

Accreditation in the Russian Federation. New Legislation

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Abstract: Objective is to introduce a new approach to accreditation in the Russian Federation. New Russian legislation in higher education significantly alters the structure of the accreditation system. The most important element of this reform is the emergence of public accreditation. Some problems and their solutions are discussed in this paper

Keywords: quality assurance; types of accreditation; Russian Classical Universities Associations (ACUR)

1. Introduction

Quality assurance system is a whole set of measures and procedures related to the current control the quality of education and the development of monitoring tools. Accreditation is one of the type for quality assurance of the educational institution. Firstly accreditation in this area was originated in the U.S. in the form of society's response to the emergence of unscrupulous providers in education system. As a result, the public associations were appeared to certify the quality of education institutions. The compliance some institution's parameters to the declared standards and criteria of the accrediting organization was defined as evaluation form. At present the accreditation and quality standards are set of the basic characteristics for higher education systems in many countries. Two basic concepts form the quality assurance process: high quality standards and institutional autonomy.

In the development of accreditation were formed two main types of accreditation: institutional and specialized (program). The institutional accreditation provides recognition of the institution as a whole. Specialized accreditation recognizes the

educational program. The accreditation process ensures for public, states and others that colleges and universities maintain academic standards and adequately managed.

Typically, the institutional accreditation is provided by regional and national accrediting agencies. As usual, institutional accreditation is necessary for the official work of colleges and universities in several countries. Availability accreditation is seen as a necessary condition for the parents of students, stakeholders at the process of the institution selecting. Loss or threat of loss of accreditation adversely affects on the number of students attracted to study. In some countries, the institutions need accredited status to gain access to national funds or to obtain funding from public or private funds. Document of accredited institution is the minimum requirement for employment in many government agencies. Accordingly, entrepreneurs rarely recognize the document received from the unaccredited institution.

Specialized accreditation programs usually provide by professional associations or specialized agencies in areas such as business, medicine, art, dance, journalism, engineering, and law. Each of these groups has a criteria for accreditation and conditions of accreditation procedures. Since program accreditation is often used by employers as a prerequisite for obtaining work permits in the professional sphere, it received significant development in the world.

Associations of accrediting agencies in the area of institutional and program accreditation help to preserve the independence and autonomy of accreditation process. Such national and international associations are focusing on the process and quality accreditation, constantly reassessing and revising the requirement for accreditation organizations and recognize those who justify their hopes.

In Europe, the accreditation process was stimulated only in the 90s of the last century in connection with the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process) project. As a result of the consistent work of European institutions and the universities initiatives were formulated the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for the implementation of quality assurance processes in higher education. As part of this work the accreditation process plays a significant role and is based on the principles of sharing best practices between national systems of higher education in Europe. To support this process were formed the international network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (ENQA etc.). Other networks are shown in figure 1

