

INTRODUCTION OF VOCATIONAL STANDARDS: ARE THERE ALTERNATIVE WAYS?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to analyze approaches to the development of vocational standards abroad. The authors consider the most alternative approaches of a number of the countries that traditionally have no vocational standards; compare advantages and shortcomings of different approaches in the description of skill standards; show advantages of the use of vocational standards or equivalent documents in different countries; disclose the reasons behind various approaches to labor standardization.

The article uses the comparative study method based on the review of home experience of qualifications system development in Soviet and foreign practices. The authors have used the methods of collecting empirical information on approaches to qualifications characteristics in modern vocational standards, URSG, UJEC and in documents of a number of European states; methods of conceptual and terminological analysis, interpretation and modelling, problem method that have yielded the following results: identification of peculiarities of the method of the development of Russian vocational standards, description of arising risks of their application and planning the ways to overcome them.

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Science novelty of the work consists in consistent justification of possibilities and limitations in the application of foreign experiences in Russia.

Practical importance consists in justification of advantages of the application of vocational standards in Russia and abroad.

Keywords: national qualification system; vocational standards; professional education and training

INTRODUCTION

This article presents intermediate results as part of subject No 27.4353.2017/NM of the State Task of the Russian Ministry of Education and Science to the Federal Institute for Education Development in 2017 “Scientific and methodological support of the introduction of vocational standards in “Education” professional activities (reference number – 27.4353.2017/5.1).

The team of authors have worked on the development and introduction of vocational standards in Russia for the last seven years. They have supervised the elaboration of the vocational educator’s standard. Over the last years, the Center for Vocational Education and Qualification Systems has prepared guidelines for the application of vocational standards when elaborating vocational education programs. This publication reviews the foreign experience, addresses possible alternatives to vocational standards and their typology.

1. Literature review. The decision to elaborate and introduce vocational standards in different countries is made with regard to the objectives important to one or another country. Some countries choose to not elaborate these documents as they use other tools to ensure the balance between labor market requirements and possibilities of the vocational education system [18].

There are various approaches to the elaboration of vocational standards depending on countries’ development conditions, their goals and expectations from this kind of documents [9]. There are countries that do not traditionally use the “vocational standard” concept. However, they have other tools to ensure interaction between labor and vocational education spheres when describing and assessing qualifications [8, 11].

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study has analyzed educational research and method works of various countries that describe conceptual approaches, methods, technologies and conditions for the introduction of vocational standards and equivalent documents.

Based on this analysis, results were summed up and ranked, which was reflected in a series of publications and workshops (webinars), including in foreign publishing houses and on the Internet [1].

3. STUDY RESULTS

Some European states have a historical tradition of co-operation between business and education, joint elaboration and updating of curricula, so there is no need to elaborate vocational standards. These countries include Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Sweden [3, 4, 5].

In Denmark, for example, they describe the domain of competence, list of tasks, skills, knowledge needed in a certain sphere of activity. This information is used as the basis for the elaboration of vocational standards targeted at the determination of the area of responsibility of education rather than systematic description of jobs, qualifications or positions [6, 7].

The German vocational education system works approximately the same way; it is often presented as an ideal model based on the Beruf (“job, profession”) concept. Well-regulated social partnership that undergoes major transformations to adapt to modern needs makes this model viable [10].

In Germany, job regulations (guidelines) are the official documents for the elaboration and implementation of educational programs. Regulations specify the regulatory basis for their elaboration – the vocational education act, pursuant to certain paragraphs of which the German Ministry of Economy and Technology jointly with the Ministry of Education and Research normally and most often approve this document. Regulations set out the period of studies, requirements to evaluation procedures and their general content, provide framework curriculum in weeks for an enterprise, tentative program in hours for a training college and describes general didactic principles that the dual training system is built on [16].

Still, the situation is different in most European states and they use vocational standards as a tool for the interaction between the educational system and business [17].

The case for the elaboration of vocational standards is assurance of a distinct relation between employers’ requirements and education. Standardization enables continuous monitoring of qualification updates and conformity of educational programs to labor market requirements [9].

