

Qualification Evaluation of Postgraduate Degree Authorization Institutions in China: A Case Study

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Abstract: This paper takes 'postgraduate degree authorization evaluation of China University of Geosciences (Beijing) in 2016-2017' as an example to analyze the evaluation index system, evaluation process and existing problems of degree authorization institutions in China, and finally proposes corresponding policy recommendations for improvement, in order to provide reference for the qualification evaluation of postgraduate degree authorization units and the construction of students' training quality supervision system.

Keywords: Postgraduate; Degree authorization institutions; Evaluation; China

INTRODUCTION

In order to put the '*National Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)*' into practice, implement the '*Opinions of Ministry of Education, National Development and Reform Commission, and Ministry of Finance on Deepening the Reform of Graduate Education*' (Teaching and Research [2013] No. 1) to ensure the quality of degree and postgraduate education in China, in March 2014, the Academic Degrees Committee of State Council and Ministry of Education jointly issued the 'Measures for the Qualification Assessment of Degree Authorized Institutions'.

The assessment method points out that the qualification assessment of degree authorization institutions is an important part of the degree authorization review system in China. A round of assessments are conducted every six years, which are divided into two stages. One is the self-assessment of degree-granting units in the first 5 years and the other one is random evaluation by the education administration in the last year. The proportion of the random evaluation is generally not less than 20%, and covers all degree-granting units [1-2].

At present, the main features of the evaluation on degree authorization institutions in China include: ① Government leading. The degree-granting units are the subject of evaluation, and belong to the 'top-down' evaluation method. ② Mandatory. The degree-granting units are subject to evaluation, and the units which refuse to evaluation will be directly revoked the degree authorization qualifications. ③ Emphasis on the goal of "promoting construction by evaluation". The evaluation focuses on the hardware support system such as the teaching staff of the degree authorization units, base construction, and funding investment [3-5].

Therefore, the evaluation process also has the following problems: the degree-granting units focus on reporting but despise construction. With the blind scale expansion, the investment in graduate education is relatively insufficient. The internal quality assurance system is not perfect. The participation of internal and external stakeholders is not enough. The evaluation index system is insufficiently targeted and measurable. The constraints, incentives and feedback mechanisms are still lacking [6-10].

In view of the above unresolved issues, this paper takes 'postgraduate degree authorization evaluation of China University of Geosciences (Beijing) in 2016-2017' as an example to analyze the evaluation system and existing problems, in order to improve the evaluation work of postgraduate degree authorization units and the construction of students' training quality supervision system.

Status quo of qualification evaluation on postgraduate degree authorization institutions—taking China University of Geosciences as an Example

Evaluation index system

According to the 'Master's Degree Authorization Qualification Assessment Program of China University of Geosciences' and related measures, the index system of this evaluation contains three types of primary indicators, namely:

- **Objectives and standards of degree authorization institutions**

Two second-level indicators: Training objectives, Degree standards (including four third-level indicators: Knowledge structure, Academic level, Training requirements, Basic requirements for master's thesis)

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- **B. Basic conditions for postgraduate training**

Five second-level indicators: Training direction, Teaching staff, Scientific research, Teaching and research support system, Scholarship and award system

- **C. Student training**

Ten second-level indicators: Enrollment selection, Course teaching, Tutor guidance, Academic training and practice, Academic exchange, Diversion elimination, Quality of thesis, School tradition construction, Management services, Employment development). The whole index system of evaluation is shown in Figure 1 and Table 1.