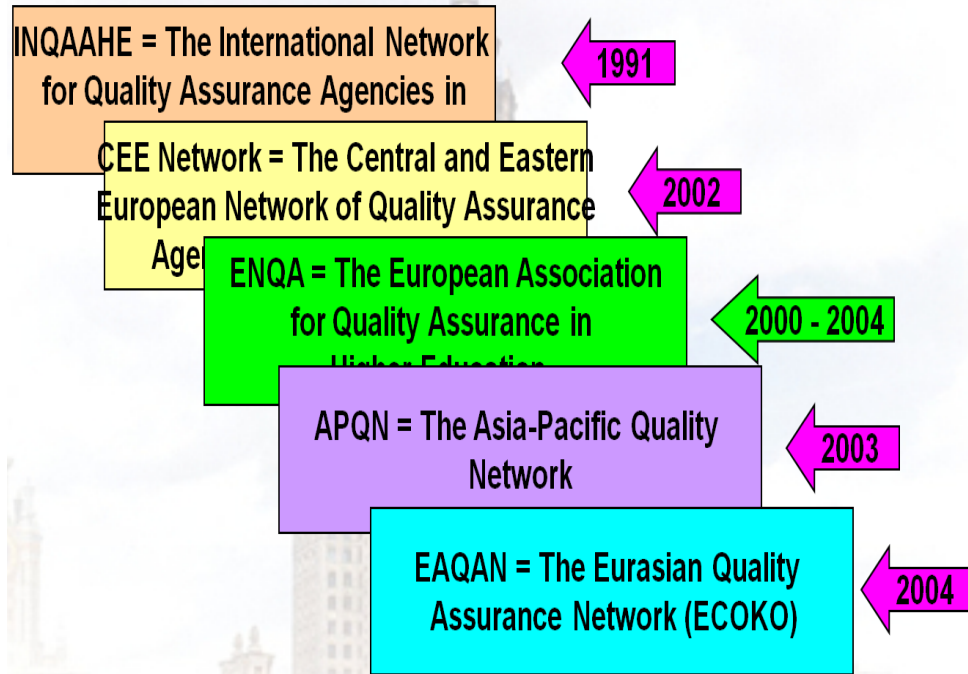


Figure 1. European network of quality assurance agencies

In general, the aim of the European accreditation are:

- demonstration of compliance to the standards and criteria of a accreditation agency;
- helping for students;
- provision of a credit transfer;
- ensure private investment;
- protecting the institutions from the external pressures;
- setting targets for the development and improvement;
- involvement faculties to the planning process;
- establishing criteria for the professional activities.

2. Prerequisites for the Development of Public Accreditation in Russia

Accreditation processes in Russia have emerged in the early 90s as a response to the process of higher education reform. At the beginning of the reform process in

Russia were created the new problems for the management related as to the technology factor, so to the development of evaluation and performance indicators.

In general, the new Russian system of evaluation of educational services is based on the expert position. The concept of evaluation system contains two basic principles. First one is that at the all levels of education the evaluation system is the state assessment procedure. The state acts as the organizer of expertise. Second one is that the state creates conditions for the development of an independent (public) evaluation. This suggests that the public accreditation system is emerging in the Russian Federation.

The purpose of accreditation is public acceptance of accreditation decisions based on the results of the external evaluation conducted in accordance with established standards. In this sense, the process of establishing new forms of expertise is based on the identification of stakeholders and determining their requirements. The tasks of public accreditation are: assessment of the quality and content of training of graduates, providing the professional community and employers guarantee in level of outcome competencies of graduates, providing reliable information about quality of education to stakeholders, and etc.

It is evident that the objects of public examination are: the conditions of planning and implementation of the educational process, procedures and final interim certification; activities of educational institutions in quality management, selection and provision of working conditions for staff, projects and programs implemented innovation and research; information environment necessary for the implementation process of training and education, social and cultural environment for the formation of personal qualities and the like.

The basic principles of public accreditation in higher education are considered: legality, voluntary participation, transparency of information on the procedures and criteria, the protection of participants, completeness and accuracy of information used by the experts, the independence of the educational institution, quality assurance procedures for accreditation, independence and objectivity of decisions, exclusion of discrimination at decision -making, responsibility for the results of the accreditation, the availability and transparency of results.

Generalization of the international experience in organizing procedures for the accreditation gives the model contours of public accreditation, which includes such

basic elements as self-study; cameral analysis of documents, expert visit, drafting of the final report on the results of the examination, the decision on accreditation.

In general, the results of public accreditation must inform the professional and academic community, students, employers, the government and the public about the quality of education provided by specific institutions; protect the interests of consumers of educational services specific schools; improve the efficiency of financial resources earmarked for educational projects due to their redistribution in favor of professional educational institutions receiving accredited status.

In accordance with the new “Law on Education” in Russia “*Public accreditation of educational programs is a recognition of the quality and level of training of graduates to meet the requirements of professional standards, the requirements of the labor market and employees of the profile.*”

But at present the Russian national standardization and certification framework is not currently defined in many professional fields of activity. Professional standards and association of employers in many professional fields are missing. Existing standards do not consider the estimation of educational programs as the subject of their activities. They have not the tools and procedures for its implementation. Therefore, before the developing Russian quality assurance system faces a number of challenges. They are:

- creation of conditions for activity of accreditation organizations aimed to recognize the programs by professional associations and employers' organizations;
- determination of status for accreditation organizations;
- development cooperation accreditation organization with the expert community;
- formation of the principle of independence, professionalism, integrity and expertise in the field of accreditation activities.

The main tasks of expert organizations (or professional associations) to conduct an independent evaluation of the results of education are:

- creation group of independent and trained experts;
- ensuring professionalism, integrity and honesty in the work of the experts, monitoring of their activities;
- ensuring the independence and integrity in decision-making expert organization;

- assessment of the quality of graduates in accordance with the requirements of stakeholders;
- assessment of quality assurance of education;
- analysis of conformity to applicable standards in the education market;
- preparation of consolidated information (expert opinions) to accrediting organizations;
- compiling ratings education programs.

