

The Russian education system

<http://www.hse.ru/en/en/rus-ed.html>

Higher education structure

Over the last ten years, the system of higher education has undergone considerable change in the following areas:

- Goals - with an orientation towards the needs of the market, society, and individuals;
- Structure - decentralization (in contrast to Soviet centralized planning);
- Autonomy of higher educational institutions - introduction of private higher education; four- and two-year programs in parallel with the traditional five-year program; elimination of a bias towards engineering specialties;
- Financing - diversification of financial sources instead of a reliance solely on state financing;
- Content - increasing the humanitarian components in the curriculum, and diversifying programs and courses

Following the provisions of the 1992 Law on Education and responding to the rising demand and the need to generate revenue, the state educational institutions acquired more autonomy, opened new programs and started enrolling commercial students. New non-governmental universities and institutions have been set up. By 2002 they numbered 384.

Nevertheless the Russian higher education system remains relatively centralized: the Federal Government provides no less than 50% of all higher education institutional expenditures and keeps all state-owned institutions' funds under strict control through a special system of treasury accounts, it provides accreditation, attestation and licensing of all institutions, private or public, it establishes considerably detailed unified standards of HE programs defining the curricula and content for all disciplines and it maintains a monopoly on issuing degree level diploma certificates.

HE institution system section data

At present, the current Russian HE community consists of over 1000 HEIs, 655 of which are state institutions. In 1990 there were only about 700 institutions. During the last 10 years, both state and non-state HEIs have created more than 2000 branches. Of these, 64% are registered as state institutions, and 36% as non-state HEIs.

As for the distribution of students on these two types of institutions, of the total of 6 million students, about 5.2 million or 87% are registered at state HEI. Thus, 36% of non-state institutions enrol about 13% of students. This means that many of the private institutions are fairly small and mainly have local importance in their respective region. Private institutions were mainly opened for the professions that were demanded by the labour market: lawyers, economists and accountants.

A large number of the faculty members at private universities are full-time employees at public universities. They are employed as part-time staff in private institutions to teach general courses that every university is expected to offer.

Many private institutions are established by individuals or businesses, but others are closely linked to central governmental structures. The latter, for instance ministries and committees of the state Duma, have been involved as founders and co-founders of institutions. The public sector has also contributed by physical infrastructure, or financial support to the private institutions, many of which are closely linked to governmental structures.

Russia has four types of higher education institutions:

- Universities: responsible for education and research in a variety of disciplines; There are "classical" and "technical" universities with special attention paid respectively to social sciences and humanities or natural fundamental and applied (engineering) sciences. Unofficial ratings also distinguish old "classical" universities and "new" universities, former pedagogical or technical institutions which have acquired their university status quite recently.
- Academies: responsible for education and research. They differ from universities only in that they restrict themselves to a single discipline;
- Institutes: multi-discipline oriented. They can be independent structural units, or part of a university or academy and usually specialize in one field. However pedagogical institutes are responsible for the entire spectrum of disciplines taught at schools
- Private institutions: have grown in increasing numbers. They offer degrees in non-engineering fields such as business, culture, sociology and religion.

Degree structure

There is a new degree structure, which follows a three-tier pattern, three levels, and uses U.S./British nomenclature.

Currently there are only two types of diploma (degrees) which are officially recognized as certifying a completed higher education. These types are *diploma of specialist* and *diploma of a Master level (magistr)*. The *Bachelor diploma* and the certificate of "incomplete higher education" are not regarded as higher education degrees. In some cases a bachelor degree suffices to start a career. However, bachelors (or undergraduates) are not allowed to take positions where higher education is required by labor law or by custom, and they can't get the research *degree of Candidate of Sciences*. Male graduates are drafted into the army as soldiers and must serve for two years while specialists and post-graduates have a 6 month shorter conscription period.

It should be noted that Russia has signed the Bologna Declaration and by the year 2010 transition to a two- tier degree structure should be completed, the objective is specified as one of the ultimate goals of the country's educational reforms.

