

LEGISLATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

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The paper provides an outline of the legislative and instructional support for higher education in the Republic of Belarus focusing on the alignment of terminology. In accordance with the Code of Education and the National Classifier, lists of competencies are developed, which then serve grounds for the sample curricula and standards development. Based on the standards, standard and higher education institutions' curricula syllabi are developed. The legislative and instructional support for higher education in the Republic of Belarus adheres to the international standards of quality education, at the same time providing curriculum flexibility for tertiary institutions.

Keywords: higher education; educational standard; syllabus; curriculum development; national classifier; qualifications.

With the internalization of higher education (hereinafter HE) and growing need for modernization and uniformity, the cross-cultural study of the Belarusian HE system is becoming more and more relevant. As students apply for postgraduate programs in teaching and are enrolled in courses where English is the language of instruction, they fairly expect key requirements and learning outcomes of these programs to match those of the European and global academic community. In this regard, focusing on the main concepts of HE in the Republic of Belarus and its alignment with international education framework on the global scale, is important.

In this paper we will provide a brief but clear outline of the bedrock of the HE in the Republic of Belarus, providing the main terminology and regulations that establish requirements for the learning outcomes. The paper will be useful for the researchers and curriculum designers who aim at maintaining harmonization and quality of postgraduate programs worldwide. We will particularly focus on the study of the national education framework (Legislation on Education) and The National Specialties and Qualification Classifier in the Republic of Belarus.

The main law regulating education in the Republic of Belarus is the Code of Education [1], a regulatory framework for Education (January 13, 2011 No. 243-3), adopted by the House of Representatives on December 2, 2010 and approved by the Council of the Republic on December 22, 2010 (with amendments, the last 14 January 2022). The Code of Education specifies the main notions and policy in the education system.

Scientific and Instructional support for HE comprises the following components:

- Curricula and Syllabi Framework (curricula, syllabi, Master students' individual plans);
- Value Education Framework;
- Teaching Framework (teachers' manuals, etc.);
- Study Materials (course books, workbooks, etc.);
- Reference Books (reports, digests, etc.).

To design new programs and curricula, educators refer to the Code of Education and the Common National Classifier of the Republic of Belarus. The Common national classifier of the Republic of Belarus (OKRB 011-2009) "Specialties and qualifications" [2] was approved and put into effect by the decree of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus No. 36 dated 02.06.2009, with all the amendments OKRB 011-2001 No. 1-No. 14 approved at that time. The Classifier is a technical normative legal act that defines the codes and names of education profiles, areas of education, groups of specialties, specialties, divisions of specialties, concentrations, qualifications, and the corresponding primary positions of employees. Education profiles, specialties, and concentrations, as well as core competency requirements are determined in accordance with this document. For example, A – Profile "Education". 02 Adolescence and Youth Education. 02 03 Group of specialties: Teaching philological and linguistic disciplines.

The National Classifier goes in line with the International Standard Classification of Occupations, International Standard Classification of Education, European Skills / Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) framework and the European Qualifications Framework. With these harmonization policies, according to the Bologna process, "education and training institutions are able to: use a multilingual reference terminology to describe the learning outcomes of their qualifications, thus making qualifications more transparent; adapt their programmes based on feedback from the labour market; work more closely with employment services and career advisors"[3].

The European Qualifications Framework (CEFEDOP) describes learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, and autonomy indicators) at 8 levels. The 6th level corresponds to the 1st cycle of higher education (undergraduate), level 7 corresponds to postgraduate degrees (the second cycle), and level 8 – to Doctoral degrees (the 3rd cycle).

New standards and curricula are meant to provide for the competitiveness of higher education. They are competency and practice based. As for the new aspects of the curricula, they are based on module principle which means several courses make up one module. There are also new clear guidelines for the calculation of credit hours and credit units (1 academic year equals to 60 credit units, each course is not less than 50 academic hours long which equals to 3 credit units).

The requirements for the new education framework are provided in a range of guidelines for curricula and syllabi development. For example, at the present time we use Guidelines for the design of new educational standards and curricula (Generation 3+) (18 May 2018). Designing of the new educational standards for the 1st cycle (undergraduate programs) and the 2nd cycle of higher education (advanced higher education, MA / MSc programs) includes the following steps:

- 1) develop lists of competencies;
- 2) develop sample curricula for specialties;
- 3) develop educational standards.

Competencies lists should be based on The Common National Classifier of the Republic of Belarus as well as qualification requirements described in *ESCO (the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations)* and the Dublin Descriptors. According to the Guidelines, Bloom's taxonomy is used to formulate the competencies.

The development of sample curricula for specialties is based on the competencies and lists of modules and courses needed to develop these competencies. The curriculum comprises standard curriculum that is core, obligatory for the specialty, and the curriculum of the Institute of Higher Education (hereinafter HEI). The State Curriculum Component comprises up to 55 % for the undergraduate programs and up to 35 % for the programs of the 2nd cycle. The HEI Curriculum Component is developed by every tertiary institution based on their goals, expected learning outcomes, and facilities. As a rule, the State Component provides for the universal and basic skills and competencies, while the HEI component is meant to develop specific and professional skills. Usually (but not obligatory), one competence is aligned with one course (competences matrix is provided in every standard).

When lists of competencies and courses are ready, educational standards for HE can be developed. The Ministry of Education suggests using the Education Syllabus Template (for the 1st and 2nd cycle) and the Sample Curricula.

The document regulating the syllabi development is called The Procedure for the development and approval of syllabi and internship programs (27 May 2019). The documents regulating the curricula development are The Procedure for Curricula Development for the 1st cycle of education (27 May 2019) and the Guidelines for the development of curricula and individual plans for the 2nd cycle (18 Nov 2019). All the links and documents are provided by the National Institute of Higher Education.

Both syllabi and curricula are presented in several types: standard, IHE, experimental, and Ph.D. exam minimum. The Standard type is developed by a leading institution for each specialty or profile. For example, the Belarusian State Pedagogical University is the leading institute of education. So, the standard syllabi and curricula for the profile A – Education are developed here. These Standard Syllabi are obligatory for all other teacher training institutions.

Standard Syllabi are developed by a leading HEI in the field for all profiles (fields) of education in case there are at least two HEI with the same major. Standard Syllabi are developed only for the 1st cycle of education (undergraduate level) and are approved by the Ministry of Education or another authorized ministry.

Every HEI develops their own HEI curricula and syllabi based on the standard ones. For the courses that comprise the HEI component or when there is no standard syllabus, HEI develops one based on a specialty standard and HEI curriculum.

There are also experimental Syllabi and the Ph.D. Exam Minimum Syllabi. The Ph.D. Exam Minimum Syllabus should be approved by the Higher Attestation Commission of the Republic of Belarus.

So, as the review shows, in accordance with the Code of Education and the National Classifier, lists of competencies are developed, which then serve grounds for the sample curricula and standards development. Based on the standards, standard and HEI curricula and standard and HEI syllabi are developed. The legislative and instructional support for HE in the Republic of Belarus adheres to the international standards of quality HE and, at the same time providing variability and flexibility for the HEI to achieve particular learning objectives for their graduates.



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