Not direct causes for the development of public accreditation in the various forms is the work of international organizations to ensure the quality of higher education in the expanding internationalization and globalization in the context of national education systems. So for higher education in Russia are specific benchmark reform processes and evaluation of such reforms in European countries.

3. The New Russian “Law on Education” in the Field of Accreditation

The new law of the Russian Federation “On Education in the Russian Federation” identifies new challenges in the field of quality assurance and accreditation procedures. Prior to this law in the Russian Federation was carried out only the “state” institutional accreditation. There were no public accreditation legislation. The main innovation of the law is that the “state” accreditation conducted on the basic educational programs in accordance with federal state educational standards in higher education. That is the accreditation becomes as a state program accreditation and institutional accreditation of the law removed.

Besides the state’s program accreditation the new law introduced the concept of two new types of accreditation - “professionally - public” accreditation (PPA) of educational programs and “public” accreditation.

In general, the new law establishes the opportunity to receive not state accreditation in various Russian, foreign and international organizations. However, under the law, there are no association of “public” and “state” accreditation, as well as their mutual influence. If the “state” accreditation program is mandatory, the public accreditation gives no additional legislative rights to the program. In this way Russian universities do not know straight needs in “public” accreditation.

Under the “public” accreditation the law recognizes the level of the educational organization to the requirements of the relevant criteria Russian, foreign and

international accreditation agencies. Employers and their associations, as well as their authorized organization may conduct professional -public accreditation of education programs.

On the basis of professionally-public accreditation of educational programs by employers, by their associations or organizations authorized by them may be formed ratings of their accredited educational programs and organizations. Organizations that conduct public accreditation and professionally-public accreditation should ensure transparency and accessibility of information on how they conduct the appropriate accreditation. As a “public” accreditation, so professionally- public accreditation are voluntary and do not entail an additional financial obligations of the state. Thus, the Law “On Education in the Russian Federation” defines three types of accreditation - the “state”, “public” and “professionally-public” one. Schematically, these types of accreditation can be represented in the diagram (fig. 2).

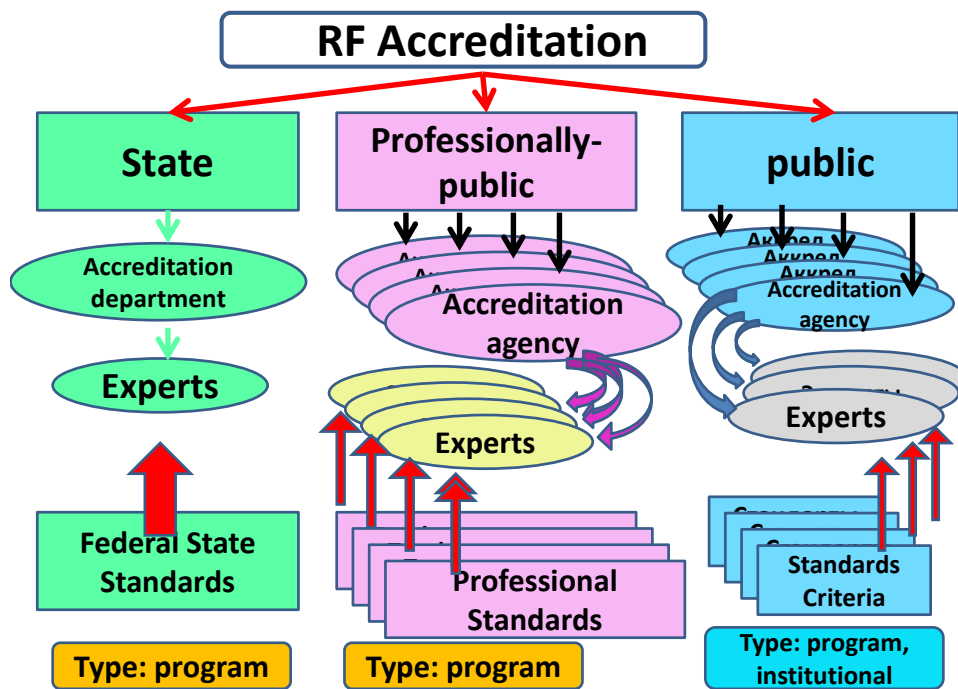


Figure 2. Types of accreditation in accordance with the Education Law in Russia

1. The state program accreditation is based on the Federal State Standards (FSS) in higher education. Each educational program (or area) has own FSS. The certified experts are involved to perform the procedure in the accreditation team. The team of experts is formed by Ministry of Education and Science of Russia for each case of accreditation. Total list of educational programs requires an extremely broad list of experts, extensive database, a sophisticated control system comprehensive accreditation process, significant budgetary resources to support the process.