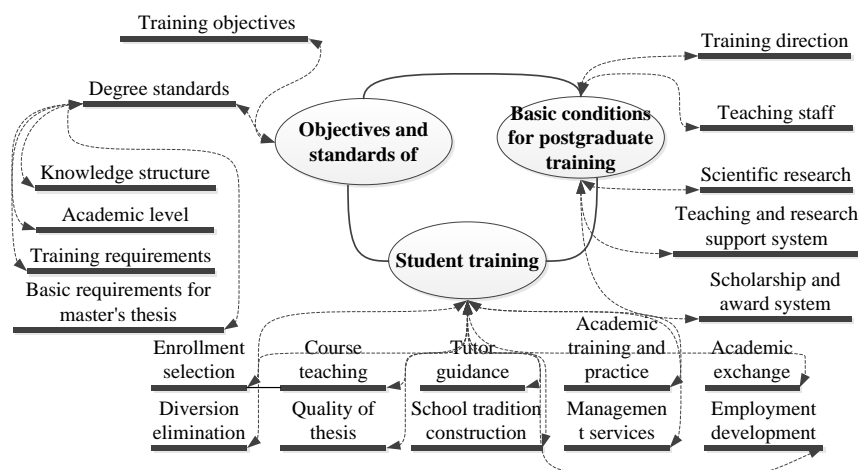


Fig-1: The evaluation index structure of postgraduate degree authorization qualification of China University of Geosciences (Beijing)

Table-1: The self-assessment index system of postgraduate degree authorization qualification of China University of Geosciences (Beijing)

Primary Indicator	Second-level Indicator	Measured Content
1.Objectives and standards	1.1 Training objectives	The goal of training graduate students
	1.2 Degree standards	The basic standard for granting doctoral and master's degrees
2.Basic conditions for postgraduate training	2.1 Training direction	Introduction of the main training direction of the degree
	2.2 Teaching staff	The situation of leaders and major teachers in each training direction
	2.3 Scientific research	The main research projects completed and under study
	2.4 Teaching and research support system	The platform for postgraduate study and research
	2.5 Scholarship and award system	The construction, level and coverage of the graduate student award system
3.Student training	3.1 Enrollment selection	The number of graduate students enrolled, the admission rate, the number of admissions, the structure of the student source, and the measures taken to ensure the quality of the students
	3.2 Course teaching	The core curriculum and keynote teachers offered, course quality and continuous improvement mechanism
	3.3 Tutor guidance	The selection, training, and assessment of the tutor team, the system requirements and implementation of instructor guides
	3.4 Academic training and practice	The situation of graduate students participating in academic training and practice, including institutional guarantees, financial support, etc.

	3.5Academic exchange	The situation of graduate students participating in international and domestic academic exchanges
	3.6Diversion elimination	The relevant information and data of graduate students elimination
	3.7Quality of thesis	Sampling evaluation, review status, and quality of dissertations
	3.8School tradition construction	Scientific ethics and academic norms education, academic misconduct punishment
	3.9Management services	The establishment of the postgraduate rights protection system, the survey of student satisfaction in the study
	3.10Employment development	The employment rate and employment direction of graduates, the feedback of employers and the survey of graduate development quality

Evaluation process

This evaluation is divided into four phases:

- Self-assessment of each school and each teaching and research section. According to the ‘*Self-assessment Index System of Academic Degree Authorization Qualification*’, the responsible person will fill in the ‘*Self-assessment Profile of Academic Degree Authorization Qualification*’ including the data and explanation.
- Written self-assessment report. According to the ‘*Self-assessment Profile of Academic Degree Authorization Qualification*’ and the criteria for judging, the responsible person will organize the ‘*Self-assessment Summary Report of Academic Degree Authorization Qualification*’.
- Then the school expert group will conduct on-the-spot assessments of each school, while viewing the electronic and paper materials.
- Finally, an evaluation summary at the school's expert group meeting will be conducted, and the revision comments will be returned to each school and each teaching and research section.

Problems of qualification evaluation on postgraduate degree authorization institutions

• The participation degree of internal and external stakeholder still needs to be enhanced

The evaluation work is led by the government, and the Education Steering Committee and the Disciplinary Review Group participate in the evaluation as a third-party organization. Since the evaluation itself focuses on the completeness of assessment system, the participation of the society and employers is not enough. In addition, due to the lack of follow-up of graduates in the evaluation process, assessments are likely to lead to disconnect between student training and employment.

• Insufficient depth of self-assessment

The self-assessment is not based on its own development and efficiency considerations but on the government's request, resulting in the lack of enthusiasm of the degree-granting units and the low awareness of active participation. At the same time, degree-granting units are unfamiliar with the evaluation work, and the subjects (such as teachers and students) who are evaluated have insufficient experience and

participation. The postgraduate education management department has no time and energy, resulting in a lack of effective guidance for the institutions (universities). The schools in universities are busy with day-to-day management and regard the evaluation as workload. All of the above reasons will cause the self-assessment to not be carried out effectively and in depth.