A gap between the labor demand and education supply may be quantitative and qualitative. Disparity between the number of jobs and employees that have the qualification required for these jobs is a quantitative gap. A qualitative gap means that the vocational education system

fails to develop the competences needed at workplace and properly train students in line with employers' requirements [19].

A labor and education coordination mechanism may comprise quite a broad range of tools. Vocational standards that directly affect educational standards have a good potential to overcome the qualitative gap. However, as already stated, various countries have different traditions and ways to overcome the gap between the labor market and education [20].

Apart from vocational standards, continuous monitoring of demand for skills, promotion of the learning environment, advanced training of the instructional staff are important education tools. In a number of countries (for example, Germany and Scandinavian countries), these tools have been traditionally created jointly by business and education and they suffice to cover the gap [21].

The European practice treats a vocational standard as a "method to classify and describe the most important work that humans can perform" [15].

There are three conventional groups (types) of the vocational standards existing in European states. They differ in form, content, development and application goals.

The first group (type) of standards is a classification system to ensure labor statistical monitoring. Vocational standards of this type do not contain competence requirements imposed by the labor market. Still, qualifications can be matched with these requirements and the classification may be used to gather information prior to the elaboration and description of these requirements.

In some countries, the best developed (popular) qualifications may be described in terms of required competences, labor conditions and possible positions. The main feature of these standards is their generalized character. They describe the most important jobs (work) performed by humans that are methodically registered and classified. Such vocational standards exist in France.

The second group (type) of standards represents a benchmark for the description and further assessment of mastering a professional activity. In this case, requirements are described based on activity analysis; they are measurable (diagnosable) and are matched against the qualification levels established in the country. The content of requirements varies based on continuous monitoring of objective changes in activities, but they do not relate to a particular position or qualification; they only relate to the activity and its required performance level. These vocational standards are quite flexible; they may be used as the basis for the development of educational standards and programs for particular qualifications and in the

human resources system for the evaluation of needs for staff development (advanced training) or mastering of best practices.

Such vocational standards are used in Great Britain [2].

The third group (type) of vocational standards describe particular qualifications in line with a specific position. For each particular qualification, the vocational standard becomes the basis for the elaboration of the educational standard and assessment tools. This approach is used in Spain. The same practice exists in France and French-speaking part of Belgium. However, this system is used with regard to regulated qualifications, especially in basic vocational education, where one qualification matches one position and qualifications are obligatorily assigned by the state [12].

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis conducted allows to affirm that in today's Russia, vocational standards have to become the basis for the creation of new mechanisms of interaction between labor and education. Elaboration of vocational standards is a reason to set up stakeholders' task groups in various professional activities, establish a stable continuous dialogue between business and education in the course of introduction and use of vocational standards.

The Unified Rating and Skills Guides (URSG) applicable in this country are getting obsolete in terms of its content. In the modern context of the country's development, it is impossible to continuously update and arrange all the qualifications, as was the case in the recent Soviet past. This is impossible, first of all, due to the mobility of qualifications and fast changes in the labor industry.

The Unified Job Evaluation Catalogue of directors, specialists and employees (UJEC), as its name implies, describes jobs, which makes it similar to foreign vocational standards of the third type. However, it does not contain systemic description of the labor functions required to implement one or another business process; this description is fragmentary and poorly structured. This complicates the use of UJEC for the elaboration of vocational education programs, development of control and measurement materials for the qualification assessment and certification, etc.

When new vocational standards are elaborated, there is a risk of negative influence of customary approaches to the creation of qualification characteristics such as job duties. The global experience shows that it is possible at low qualification levels and is complicated at higher levels.

The existing job system has to be reviewed and revised in line with the objective situation on the labor market. This is one of the tasks of the national qualification system modernization. The modern Russian job system is mobile and massive, which is why strict matching of vocational standards to specific positions is not convenient.

The second type of vocational standards is the most flexible one in this respect. It enables elaboration of modern requirements to labor activities that can drive the development of vocational education and one of the important prerequisites to the settlement of tasks of staff support of economy modernization and technological development.

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