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FROM SOCIAL INCLUSION TO SKILLS: PRESSING THEMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY MAKING

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Abstract. This article reveals the analysis of the results of the annual conference of experts on the reform of higher education under the general theme – "Strategies for social inclusion in higher education". The article reviewed a number of analytical reports in the field of social inclusion strategies in higher education and their implications for the future development of higher education in the EU and the Bologna Process.

This article uses methods of retrospective analysis of the conference content. Moreover, some of the article insights were based on the method of sociological observation and in-depth interviews of experts during the conference, including the desktop research method. It is necessary to increase the information activities of the Erasmus+ program in order to strengthen the participation of national universities in EU programs. At the same time, we recommend strengthening the integration processes that are taking place at this stage of development, which will undoubtedly bring tangible benefits, based on the experience of the EU countries.

Keywords: higher education, social inclusion, socially vulnerable groups, benefits in higher education.

ОТ СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ ИНТЕГРАЦИИ К НАВЫКАМ: АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ТЕМЫ В РАЗРАБОТКЕ ПОЛИТИКИ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ

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Аннотация. Статья раскрывает анализ результатов ежегодной конференции экспертов по реформированию высшего образования под общей тематикой "Стратегии социальной интеграции в высшем образовании". В статье был рассмотрен ряд аналитических докладов в области стратегий социальной интеграции в высшем образовании и его значение для будущего развития высшего образования в странах ЕС и Болонского Процесса.

Ключевые слова: высшее образование, социальная интеграция, социально-уязвимые группы населения, льготы в высшем образовании.

Introduction. The annual conference "From social inclusion to skills: Pressing themes in higher education policy making" was conducted on 12-13 December 2019 in Prague, Czech Republic in the premises of the Charles University in Prague [1].

Charles University is the oldest University in Central Europe, which was founded in the XIV century by the Emperor Charles IV [2]. Today it is considered one of the most prestigious educational institutions in the world and, of course, is in demand among our compatriots. In the Czech Republic, thanks to its high scientific potential and strong teaching staff, it has secured the status of the country's main University.

Charles University is an example of the quality of the Czech higher education system. High scientific potential, strong teaching staff and unique historical traditions make it the main state University in the Czech Republic.

Charles University is included in the list of the best universities in the world (QS World University Rankings).

Charles University is the largest and most famous Czech University in the world. The University was included in the list of the 500 best higher education institutions in the world (the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2020 – 401-500 ranking place [3]).

The national hero of the Czech Republic, the thinker Jan Hus, physicists Nikola Tesla and Albert Einstein, the first President of Czechoslovakia Tomas Masaryk, writers Franz Kafka and Milan Kundera taught at the University of Prague [4].

Charles University is a member of the Association of European universities along with Oxford, Sorbonne, Bologna and the University of Geneva.

Currently, the University consists of 17 faculties (14 in Prague, 2 in Hradec-kralov and 1 in Plzen). It has more than 53,000 students (a sixth of all students in the Czech Republic). Training is conducted in more than 300 accredited programs in 642 specialties. There are more than 20,000 undergraduate students, 25,000 graduate students, and 8,000 post – graduate students. More than 7,000 students of Charles University are foreigners.

Prague University provides training in unique programs - "Egyptology" (Czech Egyptologists-world-class specialists), "Addictology", "Criminology". Charles University is ranked 7th in the ranking of European universities and 1st in the number of students coming under the Erasmus program. The unemployment rate at the end of Charles University is very low – only 1.7%, which once again confirms the demand for graduates of the University.

Studying at the Charles University is remarkable in that students here are not limited to the knowledge obtained from Czech professors - they also have the opportunity to listen to lectures by teachers of the world's leading universities, who regularly visit Prague. Also, much attention is paid to international cooperation with the best scientific and educational institutions in Europe, Asia and America, and the development is promoted by various student exchange programs, among which one of the most popular is Erasmus.

Methods

This article uses methods of retrospective analysis of the conference content. Also, some of the results of the article were based on the method of sociological observation and in-depth interviews of experts during the conference, including the desktop research method.

Results

The seminar began with a welcome speech from the organizers, the goals and objectives of the final conference were announced, a Summary report of the Experts' work prepared by EACEA Erasmus+, and the conclusions of the study on the state of

international credit mobility (ICM) and inclusivity in the countries of the Erasmus+ program partners were presented [5].

