

## Impact of Student Government Bodies on Students' Professional Development

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### ABSTRACT

The relevance of the problem under study is due to the fact that the introduction of student government models in the professional development of students is one of the most effective mechanisms for developing the competence of the future graduates, which may significantly increase the demand for them in the labour market in future. The purpose of the article is to develop a model for setting up a functioning student government body, to present the results of implementing the given structural-functional model, to study the positive effect of the student government body on the professional development of students, as well as on the integration of formal and non-formal education. The article describes a model for setting up a functioning student government body, presents the results of implementing the structural-functional model of the student government body, specifies the basic conditions for effective work of the student government body, examines the positive impact of the student government body on the professional development of students, investigates the influence of the student government body on the integration of formal and non-formal education. The model is aimed at increasing the impact of student government on the effectiveness of professional development at the university; it is also oriented towards the development of non-formal education environment of the university.

### KEYWORDS

Competences; non-formal education; professional development; student government

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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### Introduction

Throughout the history of its development the system of vocational education has reacted to changes in labour organization in the human community naturally and has adjusted the content of education and training in accordance with the level of current knowledge and the new requirements of society (Maksimova, 2013; Sakhieva et al., 2015; Masalimova et al., 2014). On September 1, 2013 a new federal law of 29.12.2012 No. 273-FZ "On education in the Russian Federation" came into force in Russia, according to which

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"education is a single purposeful process of upbringing and training, where upbringing is considered as an activity aimed at personal development, creation of conditions for students' self-determination and socialization while training is regarded as a purposeful process of organizing students' activities".

These changes in the legislation give a new vector for the development of universities, within the framework of which student government bodies can be set up (Tovkan, 2015), which should take over some administrative functions (Grishina, 2013).

Student government is a special form of proactive, self-directed, responsible social activity of students, aimed at addressing important issues of students' life and activities, at developing students' social activities, at supporting social initiatives (Fatov & Fedoseeva, 2009; Kalimullin, Vlasova & Sakhieva, 2016; Zakirova, Masalimova & Nikoghosyan, 2016).

In order to set up an effective system of student government at a university it is necessary to create special organizational and pedagogical conditions (Petrova, 2009).

The pedagogical conditions include the availability of teaching and practical manuals on the organization of student government activities at the university, as well as such policy documents as concepts, programmes, plans, regulations and orders; the provision of refresher training for student government organizers and specialists; the application of diverse forms and interactive methods of training oriented towards creating a situation of success of leaders, monitoring the value orientation of students, the efficiency of forms and methods of work of the student government, ensuring the diversity of forms of creative activity of students at the university, developing the creative potential and leadership qualities of the personality (Ponomarev, 2009).

In accordance with the concept and programme of development of the Russian State Vocational Pedagogical University up to 2018, the concept of upbringing activities in the Russian State Vocational Pedagogical University adopted at the Academic Board meeting of 28.10.2013, purposeful and systematic work on the development of student government is carried out in the Russian State Vocational Pedagogical University.

While doing the research we examined the following pedagogical conditions for the formation of the effective student government.

1. The University should have departments responsible for upbringing activities that can provide assistance in the formation and organization of student government bodies in the initial period of their work.

2. Teaching and practical manuals on the organization of the student government activities, including regulations, concepts, programs, orders should be available at the university.

3. There should be a system of training for student government members and a system of continuity.

The organizational conditions of formation of the effective student government are as follows:

1. The university should have a working model of organizing the student government activities, including the structure and scheme of interaction with the administration of the university.

2. The student government bodies should be provided with resources such as premises, work equipment, access to the working space, financial support for the student government work plans.

