

# Partnership experience between Russian and European universities in agrarian profile educational programs quality providing

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## Abstract

*Agrarian profile educational programs quality providing in Russian and European universities is crucial for the development of agricultural production. They must meet the requirements of employers. The international project "Development of professional public accreditation system of agrarian (agricultural) profile educational programs in the Russian Federation» ("Tempus-PACAgro") brought together representatives of Russian and European universities with the aim to reform the system of quality assurance. The project involves representatives of employers. The participation of representatives of Russian universities in the Erasmus Mundus program provides additional opportunities to study the experience of European universities. An important task for the Russian and European universities is to develop new opportunities for cooperation in order to guarantee agrarian profile educational programs quality providing. Primarily it is participation in the double diploma degree programs that promote mutual understanding and trust between universities-partners, laying the foundations for long-term cooperation, leading to the search for tools to improve the quality of education.*

**Key words:** agricultural university education, quality providing

**JEL Classification:** I2, I20, I21, I23

## 1. Introduction

The most important task is to improve the quality of agrarian profile educational programs in Russian and European universities. They are crucial for the development and improvement of agricultural production in modern conditions. University graduates who came to the production, must be well prepared and adapted to work in constantly changing conditions in accordance with the requirements of innovative environment development, they are required to solve effectively the challenges facing the company and the industry.

Employers make high demand for graduates, which suggests the following qualifications:

- Professional knowledge and practical skills for the professional activity of small, medium-sized

and large companies;

- Long-term sustainable activities and initiatives (including overtime);

- Identifying and solving problems flexibility and stability;

- Satisfaction from activity;

- Lifelong learning;

- The ability of social interaction;

- Ability to communicate in a foreign language;

- Other competence arising in the corporate culture and business. [1]

## 2. Data and Methods

The international project "Development of professional public accreditation system of agrarian (agricultural) profile educational programs in the Russian Federation» ("Tempus-PACAgro") brought together representatives of Russian and European universities with the aim to reform the system of quality assurance. Participants of the project are higher educational institutions from

different regions of Russia (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Tatarstan, Kabardino-Balkar Republic, the Republic of Mari El). Foreign partners of the project are the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (Nitra, Slovakia), Aleksandras Stulginskis University (Kaunas, Lithuania), Estonian University of Life Sciences (Tartu, Estonia), of Lleida (Lleida, Spain), Catalan University Assurance Agency (Barcelona, Spain).

The project involved "Agribusiness Association of educational institutions and fisheries." The partners of the project "Tempus - PACAgro» are representatives of employers: Limited company "Rusmarketkonsalting" (Saint-Petersburg, Russia), Federal State Budgetary Scientific Establishment "Institute of agroengineering and environmental problems of agricultural production" (Saint-Petersburg, Russia), the Agricultural Industrial Cooperative "Pedigree Plant on black and white cattle breeding 'Detskoselsky" (Saint-Petersburg, Russia).

The participation of representatives of Russian universities in the Erasmus Mundus program provides additional opportunities to study the experience of European universities.

An important task for the Russian and European universities is to develop new opportunities for cooperation in order to guarantee agrarian profile educational programs quality providing. Primarily it is participation in the double diploma degree programs that promote mutual understanding and trust between universities-partners, laying the foundations for long-term cooperation, leading to the search for tools to improve the quality of education.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

Russian participants of the TEMPUS project "PACAgro" studied the experience of European higher education institutions to ensure quality assurance of agricultural profile educational programs. In accordance with European standards, educational institutions should have their own policies and procedures for quality assurance, as well as the standards for ongoing programs and assigning qualifications. Students and other interested parties should also be involved in this process. Standards and criteria for assessing the quality of educational programs used by accreditation agency AQU Catalunya, are important for the Russian project partners.