• Insufficient targeting of the evaluation index system

The evaluation primary indicators of various disciplines are basically consistent, and the differences between academic degrees and professional degrees and the index systems between different disciplines are not obvious, which is not reasonable. Take China University of Geosciences (Beijing) as an example, the School of Earth Sciences and Resources, the School of Economics and Management and other schools use the same self-assessment index system, and their criteria for determining the A/B/C/D grade are also roughly the same. But in fact, the research projects and employment situation of the School of Economics and Management are not comparable to the School of Earth Sciences and Resources. Therefore, it is not proper to use the same criteria.

• Insufficient statistics and measurability of evaluation indicators

In terms of index evaluation, qualitative indicators such as management services, School tradition construction, and training direction are less measurable. The self-assessment and random evaluation can only be scored by subjective evaluation of experts. The quantitative indicators such as the ratio of students to teachers have no criteria, leading to the evaluation experts not having a relatively objective basis, and it is difficult to make a correct evaluation. In addition, the evaluation system is relatively focused on large-scale indicators, such as the number of enrollment, the number of teachers, the number of bases, the number of scientific research projects, etc. It is easy to form a training system based on scale, and relatively lack of efficiency evaluation indicators. What is the most important, it is difficult to collect the data. On average, each teaching and research section (including about 15 people) only has 2-3 teachers participating in the collection and statistics of indicators. The task is heavy

and the error rate is high. There is no information collection and sharing platform in school level and university level, and even the relevant data and materials of archives and personnel departments are few. So it is impossible to verify the comprehensiveness and accuracy of information, which is the biggest problem at present.

• **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Strengthen multi-participation in evaluation

In addition to the degree-granting units, we must actively encourage various social forces to participate in the evaluation, and guide industry associations, social academic organizations, employers, etc. to support the evaluation of degree-granting units from various aspects, and gradually establish a multi-integrated (including governments, expert groups, universities and society) quality evaluation system for graduate education. In the degree-granting units, an incentive mechanism should be implemented to encourage teachers and administrative staff to take the initiative to participate and adapt to the needs of the development of postgraduate education evaluation system.

• **Enhance the evaluation and improvement awareness of degree authorization institutions**

The degree-granting units should find the entry point for evaluation and daily work, and integrate the assessment with the universities' development planning, discipline construction, teacher team building and curriculum system construction [11]. The degree-granting unit should find the entry point for evaluation and daily work, avoid evaluation and work, and integrate the assessment with the school's development planning, discipline construction, teacher team building and curriculum system construction. At the same time, the degree-granting units should combine the evaluation index system to find the deficiencies and problems in the work, implement the rectification, and realize the promotion of the quality of postgraduate education.

• **Optimize evaluation index system**

The evaluation index system should closely conform to the reform and development direction of the national postgraduate education, fully take into account the actuality of different degree types and majors, and be formulated at the targeted classification and level [12]. The design of evaluation indicators should be changed from the scale indicators to the efficiency indicators. It is also important to enhance the measurability of indicators. Standards are recommended to be provided for quantitative indicators according to expert opinions. Qualitative indicators are recommended to use multiple evaluation points for quantification.

• **Strengthen the construction of constraints, incentives and feedback mechanisms**

There is an urgent need to establish a unified information collection and sharing platform at the municipal or institution (university) level, strengthen information collection, analysis of evaluation results and supervision of the processing process, clarify the scope of supporting materials, source of data and statistical caliber to ensure the reliability and effectiveness of information. It is significant to strengthen information disclosure, improve the transparency of assessment work, and let degree-granting units, postgraduate students, governments, and the public understand the postgraduate training status of universities. At the same time, the government can set up corresponding reward (such as appropriation and investment) and punishment mechanisms for the degree-granting units participating in the evaluation through performance. In addition, a multi-feedback system including peer experts, employers, graduates and teachers should be established to improve the quality system for postgraduate training [13].

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