3. Information support of the student government bodies (Ezhukova, 2009).

## **Materials and Methods**

### ***Research methods***

The following methods were used in the research: the method of determinism, which involves the need for researching professional development and a viewpoint that the student government has an impact on it; the method of systematicity which interprets professional development as an integral system consisting of internally related components; the dialectic method, which admits of the continuity of change, transformation and improvement of professional development under the influence of changes in the requirements of the society, the professional standards and the market; the empirical method implies the collection, accumulation, making records of the facts as a crucial initial stage of scientific cognition; theoretical methods (analysis, synthesis, modeling, concretization); diagnostic methods (questionnaire survey); empirical methods (the study of normative and instructional documents); experimental methods (ascertaining, formative and control experiments); methods of mathematical statistics and graphic presentation of the results.

### ***Experimental research base***

The experimental site of the research was Russian State Vocational Pedagogical University.

### ***Stages of research***

The research was conducted in three stages.

The first stage included theoretical analysis of student government forms existing in other universities, study of publications on the issue of student government and professional development; at this stage the problem, purpose and methods of the research were determined, the plan of the experimental study was devised.

At the second stage the model of implementation of student government in the university was developed; a set of pedagogical conditions for the effective professional development of students was explored and substantiated; research and experimental work was carried out, the findings of the experimental work were analyzed, checked and specified.

At the third stage the experimental work was completed, the theoretical and practical conclusions were specified, the achieved results were generalized and systematized.

## **Results**

### ***The structure and content of the model***

In 2013 the Russian State Vocational Pedagogical University was the site for testing the structural-functional model of student government: Joint student council. The model was created as a result of the study of the works of the

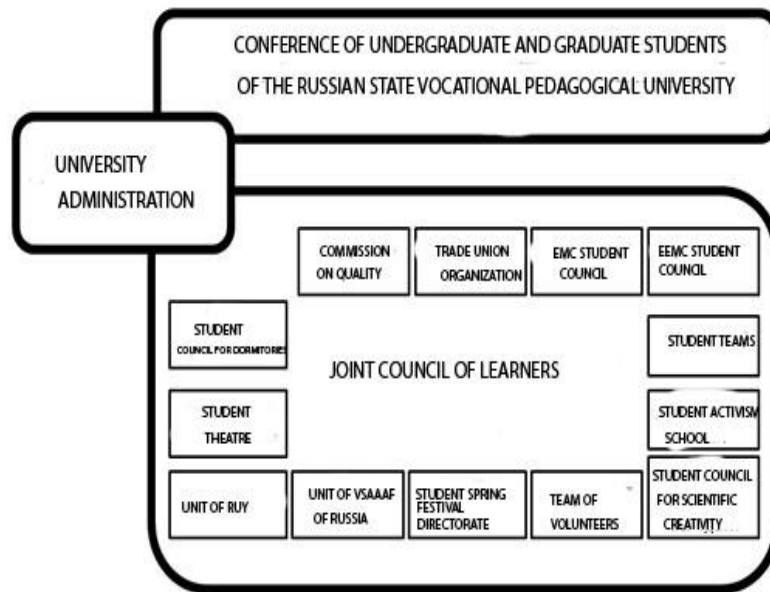
scientists of our country, the theoretical and methodological basis of which included: research works on the problems of didactics by V.I. Andreev (2004), professional activity by E.F. Zeer & I.V. Meshkova (2012), student and pupil self-government by T.I. Volchok (1999), G.V. Garbuzova (2009), I.F. Ezhukova (2009), V.A. Zmeev (2001), I.N. Kreshchenko (1996), S.S. Petrova (2009), V.A. Tovkan (2015).

The model of the Joint student council includes representatives of twelve public associations, representatives of each faculty and college of the university. The work of student councils at the faculties is based on the principles of co-management, systematization and voluntariness, as well as on project principles. Each faculty has student councils that help the faculty administration bring the necessary information to the students of the faculty, organize scientific, cultural and sporting events.

The Joint student council consists of an education quality commission, six student teams, a trade union organization, a law enforcement team, a council for young people's scientific creativity, a student activism school, a team of volunteers, a student spring directorate, a unit of the volunteer society of assistance of army, aircraft and fleet of Russia, a unit of the Russian Union of Youth, a student theater and a student dormitory council (Figure 1).