Below you can find a more detailed description of a typical higher education program's organization:

Level I Programs at this level are organized into two stages:

- Stage 1 consists of two years of course work, upon completion of which students are awarded a "certificate of incomplete higher education."

- Stage 2 is devoted entirely to one to two years of intensive professional training. Upon completion, students are awarded a diploma of incomplete higher education (*o nepolnom visshem obrazovanii*).

These are not distinct programs but rather credentials awarded upon partial completion of study leading to a diploma of higher education, such bachelor or specialist. Students with a Level I certificate or diploma have not completed their higher education. However, they can seek employment in jobs that require some higher education, but not a degree.

Level II Bachelor (*bakalavr*): Awarded upon completion of four-year programs in the humanities, economics and natural sciences, as well as some practical professional training. It represents the completion of "basic academic education."

Level III There are two options after the second level -*master and specialist*. Both degrees allow access to doctoral study.

Master (*magistr*): This is an academic degree designed for students who wish to pursue a career in academia and research. It takes two years after obtaining the bachelor degree. The field of study must be the same as for the bachelor. (Because most students continue after the *bakalavr* at the same institution, they might not receive the actual *bakalavr* diploma).

Specialist: This is a professional training program designed for students who choose to pursue the practical applications of their specialization. The degree can be earned in one of two ways:

1. Upon completion of at least 1.5 years of study after the *bakalavr*. (Students who earn the diploma of specialist this way often do not get their actual *bakalavr* diploma.)
2. Upon completion of four to six years of study after the *attestat o srednem polnom obshchem obrazovanii* (this is the unchanged Soviet diploma of specialist). The degree grants professional qualification in engineering, teaching, economics, etc.

Bakalavr, magistr and specialist diplomas are awarded by the State Attestation Commission.

The Law on Education does not address any changes to the Soviet model of graduate education (the *kandidat nauk* [Candidate of Science] and *doktor nauk* [Doctor of Science]).

A database of higher education institutions in Russia can be found on the following Web site: www.informika.ru/eng (choose the "databases and references" option). Information provided for the institutions includes address, fields of study offered and legal status (state, private, accredited, etc.).

Admission system

Many students wishing to enter a university need additional preparation to gain admission. Only one-third of students are estimated to enter university relying only on the knowledge acquired in school. Another one-third take special preparatory courses. Others either hire private tutors or educate themselves. The cost of preparing for entrance examination is a heavy economic burden for Russian students and their families. For the HEIs the problem is that many students do not have the qualifications considered necessary for entry to higher education.

Currently the Certificate of Secondary Complete General Education, "*attestat o srednem (polnom) obshchem obrazovanii*," and successfully passing university-matriculation exams are required for admission to all higher education institutions.

The Education reform programme aims to promote equity of higher education. The proposed schemes, a unified national test and government individual financial obligations, which operate in conjunction, are described below in the section on the education reform program.

Tuition fees

The Russian Constitution (article 43, para 3) guarantees everyone the right to get higher education free of charge on a basis of competition. Adhering to the law, the Government allocates funding to pay the tuition fees within an established quota, i.e., the number of students for each state institution.

Traditionally the size of quota varies from institution to institution and from one field (discipline) to another. It depends on the share of state in the institution's budget, demands from state bodies in a region, social programs and other, sometimes rather subjective estimates. Last year nearly 50% of graduates didn't pay tuition fees.

On top of the quotas described above, the universities are free to enroll students on a fee-paying basis and have the right to define the fee for their programmes according to the market price and demand.

Main legal framework

- The Constitution of the Russian Federation.
- Decrees and orders of the President of the Russian Federation.
- Decrees and orders of the Government and Parliament of the Russian Federation.
- The State Law on Education of 1992, adopted by the Duma in 1996, outlines the principles of state policy on education.
- The Regulations on Higher Education Establishments provide institutions with more details of how national plans should be fulfilled at the same time as they incorporate the autonomy and other rights of HEIs.
- The Law on Higher and Post Tertiary level professional education approved by Duma in 1996.
- In 2001 the Government approved the Concept of the Modernization of the Russian Education for Period until 2010. This document has become the framework for all innovations, experiments and reforms enacted in Russia in the education area.

