

Elżbieta I. Szczepankiewicz, Manuela Skoczek-Spychała

THE ROLE AND AIMS OF STATE AND COMMUNITY ACCREDITATION AS AN ELEMENT OF THE EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF PROGRAMS OF STUDY IN ECONOMIC SCIENCES IN POLAND

ROLA I ZADANIA AKREDYTACJI ŚRODOWISKOWEJ JAKO ELEMENT SYSTEMU ZAPEWNIENIA JAKOŚCI KSZTAŁCENIA NA KIERUNKACH EKONOMICZNYCH W POLSCE

Department of Accounting of the Poznań University of Economics
Katedra Rachunkowości, Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Poznaniu
al. Niepodległości 10, 61-875 Poznań, e-mail: elzbieta.szczepankiewicz@ue.poznan.pl

Streszczenie. W Polsce dla zewnętrznego zapewnienia jakości kształcenia na kierunkach ekonomicznych, oprócz akredytacji państwowej, duże znaczenie ma akredytacja środowiskowa. W opracowaniu omówiono proces budowania i rozwoju systemu akredytacji środowiskowej w szkolnictwie wyższym. Przedstawiono rolę, zadania i wyniki akredytacji środowiskowej w zapewnieniu jakości kształcenia na kierunkach ekonomicznych w latach 2000–2009.

Key words: accreditation system, quality of education.

Słowa kluczowe: jakość kształcenia, system akredytacji.

INTRODUCTION

The statistics show that since 1990 the number of institutions of higher education in Poland has doubled, while the number of students has quadrupled. Currently nearly half of the young people aged 19–24 pursue higher education. This increased accessibility of higher education may threaten its quality. Ensuring good education quality at universities and colleges of economics is a very complex process, which necessitates a number of actions on the part of both by the State and by the institutions of higher education themselves.

Such actions should contribute to increasing the higher education institutions' competitiveness as regards the education services provided. The quality of education in Polish institutions of higher education is tied with the existence of the external and internal education quality assurance systems.

At present two methods of external education quality assurance are implemented in Poland. The first one is achieved through the state accreditation system, which periodically and free-of-charge assesses all the public and non-public institution of higher education in Poland. This system is governed by the "Higher Education Act". The second external education quality assurance method is the community accreditation system, which was initiated by various academic communities. This type of accreditation is voluntary and paid. Moreover, all the state-owned and non-state-owned institutions of higher education, having at their disposal the currently applicable laws, have sufficient powers to create internal education quality assurance systems. The individual quality systems developed by higher education institutions, employing specific methods and tools, as well as the state and community

accreditation systems which have been operational for the past several years, allow higher education institutions to ensure the quality of education consistent with their mission. Accreditation should constitute a reliable proof of the fact that an institution of higher education holding an accreditation certificate provides its students with an adequate level of education.

The purpose of the present work is to discuss the process of formation and development of the community accreditation systems in Poland in the years 2000–2009. The role, the aims and the results of community accreditation in ensuring good education quality of programs of study in economic sciences were also discussed.

COMMUNITY ACCREDITATION SYSTEM FOR PROGRAMS OF STUDY IN ECONOMIC SCIENCES

The community accreditation system is very important for external education quality assurance of economics programs. This system existed before the State Accreditation Committee was established, as a voluntary method of accreditation of higher education institutions. Community accreditation is always initiated by particular groups of higher education institutions interested in the assessment and improvement of education quality of the programs they offer. Such an initiative is a manifestation of the academic community's concern for the quality of education in a given field. This form of accreditation means that the entities which appoint a given Accreditation Committee also establish the accreditation standards and procedures, appoint the bodies which carry out the accreditation procedures, and authorize them to award or refuse accreditation. So far several organizations performed community accreditation of programs in economic sciences, including the Foundation for the Promotion and Accreditation of Economic Education EPOQS (FPAKE), Association of Management Education „Forum” (SEM "Forum") as well as the University Accreditation Commission (UKA).

Community accreditation is **voluntary**, as the decision to undergo accreditation is made by higher education institutions which are interested in the confirmation, assessment and improvement of the quality of education offered. Such accreditation is **periodic**, as it is awarded for a specific period, e.g. 3,5 years. Upon the lapse of this period the higher education institution may apply for yet another accreditation. The higher education institutions which decide to undergo accreditation must cover 100 of its costs, as it is **not free of charge**.