The functions of the Joint student council cover six basic areas of activity: scientific, educational, social, sporting, political and legal, creative. Within each area of activity there is a strategy for development, a road map for the implementation of the activities, with the goals and objectives set for 2 years.

The issues of professional development are closely connected with the initiatives of the federal ministries and departments to get students involved in the evaluation of education quality, resulting in the need to find and develop new meaningful forms of interaction between lecturers and students, including professional and practical interaction, therefore, the improvement of the quality of education at the university is a guiding principle of the student government.



**Figure 1.** Student government structure at the Russian State Vocational Pedagogical University

In addition to being able to influence the policy of the university and the quality of education the primary aspect of the student government development is its being oriented at the formation of general cultural competencies that contribute to the student's personal development and increase the labour market demand for them. Attending training sessions, seminars and master-classes, students develop the ability to perceive information, to set an objective and to choose ways of its achievement, the ability to speak logically and reasonably. Teamwork increases one's readiness for cooperation with colleagues, develops the ability to work in a group, forms the knowledge of the principles and methods of organizing and managing small teams, the ability to find organizational and managerial decisions in non-standard situations and the readiness to bear responsibility for them. When organizing the activities of the Joint student council, students learn to practice methods of self-control and motivation, develop the ability to critically evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, identify ways and choose means of developing advantages and overcoming weaknesses. The work with documents in the process of preparing activities improves the knowledge of one's rights and responsibilities as a citizen of the country, the ability to use various regulatory and legal documents in one's activities, increases one's readiness to improve and develop society on the principles of humanism, freedom and democracy.

### ***Stages of introduction of the model***

The introduction of this model included the following phases of experimental work:

- identification of the initial level of the university students' professional development and the level of their being satisfied by the university's educational work by means of questionnaires and statistical analysis of the results of the study;

- working out and introduction of the structural-functional model of student government: the Joint student council.

- determination of the level of professional development of the university students and their attitude towards the work of the student council, the level of educational work at the university.

### *The ascertaining stage*

To assess the effectiveness of the student government's setting up and functioning we made a survey on students' satisfaction with the process of their professional development. The research had started in September 2013 before the university's student government body began functioning. The study involved 569 people - first to fourth year students representing all the institutes of the Russian State Vocational Pedagogical University. A subsequent research took place in May 2015, involving 600 people - first to fourth year students representing all the institutes of the Russian State Vocational Pedagogical University. The research methodology was based on the materials of the National accreditation agency in the field of education, Yoshkar-Ola, Russia, most fully reflecting the aspects of the educational process at a higher education institution. The research results are presented in table 1.

**Table 1.** The result of the survey on students' satisfaction with the process of their professional development

Question	Answers	
	the year 2013	the year 2015
1. Are there any information sources at your university that can help you to get acquainted with the work-plan of the Student Government?	- Yes 75.05%	- Yes 90%
	- No 9.49%	- No 3%
	- Don't know 15.47%	- Don't know 7%
2. In the work of which student public organizations do you participate?	- student trade union 14.42%	- student trade union 32%
	- student club 3.87%	- student club 16%
	- public order service 0.88%	- public order service 2%
	- student employment service 0.53%	- student employment service 1%
	- student team 4.22%	- student team 6%
	- students' scientific society 5.1%	- students' scientific society 6.5%
	- I don't take part in the work of	