Authorities and organisations

The Ministry of Education is the central body of the federal executive authorities responsible for implementing state policy at all level of education.

At the regional level, the education management structure consists of the pertinent authorities: committees (departments or ministries) of education, public council organisation and associations, etc. They define and execute regional educational policy.

The Subjects of the Federation is an organisation involved in coordinating and budgeting various kinds of institutions and education under regional jurisdiction.

The recent governmental reform brought in noticeable changes in the structure of the Cabinet. The Ministry of Education is now replaced by the Ministry of Education and Science.

The concrete structure and authorities of the newly established ministry are not finalized at the moment. However, it is stated that the Ministry will be responsible for policy elaboration while implementation of the strategy will be delegated to the federal agency with monitoring and control function assigned to the federal service.

The cohort of 655 state HEI is split into 572 federal institutions, 55 institutions established by regional authorities (oblasts) and the remaining under local or municipal authorities.

It should be noted that among the 572 federal institutions, some are established by and administratively belong to different federal bodies. For example the State University - Moscow Institute of International Relations is under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Moscow Technical University of Communication and Informatics has been founded by the Ministry of Communication and Industry. And the Moscow State University is a unique institution as it is financed directly from the federal budget.

However, as it was mentioned in the foreword, all issues related to the content of HEI programs should be agreed and handled in compliance with the governmental educational standards.

Governance structure

The individual universities have become much more autonomous than they were in the previous system, but still, present day autonomy can be circumscribed for many reasons and is depending on factors such as: financial stability, leadership and management, political linkages, and institutional culture.

The 1992 Law delegated to the republics, provinces and local education authorities the responsibility for curriculum, textbooks, teaching methods, budgets, construction and equipment. HEIs gained the right to seek income from non-government sources and to engage in commercial activity. The law also confirmed the possibility for private institutions to be established.

At institutional level, the management is usually performed by its elected representative body, the Council. As described in The Reform of Education in New Russia (2), "Election procedures are determined by the Charter of the institution which defines the distribution of powers between the Council and the administration; day-to-day management of the institutions is performed by its administration. The management of non-state education institutions is performed directly by the founder of the institution or, if stipulated by the founder, by a board of trustees named by it. In both cases, the board is responsible for material and technical support for the educational process and organising the supply of teaching materials. Education management has considerably increased in institutions given their new, significant independence. Today an education institution can choose how to organise its educational process, select and hire its own staff, and organise its own research, financial and economic activity."

Institution's Boards of Trustees and HEI themselves usually maintain relations with all levels of authorities, business (industry) and communities to diversify the sources of income, generate revenue and/or get financial and other kinds of support. Whereas the education process is aimed at awarding of state diploma and research process is connected with award of research degrees they should comply with the state standards approved by the Federal Government and demands of Russian Academy of Sciences.

Systems of financing of HEIs

Reduced state funding has meant that HEIs themselves have to find other sources of income. Two such sources are letting out facilities and provision of fee-based education. Over a short period, public universities have substantially diversified their funding sources.

Relative HEI autonomy from the Government is based on diversified sources of finance. Typically, a Russian state university receives 50-70% of its funding from the Federal Budget directly or through the

main founder--the government structure; and additional 10-20% of funds are generated through research activity (fundamental if the contractor is the state or applied in case of industry); 5-10% from grants and overheads; and 10-20% from tuition fees and about the same amount from different types of educational services, renting out facilities and additional services provided for population. Proportions vary from university to university, however, the state share is rarely lower than 40%. This share is the main source for renovation of facilities, equipment, library funds and maintenance of buildings. Income from other sources is used to increase professor's and other staff salaries, purchase of computers and software.

