Higher Education QA: Approaches, challenges and opportunities

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Chapter III

Planning Student Quotas

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As it is known European Higher Education Area is an education system based on competencies. Competence-based higher education is impacted by contextual factors such as financial recourses, number of students, number of staff, number of lecture halls, number of learning equipment and so on. One of the important factors associated with quality is student to faculty ratio. The mentioned factor weighs20% while ranking a HEI by such organization as QS World University Rankings. In 2016, this indicator was equal to 14.8:1[13] on average in the field of higher education for OECD countries. One of the British sources highlights that "it was important to recognize that student to academic staff ratio itself does not represent an indicator of quality or student's satisfaction. This indicator naturally varies by fields, by institutions and different life cycles of the subjects." However, they "indicate how much time of the academic staff is usually allocated for one student and it also depends on how time utilization. Often, this helps us to define the quality of student's experience and the factors limiting it".

As it is demonstrated in a lot of students' surveys, a fact that during selection students prefer such HEI where they will share resources with less number of students and they can get more attention from the professors is a basis for association with the quality. In the end, this indicator for the university depends on its capacity. Capacity in service means the quality provision of the maximum number of customers for a specific period with the resources attracted by the organization. In the higher education system of Georgia, we use the term "student quotas" instead of "capacity".

Planning the student quotas and defining the marginal number of requested students represent a requirement of the authorization standards (Sub-Standard "2.2. Internal mechanisms of quality assurance";).

How can be defined what should be the number of the student quotas at the HEI? There are recommendations to this regard in the guideline published by the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement.[14] Are these recommendations enough?

The student quotas depend on all types of resources that are utilized so that the HEI could provide quality services for students. The method of factor analysis can be used in order to define this optimal number of the student quotas which essentially represents the capacity of the HEI. The article demonstrates the utilization of the mentioned approach.[15]

The above-mentioned approach defines theoretical, normal, and practical capacities. The optimum capacity i.e. optimum number of the student quotas shall be established based on the

[13]https://stats.oecd.org/Index. aspx? Dataset code=EAG_PERS_RATIO

average of these three indicators. Theoretical capacity is based on the available physical places. It does not provide an opportunity to consider whether the types and characteristics of the lecture halls (size, number of seats, planning, location, equipment and so on) comply with the requirements of the learning process. It only considers theoretically existing educational and auxiliary space based on the norms chosen by the HEI. The norms imply how many square meters of the educational and auxiliary space to be allocated for one student. Internationally accepted norms in this respect are from 1.5 to 14 square meters.[16] In this case, the size of the students' working space, the number of lecture halls and their size in terms of number of seats, daily working hours and number of working days at the HEI per week shall also be considered. In the best scenario, such capacity represents the maximum capacity of the HEI's physical space which is not and cannot be achievable in reality. However, during the further stages of planning the capacity, it is "clarified" by considering the risks and additional limitations.

Normal capacity is the number of students who annually, simultaneously and without any interruptions studied at the HEI during the past several years before planning (for example, during the past 10 years). Internal and/or external mobility in the HEI as well as from the HEI, academic leave, return from academic leave and so on shall also be considered in this number. Normal capacity demonstrates how statistically dynamic is the student quotas at the HEI that shall be envisaged during the final planning of the student quotas.

Such factors as the number and composition of the academic staff (professors, associate professors, assistant-professor, assistants, lecturers, instructors and so on), the necessity of types of lecture halls, and the number and composition of hours (lectures, seminars, studios, laboratories, and so on) to be conducted considering by the programmes, the indicator "student to academic staff" chosen by the HEI according to its strategic plan or the best practice [17] [18], students' existing and planned quotas according to the programmes, a ratio of planned student quotas based on the strategy according to cycles (Bachelor's degree, MA degree, doctoral studies), peculiarities of the academic timetables and the academic calendar, specifically equipped or located lecture halls/spaces for specific subjects are considered during defining the practical (the most realistic) capacity. Also, students' support services, factors such as students' dormitory, financial impact, and many others can be considered. The practical capacity established this way will be the number of student quotas closest to the optimum number if not the optimum number itself.

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[14] Authorization of Higher Education Institution, Guideline, p.10, The National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, 2018

[15] "Determining Optimum Campus Enrollment: One Method", Frank Hobengarten, EdD, C&U Journal, Spring, 2003.

[16] "Review of Space norms", SMG Report, September, 2006/40

[17] http://oedb.org/rankings/student-faculty-ratio/

[18] An analysis of student: staff ratios and "academics' use of time, and potential links with student satisfaction, Stephen Court, University and College Union, October, 2012