	student organizations 58.88%	- I don't take part in the work of student organizations 32%
	- other: 4.6%	- other: 11%
3. Does your group have a supervisor?	- Yes 88.76%	- Yes 92%
	- No 3.52%	- No 2%
	- Don't know 9.49%	- Don't know 6%
<b>Express your level of satisfaction from 1 to 6, where 1 is the lowest level, 6 is the highest level</b>		
4. Estimate the level of information support for the student government activities	3.5	4.36
5. If you have a supervisor, give an approximate estimate of his work	3.55	3.58
6. How would you estimate the work of the student public organizations in general?	3.41	4.36
7. Give an approximate estimate of the material and technical resources used in extracurricular activities in general.	3.25	4.14
8. Do you think the university administration rewards students for academic achievements, winning prizes in contests, sports competitions, active participation in extracurricular activities and cultural events?	- Yes 50.79%	- Yes 68%
	- No 16.17%	- No 16%
	- Don't know 33.04%	- Don't know 16%
9. If the answer to the previous question is "Yes", give an approximate estimate of the effectiveness and fairness of students' reward	2.78	3.56
10. Do you think the opinion of students is taken into consideration when students' professional development is planned (scheduled)?	- Yes 18.63%	- Yes 48%
	- No 36.56%	- No 30%
	- Don't know 50.27%	- Don't know 22%
11. Assess the level of influence of the opinion of students on planning (scheduling) students' professional development	2.77	3.86
12. Do you think that students' professional development is paid enough attention to at the educational institution?	- Yes 31.11%	- Yes 59%
	- No 25.49%	- No 16%
	- Don't know 43.41%	- Don't know 25%
13. How would you assess the organization and implementation of students' professional development in the educational institution in general?	3.37	4.28
14. Do you think your educational institution graduates are prepared for life and work in	- Yes 42.71%	- Yes 62%

present-day conditions and for adaptation to the labour market?	- No 17.23%	- No 12%
	- Don't know 40.07%	- Don't know 26%
15. How do you assess your employment prospects?	- I look ahead with optimism 47.1%	- I look ahead with optimism 51%
	- I feel uncertain, considering my chances of employment as not very high 23.55%	- I feel uncertain, considering my chances of employment as not very high 18%
	- I am ready to work where I can earn more, regardless of the specialty 30.76%	- I am ready to work where I can earn more, regardless of the specialty 32%

The survey showed that all the indicators regarding the students' satisfaction with the process of professional development, the efficiency of work and interaction of the Joint student council with the university administration, increased both on the average and in the percentage of students informed about the activities of the student government and in the percentage of students taking part in the activities.

As to the question: "How would you estimate the work of the student public organizations in general?" the indicator increased from 3.45 to 4.36, which made 0.91 points, or 18.2 percent.

The indicator concerning the opinion of students being taken into consideration when students' professional development is planned (scheduled) increased by half. This change is due to the fact that the student government consisting of students proper began to care about students' rights and opinion.

The number of students participating in sporting, scientific, and cultural events doubled.

As to the question: "Do you think that students' professional development is paid enough attention to at the educational institution?" The positive response grew up from 31.11% to 59%, that is increased by 27.89 percent.

As to the question: "How do you assess your employment prospects?" the indicator "I look ahead with optimism" increased by 3.9%, the indicator "I feel uncertain, considering my chances of employment as not very high" decreased by 5.55%, which clearly shows the positive trends in the self-esteem and self-confidence of students in the subsequent choice of careers matching the education and in the subsequent qualitative employment. This trend of increasing self-attitude of students as professionals may develop from the fact that students do not limit themselves to learning activities only at the university. They begin to set practical tasks for the implementation of self-



government activities, which serves for training applied skills and skills needed in future careers.

### Discussions

The study of psychological and pedagogical sources reveals the insufficiency of special research on the impact of student government on the effectiveness of students' professional development and non-formal education at the university. However, the problems of student government and various forms of its implementation as well as its impact on the personal growth of students involved in the process, are discussed in detail in the works of different authors. E.L. Syrtsova (2007) regards student government as one of the most important factors in the development of autonomy and self-reliance of students; G.V. Garbuzova (2009) regards student government as a means of formation of professional identity of future specialists.

