*Novelties in Belarusian Higher Education. Final Conference of Erasmus + project Fostering Competencies Development in Belarusian Higher Education*

**Danguole Bylaite – Salavejiene**

Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), Education Academy, Institute for Professional Development. Lithuania

Email: [danguole.bylaite-salavejiene@vdu.lt](mailto:danguole.bylaite-salavejiene@vdu.lt)

**Abstract**

Erasmus + KA2 programme project “Fostering Competencies Development in Belarusian Higher Education – FOSTERC” consortium partners have met for the Final Conference in Minsk, Belarus, on the 6th of December 2019. It was an exciting moment. “FOSTERC” consortium worked together since 2016, many meetings, trainings, common research and creative work have been implemented in a cooperative way. The final “FOSTERC” event has summarised transformations and novelties that have been created in Belarus higher education institutions during the last three years.

This article shortly reviews some insights and solutions that have been discussed during the “FOSTERC” conference in Minsk.

**Keywords**: HE, modes of teaching & learning, labour market, study programme, curricular, mobility, internships, lifelong learning, Belarus

**“FOSTERC” project activities**

Project coordinator Dr. Adela García-Aracil,INGENIO (CSIC-UPV), Spain, has paid attention to the main objective of the “FOSTERC” project - to support modernization of governance, management, functioning and quality of Belarusian HEIs. Dr. Adela Garcia - Aracil noticed that the consortium of 16 partners has tried to reach the goal by improving HE graduates' learning outcomes, based on competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) development; designing new curricular, focusing on graduates’ competencies; upgrading and improving teaching and learning methodologies.

Dr. Rosa Isusi-Fagoaga, external expert IUCIE, University of València, Spain, has discussed “FOSTERC” in the context of tracer studies. She noticed that “FOSTERC” survey methodology was innovative one as involved to survey activities both students, teachers and employers.

In detail an innovative “FOSTERC” on-line survey system was presented by Dr. Alexander Rytov, Belarusian State University.

**Insights from “FOSTERC” survey**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yury Bialykh, Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs, Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno, Belarus, discussed “FOSTERC” survey results by taking into account Belarus HE graduates’ opinions. Survey showed that Belarus labour market requires the highest proficiency of such competencies as ability to acquire the new knowledge, to adapt to change, flexibility, ability to work under pressure, stress resistance, to take part in continuing professional development. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yury Bialykh has taken attention to another issue of HE in Belarus. “FOSTERC” survey data proved that HE studies not enough contributed to the development of such competencias as ability to communicate in a foreign language, to inspire others, to fulfill leader duties, to negotiate effectively, to take decisive actions in a situation of uncertainties.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alexandra Pozniak, Belarusian State Pedagogical Maxim Tank University, continued “FOSTERC” data review by taking into attention HE teacher role in modern university. She noticed the importance of HE teachers active participation in digital educational environment creation, as well as in updating study programmes and learning materials, methodology, taking part in team work, professional networks, profesional development activities, in strengthening research activities in Belarus HE.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Boreiko, Vice-Rector for Studies of Polatsk State University, Belarus, discussed the issue of stakeholders’ cooperation. She mentioned that “FOSTERC” survey data inspired academic community to innovate some aspects of home university work. One of them was to improve efficiency of university management. There were introduced principles of corporate management and corporate social responsibility in Polatsk University. Representatives of regional and local employers have joined Polatsk University Council.

**Modernization of HE in Belarus**

“FOSTERC” survey data has guided toward modernization of different aspects of HE in Belarus.

Dr. Igor Titovich, Vice-Rector of National Institute for Higher Education (NIHE), Belarus, highlited “FOSTERC” project results on national level. He presented new educational standarts in Belarus HE that focus on use of competence-based approach, include learning outcomes, modular approach, development of 1st and 2nd cycle standards, as well as new curricula development model, discussed change of studies duration, broader involvement of different stakeholders. National Institute for Higher Education (NIHE) in Belarus has developed “Guidelines for Assessing Learning Outcomes in Case Translation, Restoration and Academic Mobility” (draft), as well as “National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education”.

**Realization of competence-based modular approach in Belarus HE**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sergey Severin, First Vice-Rector of Brest State University after A. Pushkin, Belarus, discussed realization of competence-based approach in Master degree programmes at home university. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sergey Severin has taken attention to innovative Master degree programmes “Innovations in Teaching Foreign Language” (practical oriented study programme) and “Lingvodidactics” (science oriented study programme). These study programmes integrated new modules, bilingual module as well.

Prof. Dr. Valentina Simhovich, Belarusian State Economic University, presented new methods for competence building at home university. She has taken attention to main factors in realization of competence-based approach: university educational environment, curricula content, quality of methodological support, employers’ particpation. Professor discussed experimental work conducted in realization of Master degree programme “State Regulation of National and Regional Economy”.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Michail Koshman has shared his reflections on implementation of competence- based approach at Francisk Skorina Gomel State University, Belarus. Prof. Dr. Michail Koshman discussed the experimental work that has been conducted in realization of Master degree programme “Psychology”. The main focus was taken to Master degree students’ profesional and personal development in the innovative educational space of home university. Experimental work had a focus to develop students’ professional competencies that are relevant and required in labour market.

**Recommendations**

“FOSTERC” Final Conference in Minsk 2019 came to conclusion that many important changes have been implemented in Belarus HE during the last three years (2016-2019). The innovations have been implemented on national level, regional and local level for building competence-based and higher quality HE in Belarus. However, the Final Conference participants noticed that there is lack of methodological support in realisation of competence-based approach in Belarus HE. Belarus partners expressed the need for trainings and exchange of good practices with the EU partners.

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