Quality assessment

Accreditation of HE institutions is an ongoing process which is the responsibility of the State Committee (SAC).

As described in *"The Reform of Education in New Russia"*

"The evaluation of educational results, i. e. ensuring the conformity of training level and quality with the requirements of state educational standards, is performed through a complex evaluation of attainment levels of each higher education graduate by the State Attestation Committee (SAC) and then through a decision on the attestation made by the State Attestation Service (SAS). The SAS will be responsible for establishing the conformity of the content, level and quality of graduated students' training and state educational standards. Until the SAS is created, these functions are being performed by the State Inspection of the Certification of Education Institutions of Russia."

This is an ongoing process, and until it is completed, the state institutions are presumed to have accreditation. In addition, some municipal and non-state institutions have been accredited.

After the governmental reform the quality assessment will be provided by the Federal Agency for Control and Supervision over Education. It will obviously inherit from the Ministry existing authority and quality control tools: accreditation, attestation and licensing.

Key Features of the Modernization of Education Program

The current Education modernization program takes root in the reform of the 1990-1992, as reflected in the Law of the Russian Federation of 1992, however, it should not be regarded as a response to the challenge of uncompleted historical action, but instead as a strategy for building the human capital for a knowledge economy. Policy makers, researchers and practitioners in Russia share the view that education supports innovation and helps speed the diffusion of technology, the common platform for modernization program is that education quality and access are fundamental to sustainable economic growth.

In 2000 the Government of Russia approved the National Doctrine on Education. In the same year a five year program on education development was approved by the Federal Law. The resolution of the Government to take a leadership role in the reform was made explicit in 1999, 2000, 2001 when the federal budget allocations on education grew by fifty per cent annually, similar positive changes have taken place in the subjects of the Russian Federation. Allocations for education in the 2002 consolidated budget exceeded the previous year's expenditure by 64% and comprised 4.11% of the Federal budget expenditure and 0.73% of the GDP, in 2003 these figures were 4.16 and 0.75% respectively, and the 2004 plan was 4.47 and 0.76% with 33% of the GDP for tertiary education.

However, the conundrum of how to build a sustainable system of financing promoting equity, quality and efficiency is especially complex from a scarce resources framework in a country like Russia. Before presenting the two most controversial tools adopted by the Modernization program as elements of the financial governance, it is necessary to highlight some of the cornerstones of the past twelve years' development.

The centrally regulated and financed system in the USSR rested on the "one work for life" principle. The choice of profession made at the vocational or higher education institutions level defined the individual's professional career, the upgrading institutes developed further the skills and competencies the person acquired in the previous levels of education. All institutions were financed through the federal budget. The quotas of specialists to be trained were defined by the respective Ministries. The total education expenditures amounted to up to 8% of the GDP and allowed to maintain a widely accessible system of relatively high quality.

As a consequence of the shock therapy reform and the industrial recession of the early and mid nineties the state budget expenditures on education were cut down significantly, both in nominal and relative terms. For more than ten years the needs of the secondary school and tertiary education institutions have been underfinanced by more than two thirds, with the expected result of uncompetitive salaries for the teachers, depreciation of the equipment, obsolete character of the teaching materials. In 2000 the rational budget of educational institutions (calculated by the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Education as the sum of minimal competitive salary equal to the average in the industry sectors, to prevent the drain of the staff from schools and twice the amount for tertiary education institutions, plus overheads, current and capital expenses) was covered by less than one third of the normal amount.

At the same time the demand for the education, especially higher education services, continued to grow. Following the provisions of the 1992 Law on Education and responding to the rising demand and the need to generate revenue the state educational institutions opened new programs and started enrolling commercial students. New nongovernmental universities and institutions have been set up. By 2002, their number amounted to 662. Thus, there has been a steady tendency for educational services market development.