2. Professionally - public accreditation is based on the list of professional standards (that in fact do not include consideration of the design, implementation, maintenance of educational process) formulated by the employers' associations. In fact this accreditation is focused on the confirmation of qualifications level, but don't connect with FSS. Professionally - public accreditation has no clearly defined relationship with the state accreditation.

3. Public accreditation may be viewed as a program, and as institutional one. In fact, public accreditation may be based on standards and criteria of any professional groups (including non- employers), as well as on standards and criteria generated stakeholders that are interested in the development of a quality assurance system. As “professionally-public” one, the “public” accreditation has no particular relation with the “state” and “professionally -public” accreditation. In fact, this type of accreditation can be divided into two classes: “public- professional” accreditation (based on standards and criteria that are set by professional associations, non- employers) and the “actual public” accreditation based on independent standards and requirements that are set by stakeholders.

4. Professionally- Public Accreditation Model

Professionally - public accreditation of higher education programs in the Russian Federation is the process to take the recognition of educational level to criteria and requirements of employers' communities or employers' associations representing the interests of consumers of educational services system. Professionally - public accreditation is designed to meet exclusively the interests of employers as consumers of educational institutions results, so it can't act as substitute for state accreditation, and can only complement it.

In the model of professionally- public accreditation the results are based on the professional (independent) evaluation of education programs quality. The model of

accreditation suggests that professionally- public accreditation may be organized and conducted by the employers' association or by an authorized organization (hereinafter accrediting organizations). Authorized organization shall take into account the interests of employers. Accrediting organization conducts professionally- public accreditation independently, delegating the quality assessment of the program to specialized expert organizations. An independent evaluation is delegated to expert organizations, as neither employers nor authorized organization, as a rule, do not have a competence in this area.

The expert organization needs to have a special independent body (a review board) that asserts the evaluation results. Thus, the multi-level structure allows achieving the objective results. Accordingly, the expert is responsible to the expert organization, which in turn is responsible for the results of the evaluation before the accrediting organization and society as a whole.

Thus introduced new professionally- public accreditation of educational programs is a form of ensuring the quality of graduates, focused on labor market demands. This form is expressed in recognition of education programs which meet the criteria and requirements set by accrediting organizations.

Accrediting organization, developing a methodology of professionally-public accreditation of education programs, uses the professional standards that are developed by employers for professional qualifications or professional competence. In addition, the accrediting organization should consider different standards of educational activities that are recognized in society and guarantee the quality of education provided by educational institution. Some of these standards include European standards (ESG - European Standards & Guidelines), Federal State Standards of higher education in Russia and standards of international public organizations operating in the field of education etc. Block diagram of professionally-public accreditation model is shown in Figure 3.