In the opinion of the authors of the present work, the most important institution in the voluntary community accreditation system of the programs of study in economic sciences is FPAKE, established by the Conference of Rectors of Higher Education Institutions of Economics. It was created on the initiative of 5 state-owned higher education institutions of economics, including:

- the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH),
- the Katowice University of Economics,
- the Cracow University of Economics,
- the Poznań University of Economics,
- the Wrocław University of Economics.

Today FPAKE also cooperates with other universities and schools of economics both in Poland and abroad, with the Conference of Rectors of Colleges, government and non-government institutions and persons whose main goal is to ensure and enhance the quality of education both in the territory of Poland and abroad, with other accreditation institutions, business organizations and entities, local communities, as well as the mass media interested in enhancing the quality of higher education (The ABC of Accreditation 2005).

FPAKE's goals include performing and awarding accreditations to programs of study in economic and management sciences, and in particular (The ABC of Accreditation 2005):

- establishing and popularizing high quality of economic education in higher education institutions,
- supporting the higher education institutions' efforts in the field of economic education enhancement and achieving comparability of Polish and foreign education standards, as well as developing the common European academic area,
- creating internal and external education quality assurance systems for economic education,
- facilitating exchange of information on the improvement of economic education in Poland between all the stakeholders,
- supporting cooperation between business entities and higher education institutions with respect to economic education,
- giving opinions on economic education in Poland.

In order to reach the foregoing goals FPAKE developed quality standards for programs of study in economics and management sciences, which are reviewed and improved on a regular basis, and it carries out accreditation of programs of study in economic sciences offered by higher education institutions. FPAKE cooperates with various organizations in developing accreditation procedures and standards, and ensures comparability of the adopted standards with both European standards and the standards applied by other Polish accreditation and education quality assessment institutions¹. It also promotes the idea of high education quality in the community of higher education institutions of economics as well as in other communities, through organizing conferences, training programs, seminars

¹ In 2005 European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) announced a Report entitled "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area". The said document was the result of collaboration between ENQA and a number of European institutions interested in this topic, such as the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions of Higher Education (EURASHE), the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEE) and the European Commission. The Report was addressed to the Ministers of Higher Education of the European countries committed to implementing the Bologna Process as well as to accreditation institutions and authorities of European universities and colleges. The report comprises the following sections (Report ENQA, 2005): European standards and guidelines for the external quality assurance of higher education, European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies (e.g. accreditation committees), peer review system for quality assurance of the accreditation process and accreditation agencies or bodies. The purpose of introducing the foregoing standards, guidelines and principles in higher education institutions and accreditation institutions all over Europe was to create the possibility of using common criteria for assessing education quality assurance in European higher education.

as well as publishing the results of the accreditation procedures carried out and other materials dedicated to education quality assurance and enhancement in higher education institutions. FPAKE cooperates with higher education institutions, assisting them in creating their own internal education quality assurance systems and in self-assessment, it also carries out quality assessments upon the request of the institutions interested in obtaining such information. Moreover it cooperates with the persons and institutions responsible for improving the quality of higher education in Poland and abroad (The ABC of Accreditation 2005).

According to the FPAKE standards, the main **purpose of accreditation** carried out by FPAKE is to evaluate the quality of education in programs of study in economic sciences. Accreditation contributes to the improvement of the quality of education through a multifaceted assessment of the programs and the conditions for their administration, as well as of all the other efforts made by higher education institutions in order to improve the quality of education offered. Moreover, FPAKE provides students, employers and other stakeholders with convenient information on the quality of education offered in the accredited programs of study and facilitates students' mobility both in Poland and abroad.

The FPAKE accreditation process of a program of study in management is centered on the key areas of assessment, which are indicative of the quality of education offered by a given higher education institution. Figure 1 presents the key areas of assessment of the programs of study in management, in accordance with the FPAKE standards.