Consider some of the consequences of under financing: a relative withdrawal of the Government from the system, resulting in a perceived absence of independent quality control mechanisms allowing an inadequate quality of education to persist; a lack of reliable information on the quality of education; current and forecasted labor market needs resulted in distortions of the educational services market and a diversion of substantial funds into shadow flows and low quality of education for millions of university graduates. More than 3 million of economists, managers and lawyers graduated from more than 600 universities over the nineties. They often received qualitatively inadequate education during this time, resulting in their unemployability and subsequent need for further education.

Not considering either the societal consequences of the above or the human waste here, we will now focus on further financial losses for the education system itself. The households of both average and low income co-finance the education of their children in secondary schools at the level of about \$200-400 and \$100-120 a year respectively. The expenses born by the average income family for access of their children to tertiary education amount from \$800 to 1500 a year, often these expenses do not flow into the educational institutions, but are paid for by the individual tuition of children to the teachers of the respective institutions. The practice is justified by the currently radically individualized and diversified tertiary education institutions entrance exam requirements. The amounts are foregone for the formal education system.

The low income families not able to afford spending more than \$250-400 for preparing their children to tertiary education have to accept the low priced and low quality programs at for-profit higher education institutions, thus diverting funding from effective institutions to amounts of almost one billion US dollars. The total loss resulting from the above described diversion of financing, the low quality of graduates and their unemployability is estimated to ranger from \$3 to 3.5 billion.

The Modernization strategy aims to establish a system ensuring effective operation and use of resources, independent quality monitoring and control and efficient information flow to the learners. The Government must guarantee 1) adequate and free of charge information to the education institutions and control of the trustworthiness of the information; 2) independent and public control of the education quality, validation of the education programs, unified national tests at the secondary to tertiary education threshold; 3) subsidization of education. The two mechanisms presented further target to enhance the choices of the learners, increase effectiveness of the expenditures and promote equity. The proposed schemes operate in conjunction.

The Unified National Test is an instrument of the school leavers' knowledge assessment administered at their graduation from secondary education and an external quality control tool of the secondary schools education. The UNT results are used for application and enrollment into the tertiary education institutions. More important, the Government Individual Financial Obligations amount the university entrant receives depends on the individual's performance in the test. GIFO is an innovative subsidization mechanism allocating resources on an outcome-based principle. It can be compared to the Danish voucher system for tertiary education. However, being performance based it shares the responsibility for investment with the learner; administered at the national level the UNF enhances the access opportunities for school leavers; enrollment on the basis of UNT results serves to eliminate corruption; granting to tertiary education institutions freedom to set up the level of requirements to entrants within the UNT score and to price its services, GIFO system encourages the universities to compete for the best students.

There are a lot of heated discussions about the UNT and GIFO. Opponents argue that the test system does not permit to assess all aptitudes and knowledge, that it will be difficult to guarantee confidentiality of the materials and security of the tests administration. The concerns are not groundless, at the same time the truth is that the tests designed and piloted in the past three years do allow a transparent and fair assessment and that the transition period should provide for setting up a Federal and regional infrastructure of the test administration and public control over its transparency which would allow to diminish and eliminate possible malpractice and guarantee the test validity. In 2003, 630 students who exited higher education from 47 regions of the Russian Federation and 575 Higher Education Institutions participated in the experiment. The Unified National Test will become compulsory in 2006.

Another alleged danger voiced by the GIFO opponents is that it will deepen the gap between the urban and rural school leavers, as the latter do not receive the same quality of secondary education as the former. True, the level of quality differs, at the same time we have to accept the fact that the rural and far away oblasts school leavers do not have a lot of chances of entering central cities universities now, and the UNT will permit to assess their level of performance against the other applicants and apply to a tertiary education institution without relocation, thus increasing their chances of mobility, not diminishing them.

