ON THE ISSUE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMON PROFESSIONAL EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS FOR CUSTOMS

Abstract: The paper covers recent trends in the field of customs regulation towards unification and harmonization, particularly those concerning education and training. The WTO PICARD Professional Standards describing profile requirements for Operational and Strategic Customs Managers are analyzed. The author also highlights the competences of future customs specialists provided for by the Russian Federal State Educational Standard of Higher Education. The components of the discipline ‘The Foreign Language in the Customs Sphere’ are discussed. The necessity of adjustment of international professional standards, as well as further promotion of collaboration between educational institutions and customs administrations are justified.

Key words: customs administration, unification, educational standards, PICARD

Today, in the field of customs regulation there is “a trend towards unification and harmonization aimed at improving the transparency of customs legislation, reducing the time for customs control, introducing modern information and communication technologies, minimizing administrative interference, and reducing the costs of foreign economic activity participants” [1, p. 21].

An important role in this process is played by the World Customs Organization (WCO), which includes about 180 Member Governments, processing more than 98% of all international trade. The WCO has developed various legal documents (instruments, conventions) that have had a significant influence on the unification and simplification of customs formalities on a global scale. The
Russian Federation, as an assignee of the USSR, has been an active member of the organization since 1992. It is worth noting that in 2016 for the first time a Russian representative – R.Davydov, the Deputy Head of the Russian Federal Customs Service, was elected as the Chairperson of the WCO Council.

Under the guidance of the WCO, the Russian Federal Customs Service interacts with foreign customs authorities in the field of training and education [2]. This process reflects the current stage of the Customs Service in Russia, which is based on the key areas of “The Strategy for the Development of the Customs Service of the Russian Federation until 2020” (approved in 2012)[3] and “The Comprehensive Development Program of the FCS of Russia for the period up to 2020” [4], which supplemented the Strategy in 2017.

In these policy documents, in addition to such key areas of customs development as customs regulation, fiscal function, law enforcement, provision of public services, control and oversight functions, the importance of promoting integration processes and international cooperation are also emphasized.

In 2005, the WCO began to systematize numerous curricula in order to create a system of common world standards for the professional development of customs managers. The initial proposal was developed in partnership with the International Network of Customs Universities (INCU) when launching the Partnership In Customs Academic Research and Development (PICARD) Program.

The WCO has prepared two sets of common standards of the PICARD Professional Standards for Operational Customs Managers and Strategic Customs Managers. Academic institutions can introduce these internationally agreed standards into their customs curricula, while at the same time meeting national accreditation criteria [5]. In fact, there are several institutions world-wide, including the International Business and Law Institute, St Petersburg (Russia), that have already established pilot programs based on these new standards.

One of the profile requirements and essentials for Operational Managers is knowledge of appropriate foreign languages. This competence provides for the
ability to reflect and to review personal performance, as well as the effective use of training. Clearly, in the 21st century, knowledge of a foreign language can be especially advantageous for an applicant in the customs sphere. Moreover, employers may prefer those who are not only bilingual, but even multilingual.

It should be noted that these standards have gaps concerning the characteristics considered necessary for customs and, therefore, require further development. Some foreign researchers propose to supplement them with the competencies of such programs as the Tuning Project and the "The Customs Assessment Trade Toolkit (CATT)" [6].

While these professional profiles are aimed at strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness of Customs, both the WTO and the customs administrations also recognize the significance of a formal university education.

In Russia, currently, “The Federal State Educational Standard of Higher Education for Specialty 38.05.02 Customs (level of specialty)” [7] is in force. When comparing this Standard and the Picard Standards, one can see a certain overlap of general cultural and general professional competencies, as well as professional ones, for example, in regard to activities related to customs operations involving customs procedures, collection of customs duties and customs control, law enforcement, information and analytical, organizational, and managerial activities. However, it is obvious, that the Russian Educational Standard gives a more detailed description of the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities.

As for a foreign language, the Russian Standard provides for such general professional competence as "readiness for communication in oral and written forms in Russian and foreign languages for solving problems related to professional activity"[7].

In order to develop this competence, at the International Business and Law Faculty of the Siberian State Transport University (Novosibirsk)(STU) the following disciplines are taught: "The Foreign Language in the Customs Sphere", "The Comparative Typology of Customs Documents in the Russian and Foreign Languages," and " The Professionally-oriented Foreign Language".
The aim of the discipline "The Foreign Language in the Customs Sphere", for example, is the further mastering by students of a foreign language in various fields of professional activity, scientific and practical work, in communicating with foreign partners, for self-educational and other purposes. As a result, students must achieve the following learning outcomes:

- **Knowledge requirements**: the professional terminology within the studied aspects; a foreign language necessary to obtain professional information from foreign sources, to read and translate texts in a foreign language.
- **Ableities**: to find and extract the required professional information in a foreign language; to prepare an oral report summarizing the studied professional material; to use professional terminology in speech.
- **Skills requirements**: professional communication skills; rendering professional texts in a foreign language; independent search, analysis and presentation of information in a foreign language.

The discipline provides for the studying in a foreign language of the following aspects: key functions and tools of the World Customs Organization; the structures and main areas of responsibilities of customs administrations in English speaking countries and the EAEU; customs cutting-edge technologies including people, luggage, cargo, and vehicles screening equipment; computerized systems used by customs administrations (CHIEF, NCTS, ATS, AES); customs procedures in the European Union (EU) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU); the structure and principles of the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System, as well as key features of Commodity Classification Systems used in Australia, the USA, the EU, and the EAEU.

The following evaluation tools are used: listening, oral presentation of topics, terminology tests, role plays, computer tests, project work, essays [8].

The Discipline Program also contains methodological materials that determine the procedures for assessing knowledge and skills, including criteria for assessing assignments and scoring scales. The English Language Department of
the STU employs a rating control system. The main task of the rating system is “the creation of a complex of stimulating factors for enhancement of students’ motivation to mastering the educational programs by way of higher differentiation of estimating the knowledge level at each stage of the learning” [9,p.133].

“Of great importance is the fact that when developing evaluation tools, it is necessary to take into account the requirements of employers, which are formulated not only and not so much in the "knowledge" of graduates, as in terms of methods of activity ("skills", "ability", "readiness"). Therefore, a traditional monitoring system should include methods of formal and informal control, and self-evaluation” [10, p.242].

An indispensable component of any academic program is a training material. The main course book used in the educational process is ‘English for Customs Studies’ by E.Paritskaya and E.Taskaeva. The book is based not only on the principle of professional orientation of knowledge, but also on the principle of interdisciplinarity [11,p.165].

No doubt, uniformity in law enforcement is essential for the stable and smooth functioning of any management mechanism. One can rejoice that the importance of international standards regarding knowledge and education in the field of customs is recognized at a global level. Clearly, such initiatives as The PICARD Program can allow customs administrations, related bodies, and educational institutions to have common criteria for curricula, recruitment and career development. However, it is necessary to point out that educational institutions, including Russian ones, should be encouraged to expand the collaboration with customs authorities and to discuss the relevant issues on a regular basis.
References


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