At the Faculty of Economics and Management, Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (SUA) are working the faculty councils on quality. The Faculty offers undergraduate and post-graduate students the programs in the Slovak and English languages. Preparation of agricultural profile educational programs in English is an urgent task for Russian universities. It should be noted that the Slovak Agricultural University is connected to the net "Trends of Graduates Barometer", consisting of more than 1,000 European universities through which it monitors issues of education and career. On the website of the network, students can comment on these questions within the framework of the on-line survey. It is essential for Russian and European partners of the project to study the experience of the Faculty of Economics and Management FEM (Nitra) in the development and successful implementation of the program of double diplomas.

Studying the experience of Alexander Stulginskis University (Lithuania) showed that the organizational document of quality assurance is an approved by order of the rector of the University, "Quality Assurance Manual". The university independently decides on the need for the development and registration of new educational programs. The main criteria for the decision are: the need for specialists on the labor market; the attractiveness of the educational program for applicants; University scientific expertise in the new program. New educational program could be initiated not only by the University management staff and faculties, but also by separate group of scientists, and even employers, the social partners. Feedback in the process of the quality education improvement is ensured by the implementation of opinion polls among all participants in the learning process.

The Estonian University of Life Sciences has developed and implemented the survey system that includes all the target groups. Estonian Employers involved in all quality assurance processes (internal and external), as well as part of the international group of experts [2].

Conducted within the framework, survey of Russian employers showed their interest in quality of the graduates. 81% of employers would like to meet the students in advance to find out their level of professional and theoretical knowledge and practical skills, to get to know them as persons, to improve their skills in principle and in relation to this production (if the graduate will apply for work) [3].

When clarifying what kind of knowledge and skills are lacked for the engineer of agricultural mechanization, respondents noted: lack of knowledge in manufacturing operation and equipment in agro-industrial complex, poor knowledge of a foreign language. 57% of employers believe that the level of theoretical and practical training of graduates over the past 5-10 years has improved, 27% - consider that there is no change, and 15.4% - that it became worse. According to the survey 73% of respondents are familiar with the employers' training programs in agricultural universities.

Concerning the desire of employers to spend some time to participate in the procedures of professional public accreditation of higher education programs only 64% of respondents agreed to participate in the procedures of professional public accreditation of higher education programs, among them (respondents could give more than one answer):

- 41% are ready to participate in the survey to assess the educational program;
- 21% are ready to participate in the evaluation of educational programs;
- 12% are ready to participate in the external examination.

Participation of Russian universities representatives in the Erasmus Mundus program provides additional opportunities to study the European experience to guarantee the quality of educational programs. University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences BOKU (Vienna, Austria) in 2015 marked the 10th anniversary of «ALUMNI» foundation - the Union of graduates. The Central Union - Dachverband - includes 3,000 members. It is headed by the Rector Professor Martin H. Gerzabek, a graduate of the BOKU. The main objectives of the Union:

- Assistance to graduates in job placement, training and contact establishment between professionals;
- BOKU journal publication and management of graduates database;
- Cooperation with other professional associations of graduates.

Totally Central Union Alumni together with other professional associations includes 5800 graduates.

Besides, there is a union of BOKU graduates, [www.agrarabsolventen.at](http://www.agrarabsolventen.at), which recently celebrated its 100th anniversary (BOKU marked 140-th anniversary in 2012) and sees its role in support of BOKU Rector, training organization, experience exchange between generations and assistance in graduates' employment. This Union is headed by the head of the education department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Water Resources and Environment. BOKU graduates are also integrated in the following Unions:

- The Austrian Union of Forestry (Österreichischer ForstakademikerInnen Verband) [www.forstalumni.at](http://www.forstalumni.at)
- Union of wood industry workers (Verband Holzwirte Österreichs (VHÖ) [www.boku.ac.at/vhoe](http://www.boku.ac.at/vhoe) .One of it's tasks is to make an assistance in the preparation of bachelors and masters in BOKU.