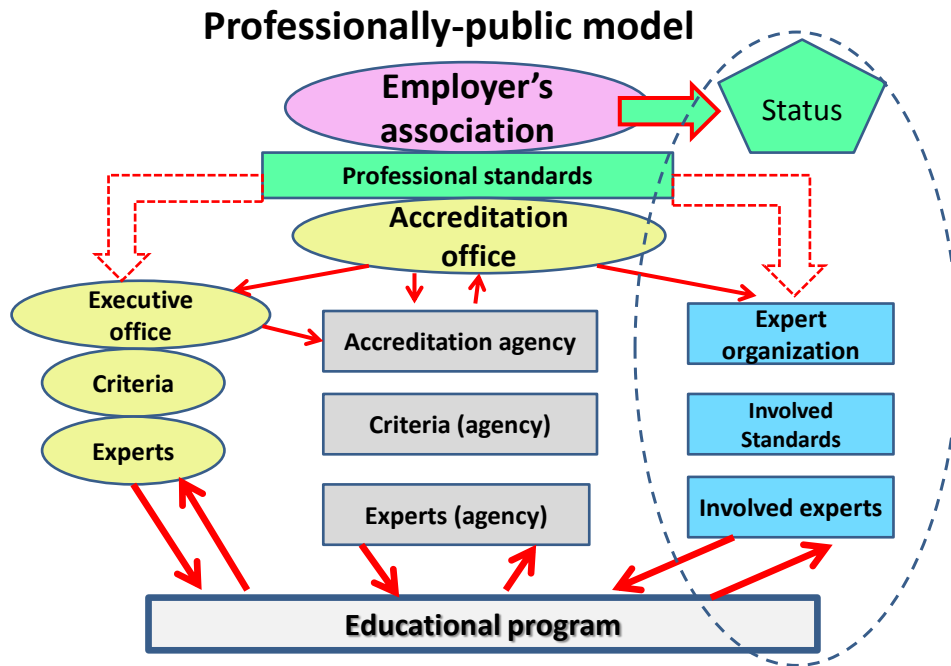


Figure 3. Professionally-public accreditation model

In accordance with implementation block diagram the professionally-public accreditation models available with three types of accreditation procedures.

1. The employers' association creates an independent accrediting (executive) office carrying out established procedures to confirm the skills of graduates. Activities of this office is based on professional standards and on criteria developed by the employer, that are able to assess the quality of educational process and outcome in accordance with the requirements of state accreditation. The accreditation procedure is carried out by trained experts selected from a pool of prepared experts. The accreditation process has a single stage. The final decision takes the accrediting body of the employer on the basis of expert's submissions.

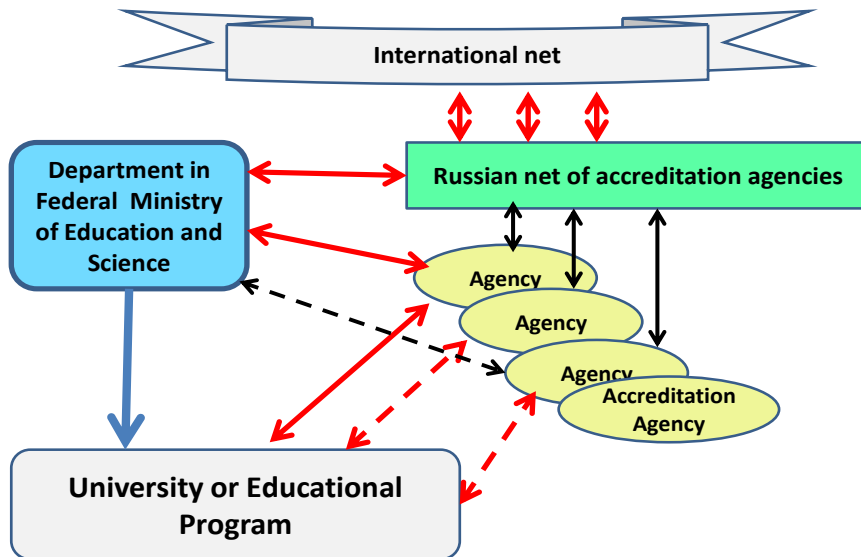
2. In the second version of the model, the employer's association requests to the independent accreditation agency performance of work under the contract. Contract requires performing the conditions of professional standards developed by the employers' association. Respectively, independent accreditation agency operates in accordance with the internal quality assessment criteria and learning outcomes of

the educational process. This scheme is a multi level, as the results performed by experts have a series of Statements - first in accreditation agency, and then a series of statements in accreditation office of employer.

3. The third option is based on the work of involved expert organization specializing in the services related to evaluation of the quality assurance in higher education or quality assessment on the base of European or other international criteria and standards, as well as the organization of international accreditation to foreign accreditation agency.

5. ACUR Public Accreditation Model

Significant problem implementing procedures for the accreditation of fundamental university programs is a lack of clear employer's associations in many areas of university education. In this case can be realized the model of "public" accreditation. Model of public accreditation may be relies on global experience in implementing accreditation procedures. This form of accreditation does not depend directly on the professional associations of employers or professional groups. It may be initiated by stakeholders regardless of their professional orientation. In general, the implementation of the model may be represented as follows. Independent accreditation agency announces set of standards and criteria for their evaluation with respect to the educational program or institution as a whole. National education authority considers an application created accreditation body, his statutes and criteria, procedures for accreditation and decides about inclusion (or non- inclusion) of this accreditation agency to recognized list. Recognition of accreditation agency sets the ratio of accreditation documents and state accreditation procedures. This model of public accreditation in Russia is in its infancy. The overall structure of functioning for accreditation agencies in the public accreditation model presented in Figure 4.