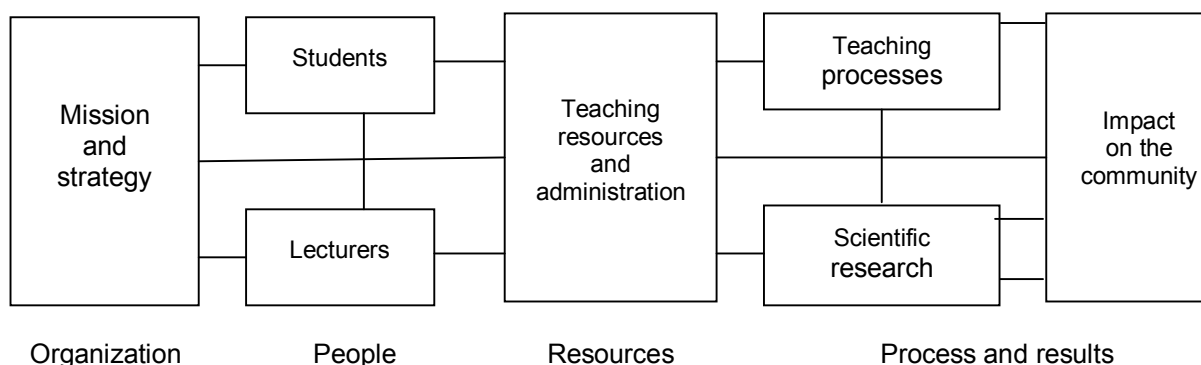


Fig. 1. The key areas of assessment of management programs according to FPAKE standards
Source: Standardy i kryteria jakości studiów akademickich na kierunku zarządzanie i marketing [Standards and quality criteria of academic study at the course of management and marketing] (2005).

Table 1 presents the key and the detailed areas of assessment of the programs of study in management, in accordance with the FPAKE standards.

Figure 2 presents FPAKE's accreditation procedure. FPAKE's accreditation is addressed to all institutions of higher education (both state-owned and non-state-owned, economic and non-economic, vocational and academic) which administer undergraduate (bachelor's) and graduate (master's) studies in:

- Finance and Accounting,
- Management,
- IT and Econometrics,
- Economics,
- International Relations,

- Commodity Science,
- Spatial Development.

Table 1. Key areas of assessment of management programs according to FPAKE standards

Key area	Detailed education quality areas
1. Mission and strategy	1a. The community
	1b. The mission
	1c. Strategic position and goals
	1d. Organization and management, including education quality management system
2. Students	2a. Graduate's profile
	2b. Criteria and procedures for student recruitment
	2c. Monitoring and aiding the learning progress
	2d. Assistance in finding the first job
	2e. Conditions for personal development
3. Lecturers	3a. The number and structure of employed lecturers
	3b. Personnel policy and human resources management
	3c. Staff professional development and training
4. Scientific research	4a. Scientific and research activity
	4b. Innovativeness
5. Teaching resources	5a. Finance management
	5b. Teaching rooms and their equipment
	5c. The library and the reading room
	5d. Computer laboratories and software
	5e. Administrative service of the teaching activity
6. Teaching processes	6a. The institutions' teaching specialization
	6b. Creating the teaching offer
	6c. Curriculum
	6d. Teaching methods, tools and aids
	6e. Student assessment system
	6f. Evaluation of the education process and its results
7. Impact on the community	7a. The role in shaping the economic and intellectual community in the country and in the region
	7b. Internationalization of the higher education institution (of the faculty)

Source: Own work on the basis of the: Standardy i kryteria jakości studiów akademickich na kierunku zarządzanie i marketing [Standards and quality criteria of academic study at the course of management and marketing] (2005), and Suplement do Informatora Fundacji Promocji i Akredytacji Kierunków Ekonomicznych EPOQS [Supplement to the Reference Book of the Foundation for the Promotion and Accreditation of Economic EPOQS (2007).

