

out the system—not simply reserved for an educational elite. Distance learning provides the most exciting challenge to the status quo, especially as it becomes clear that many remote parts of the world will have Internet access long before they enjoy decent roads.

The Task Force on Higher Education and Society brought together 14 educational experts from 13 countries with the intention to start an ongoing debate, not to answer all the questions. We firmly believe that rapid progress can be made, but only with political will, new resources,

and people prepared to contemplate and develop imaginative solutions.

At the report's launch, Wolfensohn asked why we needed such a document when what is being said is absolutely straightforward. "We need it," he said, "because we've forgotten it, because we don't give higher education the weighting that is required." We wholeheartedly agree. ■

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Transformation of Hungarian Higher Education

Ildikó Hrubos

Ildikó Hrubos is professor in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy, Budapest University of Economic Sciences. E-mail: <ildiko.hrubos@soc.bke.hu>.

Higher education reform in Hungary shares some elements with similar transformations in Western countries and others that are unique to the country. Parallel to a period of economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, higher education in the developed countries experienced great expansion, signifying a democratization of educational opportunities. In the 1980s, questions concerning efficiency and competition were in the forefront of the debates over higher education. The decade of the 1990s was concerned with quality: namely, the challenge of maintaining academic values while providing education for the masses. In the case of Hungarian higher education, not only have all of these processes been condensed into one decade but they have also been initiated under deteriorating economic conditions. Another peculiarity of the Hungarian case is that reforms were introduced that simultaneously affected both the content of education and the system of administering it. This was necessary to address the changing needs of the labor market and society at large as well as to break down the ideological and political biases of the system that prevailed under the state socialist (communist) regime.

The Expansion of Higher Education

In the academic year 1990–1991, the ratio of those admitted to institutions of higher education was rather low compared to international figures—a mere 10 percent of the 18-to-22-year age group. A rapid increase in student numbers in the 1990s served to reduce this gap: by 1997–1998, enrollments climbed to 20 percent and are expected to reach 30 percent by 2005. As a result, university enrollments increased 2.3-fold between the academic years 1990–1991 and 1997–1998.

This expansion of student numbers was achieved partly

by increasing enrollments in existing universities and partly by establishing new institutions and programs. Nonstate opportunities for education were introduced, including private universities and denominational schools. The number of institutions of higher education in Hungary increased overall from 77 to 89 (28 of these were established by churches and enroll 5 percent of all students; 6 are private, enrolling another 3 percent).

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The Network of Higher Education Institutions

One of the basic structural problems of the Hungarian higher education system is the fragmentation of the institutional network. Based on the Soviet model, in the late 1940s and early 1950s the faculties of traditional universities were separated from one another, and a number of specialized universities were established. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a network of colleges was created in a system similar to that of countries in Western Europe. In the 1970s and 1980s, the rationalization of the network of such disunited institutions was accomplished in other countries by merging institutions with narrow profiles. Hungarian higher education, however, has been bearing the burden of fragmentation ever since. Currently, there are 89 independent institutions of higher education in Hungary and 50 to 60 additional faculties. The most common problems caused by such fragmentation are inefficiency and limited scope of academic activity.

Transformation of the Hungarian network of institutions was initiated in the mid-1980s. Integration has been a priority supported by consecutive administrations in the 1990s and is expected to be accomplished by 1999–2000. According to the current plan, upon completion of integration state higher education will be comprised of 17 universities and 13 colleges. The new organizational order went into effect in January 2000.

Parallel to the transformation of the network of institu-

tions, other reforms will be introduced to meet current international educational requirements. Targets to be achieved are as follows:

- increasing the variety of offerings and standards of education, in a system flexible enough to respond to the changing labor market and other economic demands and international scholarly requirements;
- encouraging interdisciplinary research and development activities, both within institutions and internationally;
- establishing institutions of higher education as the intellectual centers of regional development, to address the tasks of society-building and economic development that will arise from European Union accession;
- establishing doctoral programs;
- increasing the stability of institutions of higher education to enable them to withstand sudden economic changes;
- introducing achievement-oriented, normative financing of higher education and the transparent operation of institutions; and
- making efficient use of intellectual and infrastructure capacities, eliminating repetition and improving coordination and cooperation.

As early as the 1980s, institutions of Hungarian higher education—particularly at the major universities—began to loosen ideological and political controls. The content of programs and textbooks was updated, taking international standards into consideration. Nevertheless, further reforms are necessary to dispel communist biases. This may be easier to accomplish within the new university structure, which will offer a broader spectrum of disciplines not possible within the current narrowly focused institutions.

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The integration and subsequent modernization of institutions will help Hungarian higher education come closer to realizing three goals that are also being pursued in developed countries: the introduction of continuing education; developing institutions of higher education into centers for high-quality research and development; and making use of such centers as intellectual resources for regional development.