Transition to GIFO will allow alleviate the burden on the household budgets, more important it will enhance the consumer's freedom of choice. Having passed the UNT and receiving a certain score and the appropriate GIFO amount, the applicant has the choice of either entering the tertiary education institution with a matching price for tuition, or supplementing the amount, apply to a university with a higher tuition fee. The essential feature of the mechanism is the dependence of the GIFO amount on the level of UNT performance, which serves as an incentive for the tertiary education institution to compete for the best students. Whereas under the current system both a bright and a mediocre student studying on a non commercial basis generate the same amount of revenue, moreover, a poorly performing student paying a commercial fee for the degree program permits the universities to survive and reach the notorious one third of the above mentioned rational normative. GIFO will increase the chances of the low income

families for better quality education, cut on the flow of financing of the low quality tertiary education institutions and channel the redirected flows to more efficient institutions.

In summary, the expected results of the described mechanisms include: effectiveness from a better targeted and more cost effective system of education financing for the efficient functioning of which the Government bears responsibility; equity through a shared responsibility of the education process stakeholders; access in terms of enhanced horizontal and vertical mobility through administration of the UNT; and quality from external and market driven quality control through the NTF and enhanced freedom of choice for consumers. The proponents of the reform are far from declaring the proposed mechanisms a panacea, the scheme is a part of a systematic program and is to be introduced alongside with the other measures, some mentioned above, and with a great prudence. It does not eliminate the need to increase resource allocations on education by 15% from the federal budget and 10% from the territorial budgets in real terms for the ten forthcoming years. The synergy of all components is critical for the education modernization program success and will allow to approximate the required level of financing by 2010.

Main trends in the government's policy on internationalization

Internationalization of higher education is a reality. The Russian higher educational institutions have at their disposal much less funds than universities in the developed countries. Can they compete with the best universities in the world and provide high quality education on a permanent basis? This problem is a serious challenge to the Russian education community and a number of problems should be solved, e.g.:

- How to achieve sufficient and permanent financing of universities and to ensure effective use of funds;
- How to ensure autonomy and professionalism in educational and managing issues;
- How to ensure equity of higher education;
- How to direct sufficient amount of resources to support high quality of education and to create conditions that will allow universities to maintain this quality;
- What is necessary for universities to better satisfy local and regional needs;
- How to ensure closer cooperation between universities, business and enterprises to improve distribution and application of new knowledge in economy and in society as a whole.

Achievement of these objectives is impossible without cooperation with other countries and, primarily, those from European states. Therefore, there is another issue linked to this of how to effectively assure the integration of the Russian higher school into the European higher education area, launched by the Bologna Declaration, as well as into the European research space, what is the role of university in this process, which strategies of universities are the most effective?

Russia joined the process of forming common higher education area four years later after the Bologna Declaration was signed. The Bologna process seems to be considered by the majority of higher education representatives as the reform agenda one should work with. Having signed the Declaration, the Ministry of Education made explicit its commitment to the aims of integration to the All-European higher education space:

- introduction of two-tier system of education,
- creation of a credit system similar to the European Credit Transfer System as a means of raising mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff of universities,

- adoption of the common framework approach to qualification of the Bachelor and Master levels, provision of "comparability" of diplomas, separate courses, credits,
- creation of an integral system of education quality assurance and organization of information support and exchange,
- increase of mobility of students, teachers and researchers,
- development of cooperation in quality assurance with a view to develop comparable criteria and methodologies.

This policy of the Ministry of Education is fully supported by the SU-HSE. The SU-HSE leaders try to implement all educational innovations both concerning content or organization within the SU-HSE's legislative, financial, material and other constraints. Since 1999 the SU-HSE has initiated the reform development of the whole system of education in Russia, and then preparation of many aspects of the reform which became one of the most significant reform programs of Russian government. Performing this role the SU-HSE implemented many of these innovations first at its faculties, in its branches, in research institutions, centers and in the centers of continuous education. For example, all the faculties in the SU-HSE, except the faculty of law, introduced the two-tier structure of curricula, curricula of all specializations reflect the distribution of the teacher's work not only in "classroom-hour" terms but in ECTS as well.