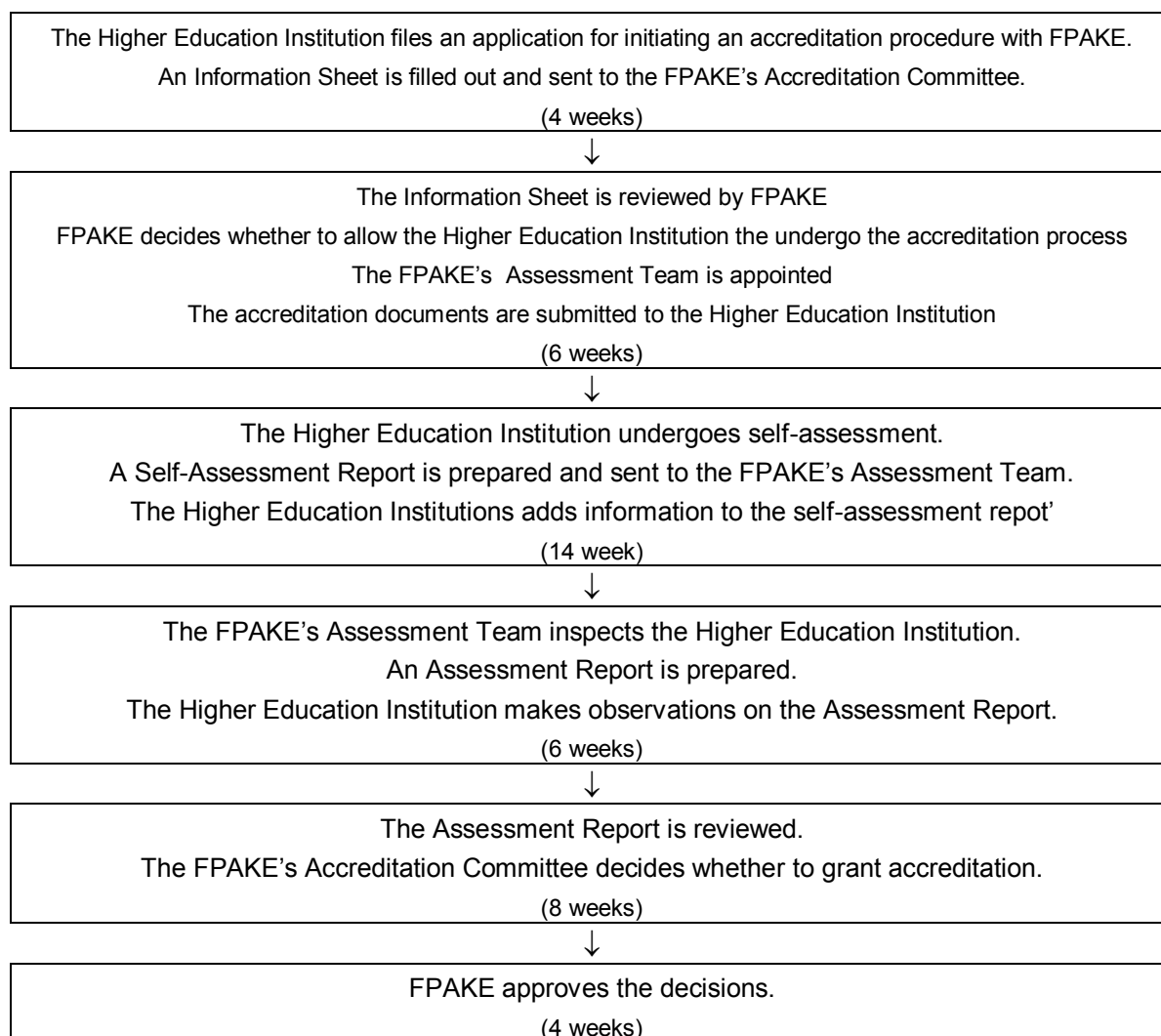


Fig. 2. FPAKE's accreditation procedure

Source: Own work on the basis of the: Standardy i kryteria jakości studiów akademickich na kierunku zarządzanie i marketing [Own work on the basis of the Standards and quality criteria of academic study at the course of management and marketing] (2005).

Due to the fact that this type of accreditation is voluntary, few higher education institutions decide to undergo it, and they undergo it infrequently, which is evident from Table 2.

As evident from Table 2, state institutions of higher education which founded FPAKE were the first ones to undergo the FPAKE accreditation. However, not all of them underwent the second accreditation upon the lapse of the 3 years' period following the award of the first certificate. Some non-state-owned schools of economics, too, decided to undergo accreditation. These include:

- the Warsaw School of Economics (WWSE),
- the School of Banking (WSB),
- the Białystok School of Economics (WSE),
- the Dąbrowa Górnicza School of Business (WSB),
- the Kielce School of Economics and Law (WSEiP).

