeliazkova and Westerheijden (2002) predict the self-study reports to be rather "self-selling" at this stage. The case study findings concur with such prediction and demonstrate that one of the main aspirations of the institutions and programs when composing the reports was to show the best and to impress the accreditation commission. Institutions refrained from being really evaluative in their reports and so the improvement value of the self-study work seems to be rather low. Accountability is definitely taking the lead in the purposes of the self-study, the main outcome of the whole process is perceived mostly in terms of getting accredited and being able to grant state diplomas. It should be noted, however, that the heads of the quality departments at the two institutions claimed that the continuous nature of self-studies and various reporting procedures have contributed to a more meaningful approach to such practices on behalf of the faculty.

I see the situation where institutions are granting degrees on behalf of the state as a potential factor for the fatalistic approach to the final qualifications of the graduates demonstrated by one respondent. In the current system it is the state that defines quality, that controls it and that takes the responsibility of the graduates' preparation. This circumstance hinders the development of the Russian quality assurance system and does

not allow categorizing it as having achieved the third stage of development according to the Jeliaskova and Westerheijden (2002) model. At the third stage institutions themselves define quality and develop relevant quality assurance procedures on their own. In Russia such vision is promoted by the Bologna process. However, from the state side there is a lack of clarity in defining what an IQAS is meant to be; and consequently, institutions are stumbling at what exactly the state expects from them: to develop their own independent quality standards – as quality is defined in terms of adherence to state standards – or to monitor the performance according to the state defined indicators. In the last case such a system can hardly be called IQAS but it seems to be what the state is implying.

The main policy implication is for the state to let institutions themselves define what quality means, thus contributing to the establishment of the genuine IQAS. It is crucial to make institutions responsible for the quality of their graduates; issuing the individual institutional diplomas should be made feasible for the majority of the institutions both by changing the legislation and by forming the positive public opinion towards the value of such diplomas. Moving away from predominant input indicators would allow the quality assurance process to be more improvement oriented, as the importance of educational processes in determining quality of graduates would be acknowledged. The indicators should be oriented towards encouraging institutional achievements in quality assurance, rather than setting the minimum standards. Such actions would eliminate the restraining force of the state on IQAS force field.

The main implications for practice include the involvement of the students into the quality assurance process not only as objects of testing but also as subjects of the

assessment. It is recommended to include a student and/or an alumnus into the self-study committee. The role of institutional leadership should be central in supporting the self-study to become a “catalyst or chariot for institutional transformation” (Martin, Manning, & Ramaley, 2001, p. 95). Employers should be motivated to take part in the institutional quality assurance practices. It might be the very formal nature of the current practices of the self-study and the inflexibility of the internships structure that deters employers from being really involved into the education process. So the move should be made on the both sides: educational institutions should make the self-study process more meaningful and thus attractive to employers, and employers should become actively involved. This would eliminate the public restraining force on IQAS forcefield.

The discussion of the self-study and its unique positioning, by being performed inside the institution but serving the goals external to it, raises the general question of the autonomy of educational institutions in Russia. When for the majority of HEIs in Russia the state is simultaneously the founder, main source of funding and the quality control agency, the situation leaves little room for an improvement oriented self-study and development of “a culture of evidence that supports honest discussions about the current condition of the institution” (Martin, Manning, & Ramaley, 2001, p.113). Development of a professional accreditation system might be able to address this problem.

The Russian accreditation system is undergoing principal changes. The new procedures and standards are expected to be enacted in 2011. It is for future research to see if the new accreditation system would have addressed the concerns about the current system raised in this study.

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Appendix I

Semi structured interview protocol

1. General information about institution/ program.

- How would you position the [name of the institution] in Russian higher education, society or internationally?
- What is the ideal position the [name of the institution] is envisioning in Russian higher education, society or internationally?

2. Quality assurance at institution/ program

- What are the practices of quality assurance at [name of the institution]?
- What departments are responsible for quality assurance? When and how they were formed?
- When was the last time of state accreditation of [name of the institution]?

3. Self-study experience

- When was the last time [name of the institution] has carried out a self-study? Was that the first time of self-study at [name of the institution]?
- How the self-study was initiated?
- How much time and effort was spent on preparation and carrying out of self-study?
- What guidelines you were given by accrediting agency? Did you change them in any way?
- How the work of self-study committee was organized? Who was responsible for the self-study? How these people were chosen? Who in reality did the most of the work?

- What resources were available for the self-study?
- What was the process of carrying out the self-study? What (study, research, services) and how was assessed?
- Who in the [name of the institution] community took part or was informed about the self-study? Who outside of the community took part in or was informed about self-study?
- What are the results of the self-study? Were they expected? How are they used?
- Was the self-study useful for your institution?
- Did the self-study achieve the purpose it was initiated for? How did your institution balance accountability and improvement rationales?
- What major challenges and successes you would identify in relation to the self-study process at [name of the institution]?

Appendix II

List of interview codes

1. Educational institution
 - a. Positioning / specific niche
 - b. History
 - c. Administrative structure
2. State
 - a. State funded students
 - b. State accreditation
 - c. Defining quality as adhering to state standards
 - d. Uncertain times
 - e. State diplomas
3. Public
 - a. Public benefit
 - i. Students that will mean something in research and in industry
 - ii. Students that will be able to be successful in labor market
 - b. Work with public organizations and employers
 - i. Formal participation of employers representatives in self-study
 - ii. Difficulties finding organizations for student internships
4. International
 - a. Cooperation
 - i. Integration into the foreign education systems
 - ii. Collaborative projects
 - iii. Exchanges of students and faculty
 - b. Quality
 - i. Recommendations from international experts
 - ii. Certification of the quality system by international standards
5. Students
 - a. Selection of students – work with strong applicants
 - b. Surveying students about quality of education
 - c. Testing students for accreditation
 - d. Documents that enlist students' rights and responsibilities
 - e. System of expelling
 - i. Poor achievers
 - ii. State financed vs. self financed
 - iii. Student being “organized” (brings to orderly behavior)

6. Quality
 - a. Institutional mechanisms
 - i. Departments for quality control
 1. Collaboration with state authorities
 - ii. Internal regulations and IQAS
 - iii. Control of inputs
 1. System of expelling
 2. Rigid admissions
 - b. State mechanisms
 - i. State accreditation
 - ii. Definition of quality by state standards
 - c. Quality control by outcomes
 - i. Alumni that would mean something in research and in industry
 - ii. Fatalism – uncertainty about the graduates' qualification
7. Accountability
 - a. Showing compliance to state standards in reports but in reality working differently
 - b. 'Show the best, hide what is not so good'
 - c. Documenting
 - d. Efficient information exchange
8. Improvement
 - a. 'Get drawn in' and decided to do the best
 - b. Comprehensive nature of indicators that allows analyses
 - c. Something useful for what there is no time in routine
9. Elements but not a system of
 - a. – students opinion surveys
 - b. – graduates monitoring
 - c. – internal quality assurance
10. Fatalism / Human factor
 - a. Plan one thing – n reality it is different
 - b. We plan if it is not done, we plan again
 - c. Set of circumstances
 - d. Lack of confidence in graduates' qualifications