The financial basis for the integration process has been secured by a U.S.\$150 million World Bank loan in addition to Hungarian government support totaling U.S.\$100 million. The allocation of this funding is based on the long-term development

plans of Hungarian institutions. The strict competition and tender system required by the World Bank compels these institutions to adopt a culture of planning and control.

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For successful integration, institutions of higher education need greater financial independence. To achieve this they must identify sources to replace state funding and utilize resources in a more efficient manner. Moreover, quality assurance mechanisms need to be put into place. Some of these issues are addressed by requirements attached to the World Bank loan.

Issues and Debates

The processes initiated in the 1990s have changed the Hungarian system of higher education considerably. However, many issues that parallel structural reform remain unresolved and must be addressed in the near future.

A more vertically articulated system is needed—one that will clarify the structure of various programs and allow flexibility among faculties and fields. These changes are made difficult by Hungary's current structural model. The question of how to streamline the system is a concern in Western European countries as well. The introduction of graduate professional training is in its early stages, although this is the very sector that is targeted to absorb the growing masses of students. A credit system is a necessary condition to ensure transfer between faculties; according to government decree, it is to be introduced in every institution by the year 2002.

To improve access to the system, various types of training must be introduced. Part-time programs for those who are employed require new approaches with regard to content, didactic methods, administration, and financing. Distance learning has been launched in 16 regional centers, and several major universities in other countries now offer degree-granting programs in Hungary. This type of education is as yet not widely accepted.

Autonomy of finance presupposes the existence of a professional administrative staff. The creation of modern institutional management is progressing slowly, and specialists specifically trained for this sector are rare. Academic staff have been slow to accept the need to transform decision-making procedures to meet new requirements.

The increase in admissions capacity has improved opportunities for higher education, but it has also introduced social inequalities. The costs of university studies have risen

considerably, and there is no system in place that provides financial support for students. A culture of saving for higher education is lacking, nor is there a system of scholarships for talented students who face financial constraints.

Much confusion still exists in society concerning the recognition of doctoral programs and international study programs. The labor market has not yet responded to the value added by doctoral training; thus, those obtaining such degrees have not received the compensation warranted by such specialization.

The rapid changes of the 1990s have affected higher educa-

tion regulations, its system of operation, and the network of institutions. But the actors involved in this transformation have paid less attention to the issue of educational quality. In the years to come, within the established institutional and organizational framework, the content of programs and the quality of training will require more attention. ■

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Euro-Shape and Local Content: The Bottom Line on Romanian Higher Education Reform

Alexandra Horobet and Bogdan Chiritoiu

Alexandra Horobet is assistant professor in the Department of International Business and Economics, Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania. Bogdan Chiritoiu is assistant professor in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Bucharest, Romania.

The European Commission, which is generally fairly unimpressed with Romanian progress toward European Union (EU) harmonization, notes in its Agenda 2000 that the education sector will not create problems for Romania's accession. The Romanian Ministry of Education also reflects optimism when presenting 1999 as a year of reform in education: "1999 will be the year of concrete actions toward visible and comprehensive changes in education, the year when all changes initiated previous to or in 1998 will be completed."

This article reviews the mixed outcome of higher education reform to date. Higher education is one sector that registered strong growth during the transition in Romania, yet such growth was not matched by increased resources, leaving the sector as starved as it was before 1989. Moreover, efforts to improve the content of higher education have encountered little success, and today Romanian universities retain many of the failings of the communist past.

Failures of the System

A number of recurrent characteristics of Romanian higher education are blamed for its lack of competitiveness. These have been targeted for change by successive governments: (1) The university system concentrates on information transfer; it aims more at the memorization and reproduction of information rather than the acquisition and application of knowledge. (2) The system does not permit sufficient choices for individualized training, does not

recognize or encourage individual achievement, and promotes an obsolete concept of personal achievement as simple quantitative expansion (increased volume of information, more classes, more examinations, etc.). (3) The system uses local—i.e., national—standards of achievement, even though educational standards are increasingly being internationalized. (4) The system emphasizes the acquisition of general qualifications, even though educational priorities worldwide have moved on to target graduate studies. (5) The system is a centralist one in which detailed decisions are taken only by high-ranking managers. (6) It is a system that is too susceptible to the pressures of corruption involving grading, competitions, job offers, and examinations.

Reform Priorities

Education reform is linked with the overall reform process; it should not "follow other reforms" but rather is a condition of their success. Moreover, it can be achieved more rapidly if other reforms are initiated simultaneously. Over the medium run, investments in education can be extremely beneficial to the success of transition as a whole.

The reform strategy of the current education minister is structured around 12 areas, several of which are relevant here.

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First, the administration intends to improve the infrastructure of education and to promote the development of information technology use. Large investments from the central budget are granted on a competitive basis to universities pursuing such goals.