Table 2. Certificates awarded by FPAKE for the quality of education

Name of the higher education institution	Year	Faculty	Course of study	Level of study	Awarded for
Warsaw School of Economics (SGH)	2003 2008	X	Finance and Banking Finance and Accounting	1ST 2ND	3 years 5 years
	2003	X	Economics	2ND	3 years
	2003 2008	X	Quantity Methods and Information Systems	1ST 2ND	3 years 5 years*
	2003 2008	X	Management and Mar- keting Management	1ST 2ND	3 years 5 years*
	2004 2008	X	International Relations	1ST 2ND	3 years 5 years
Wrocław University of Economics	2003	Faculty of National Economy	Finance and Banking	1ST 2ND	3 years
	2003	Faculty of National Economy	Management and Mar- keting	1ST 2ND	3 years
	2003	Faculty of Management and Computer Science	IT and Econometrics	1ST 2ND	3 years
	2003	Faculty of Management and Computer Science	Management and Mar- keting	1ST 2ND	3 years
	2003 2007	Faculty of Regional Economy and Tour- ism in Jelenia Góra	Economics	1ST 2ND	3 years
	2004	Faculty of Management and Computer Science	Finance and Banking	1ST 2ND	3 years
	2006	Faculty of National Economy	International Relations	1ST 2ND	3 years
	2007	Faculty of Economic Sciences	Management	1ST 2ND	3 years
	2007	Faculty of Economic Sciences	Finance and Accounting	1ST 2ND	3 years
University of Economics in Katowice	2003	Faculty of Management	Management and Mar- keting	1ST 2ND	3 years
	2004	Faculty of Management	IT and econometrics	1ST 2ND	3 years
	2005	Faculty of Economics	Economics	1ST 2ND	3 years
	2005	Faculty of Finance and Insurance	Finance and Banking	1ST 2ND	3 years
Cracow Uni- versity of Economics	2006	Faculty of Commodity Science	Commodity Studies	1ST 2ND	3 years
Poznań Academy of Economics	2003	Faculty of Economics	IT and econometrics	1ST 2ND	3 years
		Faculty of Management	Management and Marketing	1ST 2ND	3 years
		Faculty of Management	International Relations	1ST 2ND	3 years
Poznań Uni- versity of Economics	2003 2008	Faculty of Economics	Finance and Banking Finance and Accounting	1ST 2ND	3 years 5 years*
	2004 2009	Faculty of Economics	Economics	1ST 2ND	3 years 5 years
	2007	Faculty of Commod- ity Science	Commodity Studies	1ST 2ND eng.	3 years

cont. Table 2

Warsaw School of Economics (Warszawska WSE)	2004	Faculty of Economic Relations and Management	Management and Marketing	1ST	3 years
Warsaw School of Banking	2005 2009	Faculty of Finance and Management	Finance and Banking Finance and Accounting	1ST 1ST	3 years 3 years
	2006 2009	Faculty of Finance and Management	Management and Marketing Management	1ST 1ST	3 years 5 years
Toruń School of Banking	2007	Faculty of Finance and Management	Finance and Accounting	1ST	3 years
Poznań School of Banking	2009	(Chorzów Branch)	Finance and Accounting	1ST	3 years
Białystok School of Economics	2005	X	Economics	1ST 2ND	3 years
Dąbrowa Górnicza School of Business	2006	Faculty of Management, Computer Science and Social Sciences	Management and Marketing	1ST and 2ND	3 years
Kielce School of Economics and Law	2009	Faculty of Economics	Economics	1ST and 2ND	3 years

* Indicated in the table with an asterisk means that the higher education institutions received certificates with distinction or a certificate valid for 5 years.

Source: Own work on the basis of the: Akredytacja [Accreditation], http://www.fundacja.edu.pl/modul/1/47/50/certyfikaty_akredytacyjne.html, accessed 2010.11.24.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, it should be noted that present-day institutions of higher education have sufficient formal and legal powers to ensure high quality of education. Currently, state and community accreditation systems are quite effective in ensuring the minimum quality of education for programs of study in economic sciences. The systems should contribute to enhancing the qualifications of Polish economic staff and to raising the quality of education of the entire society. The legislative body, too, supervises the quality of education. Under Articles 34–40 of the Higher Education Act, in extreme cases the Minister of Education may dismiss the Rector or even close down the higher education institution. Moreover, the accreditation market itself should, in time, eliminate those higher education institutions which are believed to offer poor education quality and inadequate programs of study.

REFERENCES

Akredytacja [Accreditation], http://www.fundacja.edu.pl/modul/1/47/50/certyfikaty_akredytacyjne.html, accessed 2010–11–24 [in Polish].

Certyfikaty przyznane przez FPAKE (EPOQS) za jakość kształcenia na kierunkach ekonomicznych [Certificates granted by FPAKE (EPOQS) for the quality of education in courses of economic], www.fundacja.edu.pl, accessed: 2010.11.24 [in Polish].

Report of ENQA. 2005. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Helsinki, Finland. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), <http://www.enqa.eu/pubs.lasso>, accessed 2010.11.24.

Standardy i kryteria jakości studiów akademickich na kierunku zarządzanie i marketing. ABC akredytacji – Informator [Standards and quality criteria of academic study at the course of management and marketing, ABC Accreditation – The Reference Book]. 2005. Warszawa, Fundacja Promocji i Akredytacji Kierunków Ekonomicznych EPOQS [in Polish].

Suplement do Informatora Fundacji Promocji i Akredytacji Kierunków Ekonomicznych EPOQS [Supplement to the Reference Book of the Foundation for the Promotion and Accreditation of Economic Education EPOQS]. 2007. Warszawa, Fundacja Promocji i Akredytacji Kierunków Ekonomicznych EPOQS [in Polish].