- Alumni Union in the field of the natural sciences and water (Verband der AbsolventInnen der Studien für Kulturtechnik und Wasserwirtschaft [www.ktverband.at](http://www.ktverband.at)
- Association of Austrian technologies in the field of food and biotechnology products (Verein Österreichischer Lebensmittel- und Biotechnologen (VÖLB) [www.voelb.at](http://www.voelb.at)
- Austrian Society for Landscape Planning and Landscape Architecture (Österreichische

Gesellschaft für Landschaftsplanung und Landschaftsarchitektur (ÖGLA) [www.oegla.at](http://www.oegla.at)  
- Alumni Association in the field of environmental management and biological resources (Verein der Absolventinnen und Absolventen der Studien für Umwelt- und Bioressourcenmanagement (UBRM-Alumni) [www.ubrm-alumni.boku.ac.at](http://www.ubrm-alumni.boku.ac.at)

At the Institute of Landtechnik BOKU for many years lectures on safety in agriculture and forestry are read by specialists of the safety and health department of the Social Security Service of Austrian peasants. Students gain knowledge in the field of occupational safety and health in agriculture and forestry, including relevant information about companies and the latest technical operations in the field of occupational safety and health. And they are familiar with the potential job place.

Professional contacts of BOKU faculty with various agricultural enterprises and organizations are developed through various collective activities. One of the examples of this is the award ceremony for the best agricultural enterprises in Austria in various categories, carried out by newspaper Bauern Zeitung («Peasant newspaper»), 25.11.2015, within the framework of the exhibition of agricultural machinery Austro Agrar. A special prize for the safety of agricultural machinery was received by Ballenboy firm, which developed a conveyor <http://www.bauernzeitung.at/?id=2500,1083622>. This event was preceded by a long work on the announcement for the best safe machinery competition, establishment of an independent expert jury, comprising representatives of the Austrian Council for Agricultural Technology, BOKU University experts, the Social Security Service of the peasants. BOKU students and undergraduates were invited to the award ceremony.

Scientists of Bodenkultur University take part in the preparation of the annual Oekosoziales Forum Oesterreich, which is called think tank - the brain center and Denkfabrik - factory of ideas. The forum is held within a week on different thematic platforms of Vienna and other cities in Austria. Topics of 2016 are: farming, poultry farming, vegetable growing and gardening, the policy in the field of forestry, wine-making, the development of agricultural production in mountainous areas, pig-breeding, meadows and cattle keeping, communication. The first day of the forum "Winter Tagung-2016", which brought together representatives of all lands of Austria, farms, agribusiness structures, higher education institutions, as well as public institutions and organizations, focused its work on agricultural policy of the European Union and Austria, and summed up the past year results and concentrated on the strategic challenges for the future. Presentations by the World Trade Organization and the European Parliament representatives, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry of Austria aroused active discussion, which was attended by President of Oekosoziales Forum Europa, a professor of Humboldt-Universität from Berlin, the representative of REWE International AG, the president of the Austrian association of hotels owners and managers, the president of the Chamber of Agriculture in Austria [4].

#### **4. Conclusion**

Carried out in the framework of the project "Tempus" research and study of the experience of the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (BOKU, Vienna, Austria) in the framework of Erasmus Mundus program showed the main directions of improving the quality of educational programs to improve the training and skills of graduates of Russian universities:

- 1) organization of joint seminars, debates of the academic community and employers in order to clarify the relevance of existing programs and the development of new needs.
- 2) Inclusion of the employer's representatives in working groups (committees) responsible for the improvement of existing programs and development of new ones.
- 3) Inclusion of employers representatives in working groups to carry out an internal evaluation of programs quality.

- 4) Increased representation of employers at faculty and university management Board.
- 5) Creation of "Alumni" (Alumni) in agricultural universities in Russia [5].
- 6) The participation of teachers in activities carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture with the participation of employers, representatives of business and mass media.
- 7) Participation in programs of double diplomas that promote mutual understanding and trust between partner universities, laying the foundations for long-term cooperation, leading to the search for tools to improve the quality of education. The real opportunity for the development of double degree program can provide the participation of Russian universities in the Erasmus Plus Program [6, 7].

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