In present-day conditions of development of the Russian higher education and its incorporation into the world educational system student government is a necessary component and a form of the democratic governance process at the university (Ovchinnikov, 2005). Besides, student government is an important factor in socializing youth in conditions of social state development (Stolyarova, 2010); a factor in enhancing the competitiveness of graduates (Ponomarev, 2009); a means of effectiveness in training future teachers in the renewing society (Volchok, 1999).

The existence of student government has a great significance in the characterization of the educational environment of the university (Rogaleva, 2011) because it is an important tool for the development of socially significant qualities of the future specialist (Grebenyuk, 2012).

The main tasks of student government at institutions of higher education are:

1. Assistance in organizing educational and scientific activities, promotion of learning efficiency, activation of students' independent creative activity in the educational process, taking into account the current trends of development of the system of continuous education; formation of the necessity to solve scientific problems in the chosen specialty through the system of scientific and technical creativity of students.

2. Implementation of humanistic personal development of students in the spirit of tolerance, rejection of extremism, the democratic way of life, mutual exactingness, sense of social justice, sound moral and psychological environment, strengthening the moral foundations of young students' families, the adoption of moral standards based on public openness, intolerance towards anti-social behavior in everyday life, etc.

3. Development and intensification of initiatives of student groups in organizing civic education; formation of student associations in study groups, among the students of the same year and faculty; training of student group leaders.

Having considered the functions that the university student government should undertake, we find it important to refer to the legal forms of organization of student government. At present this segment in educational organizations is represented mostly by councils of learners (student councils). Periodic monitoring shows that the network of councils of learners currently covers about 80% of institutions of higher education. The monitoring of student government bodies conducted by L.F. Shalamova & I.S. Fatov (2014) confirms the accuracy of the data. The monitoring mentioned above covered 174 institutions of higher education from 67 constituent entities of the Russian Federation. All the educational institutions that participated in the survey confirmed the presence of some form of student government body. So, in 38.8 % of the educational institutions this function is performed by joint student councils, in 33.7% of the educational institutions - councils of learners (student councils), in 12% of the educational institutions the role of student government is entrusted to student trade union committees. In 10% of the institutions of higher education under survey the key structure representing students was not found. The remaining 5% of the educational institutions reported the existence of such structures as student unions, student associations, public associations, etc. Given that the distinction between joint student councils and student councils is normatively not defined, it is possible to summarize that student councils are the most common form of the student government body.

### Conclusion

Thus, the presented results of the study indicate that the development of student government bodies increases the effectiveness of students' professional development. When student government is centralized at the Joint student council self-government does not lose the versatility of its activity areas, but at the same time, there appears a single body, allowing many associations, councils and public organizations to cooperate effectively. This model makes it possible to engage more students in the process of self-government, as a consequence, the majority of students are informed about the non-formal education and educational activities of the university. Moreover, the development of the student government bodies has a positive impact on students' confidence in the possibility of steady employment upon graduation, as well as a positive effect on the overall assessment of the university. Students are increasingly seen as a source of innovative solutions, business activity and new personnel for public administration, it is therefore important to involve students in the process of self-government to effectively shape a wholly developed personality of the future manager. By engaging in the process of self-government, students begin to see the problems from within the university, they cease to be simply external observers, many of them start trying to find ways of solving the local problems. This involvement allows students to make a contribution to the life of their university and make it better, thus students are no longer just consumers of services, they become inventors, creators of new events, traditions, projects. The functioning model of student government makes it possible to take into account the opinion of the students when scheduling and planning sporting, cultural and

educational events, which in turn makes these events more interesting for the target group - for the students.

### Recommendations

The material of this article can be useful for the staff of institutions of higher education and secondary vocational education, who are responsible for organizing the process of educational work at a higher education institution or at a secondary vocational education institution. Introducing student government in students' life, the staff will noticeably improve students' professional development at their institutions, shifting part of things to take care of onto the student activists, thereby educating and forming more autonomous and competitive specialists.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### Notes on contributors

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