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figure 4. Network accreditation agencies

In this model, an accreditation agency performs all the functions and procedures of accreditation, including the development of complex internal regulatory documents, standards and criteria for their performance, technology and organization of procedures related to public accreditation. In this scheme work is organized in Accreditation Center of Association of Classical Universities of Russia (ACUR).

The Accreditation Center of Russian Classical Universities Associations (ACUR) is the noncommercial organization with the mission to provide professional accreditation for educational programs offered by Russian and international higher education institutions. On the basis of the established procedures for reviewing and assessing institutional educational activities, the Association carries out a public quality assurance for educational programs. ACUR's accreditation is a voluntary exercise to provide a more objective, externally determined quality assurance on the basis of a publicly declared established set of standards.

1. Mission
2. The Purposes of Educational Program

3. Planning, Formation and an Estimation of Educational Program
4. The Contents of Educational Program
5. Methodical Maintenance of Educational Program
6. Management of Educational Process
7. The Staff
8. Students
9. Resources of the Program
10. Environment Providing Development of the Person
11. Scientific Work in Educational Process
12. Culture of Quality
13. Graduates and Employment
14. Information Promotion of Educational Program

The Standards for Accreditation contain criteria for assessing the degree of compliance to ACUR Standards and Policy of quality assurance. These standards reflect the public and national expectations concerning the role of higher education. The ACUR Policy in the field of quality assurance assumes that the institution that receives ACUR accreditation will periodically, consistently, and honestly work on continuing improvement of quality of the accredited educational program, will increase efficiency of such work, and continuously aspire to enhance the superiority or excellence of the program.

Assessment procedures of ACUR accreditation are developed to encourage continuous improvement. Each of the fourteen Standards formulates strategy on measurement of the established quality.

As a whole, institution of higher education offering educational program for ACUR accreditation should have: a clearly defined purpose for the existence of the institution of higher education and the necessary resources for the achievement of the purpose and realization of the academic activities within its national laws.

Institutions whose educational programs have successfully passed ACUR accreditation are entered into the REGISTER of the ACCREDITED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS—these are programs in assessed to conform with the ACUR Standards. The register shall be open for the public, be it regional, national, or international community or agency.

Types of Accreditation

ACUR in conjunction with GAUC will provide FOUR types of Accreditation:

1. The Basic Accreditation of educational program for Russian establishment;
 - a) The Basic Accreditation of the program of establishment - ACUR member,
 - b) The Basic Accreditation of the program of establishment - not ACUR member,
2. The Basic Accreditation of educational program of foreign institutions of higher education;
3. The Accreditation confirming an international level of educational program
4. The Accreditation confirming the status of the program as Russian Educational Program of the Highest Quality.

The ACUR accredited educational programs shall have the rights to give issue to their graduates, who have successfully completed its requirements, an additional appendage (established by ACUR) and a standard letter of recommendation to the employer from ACUR. ACUR conducts the register of such given letters of recommendation and considers claims of employers if such arises. Claims and other opinions of employers are analyzed and can be the basis for response to ACUR accreditation status.

Standards reflect and include the accumulated wisdom from Russian and international experiences in the area of institutional and program accreditation in higher education, and an estimation of quality and the creation of quality culture. Standards and criteria open perspectives, which emphasize the public purposes of higher education.

ACUR's Accreditation Center continuously considers and estimates efficiency of the accepted Standards and procedures to apply them consistently and to make necessary changes, which demand new conditions of activities of institutions of higher education and market of educational services.

The system of ACUR accreditation is based on voluntary participation in the established procedure—to a fair and direct estimation of strengths and weaknesses of educational programs and other supporting activities of the institution that constitute the full academic process. General scheme of business processes of ACUR accreditation center is shown in Fig. 5.



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figure 5. ACUR accreditation center

6. Conclusion

The new Russian legislation significantly expands the possibilities of quality assurance in higher education. An independent participation of employers and other stakeholders in the accreditation process opens the way to increase confidence of universities strengthens position in a competitive environment. Participation of international experts in the accreditation and joint international accreditation procedures allow to extend the best practice and to develop a national system of education

7. References

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