The key report of the first half of the conference "Strategies for social integration in higher education" was presented by the representatives of the Ministry of Higher education of Austria. Then there was a discussion forum with a response to the main report on social integration strategies in higher education [6], where the experts gave their comments: University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Institute of Educational Policy, Georgia and Association of Irish Universities, Ireland.

For example, special conditions for disabled people have been created in Austrian educational institutions. On the territory of any local University, we can meet people in wheelchairs or visually impaired. The entire infrastructure is adapted for their comfortable life and movement without assistance. In any student's dormitory, some rooms are equipped for the needs of people with disabilities. It has special kitchens and bathrooms. And student can use a wheelchair to enter absolutely any room. And even the signs in the elevators are duplicated in Braille.

The Technical University of Vienna has a special program for support and adaptation of students in wheelchairs, hearing impaired and visually impaired.

After that, participants were given the opportunity to participate in working groups, which were divided according to the interest of the participants themselves during the main registration for the event.

The following thematic groups were presented at the conference for participation; Group 1: teaching in different classes group. 2: advocacy policy and support for underrepresented groups. group 3: inclusion in internationalization group 4: RPL as a means of incorporating different student profiles.

The main conclusion after the discussion, which was agreed by the conference participants, was as follows. Universities should do their best to support the key role of focal points for vulnerable groups of students, who are an invaluable support for many such students in their learning process. Additional efforts should be made to raise awareness of vulnerable student groups, both among staff and ordinary students, and to encourage communication between staff and various services that can provide support and advice. Technologies that enable such students to complete their course of study play an important role. However, the technologies themselves cannot be effective without training to work with them, without warranty service and repair. Therefore, methodological and organizational support is required.

And the last day of the conference ended with the organization of Regional discussion groups to discuss the impact of capacity-building projects on national higher education systems in the partner country of the Program. The discussion focused on identifying and collecting accurate results from CBHE projects (2015 - 2019) and their impact on relevant national HE systems.

Participants were divided into 4 discussion groups:

1. The Western Balkans
2. Eastern partnership countries

3. Russia + Central Asia

4. Southern Mediterranean countries

The main report of the second day of the conference was devoted to the topic of higher education services, qualifications and labour market needs in the European aspect by the representative of the Association of Irish universities (IUA), Ireland. The speaker used the example of Ireland to show the development of the higher education system and noted the positive changes in the country after the inclusion of Ireland in the European Union [7].

After the report, panelists were invited to the stage, who also commented on the report, based on the experience of partner countries and institutions in terms of labor market needs and skills. The discussion group focused on issues related to how to improve skills and the importance of collaboration between universities and industry. Special attention will also be paid to the development of entrepreneurship and innovation skills.

As a conclusion, the conference organizers provided a Presentation on the upcoming Erasmus+ program for the next 7-year period and invited all participants to Express their wishes for the next seminars and Technical Assistance Missions planned in 2020, where exact topics and dated described in the final report [8].

Discussions

The experience of Charles University, which is located in the heart of Europe, and which strategically uses the advantage of its position is recommended to apply in Uzbekistan. Since Uzbekistan is also located in the center of Central Asia and geographically can play the role of an educational hub for the countries of the region.

It is necessary to expand the use of opportunities available to universities in Uzbekistan to participate in credit mobility projects [9]. If possible, we consider it necessary to include the number of ICM projects in the performance assessment of international departments.

In the European region, where the average coverage of higher education $\text{u}\ddot{\text{a}}$ native EU citizens are more than 40% [10], the question of access to higher education services for socially vulnerable segments of the population is very relevant. In Uzbekistan, it is also recommended to bear this in mind, due to the radical increase in access to higher education in the past two years.

It is necessary to increase the information activities of the Erasmus+ program in order to strengthen the participation of national universities in EU programs and in the same time we also recommend strengthening the integration processes that are taking place at this stage of development, which will undoubtedly bring tangible benefits, based on the experience of the EU countries.

It is recommended to further strengthen the link between education and the labor market, moreover, it is recommended to consider the introduction of a scientific degree-industrial or business doctor of science, that is, a degree in practice. In the European region, there is a clear understanding that strong practitioners do not go to

universities, because of the small payment, so the award of such a scientific degree will attract the best practitioners from the existing business or industry to teach [11]. It is recommended to consider the possibility of introducing ECTS [12] in all universities, as well as micro-ECTS in the system of retraining and professional development.

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