

that is also designed to strengthen the competence of UATs' high-level technical personnel. However, detailed studies of UATs reveal serious academic drift, which divert them from their original industry-oriented and market-based mission.

#### ACADEMIC DRIFT IN UATs

Academic drift refers to the tendency of newer and specialized colleges to boost their research activities in ways that emulate large research universities. A form of institutional isomorphism, the process often means that applied knowledge, intended to be directly useful, gradually loses its close ties to practice. Detailed studies of several UATs reveal such academic drift. While the original plan for UATs was to demonstrate innovation through cooperation with local enterprises and industries, in practice, this is not taking place. Instead, UAT faculty devote most of their energy to publishing and applying for major scientific projects at the national level—as these achievements pave the path to promotion. Academic drift results from institutional processes linked to performance-related measures, such as stimulating publishing and participating in major national research projects through partnerships with regional re-

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**Over 600 undergraduate colleges and universities (mostly local second-tier universities and independent colleges) established since 1999 are proposed as the main body of the planned UAT transformation.**

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search universities in China's middle and western regions; offering extremely high financial rewards to academics for each paper published in high-ranked journals; or garnering projects at the national level—while offering much lower incentives for university–industry projects. Coupled with the fact that UATs are less competitive collaborating with industries (which prefer to reach out to established research universities when in need of advice or technical assistance), such counterproductive processes lead UAT faculty to shift their efforts away from their primary tasks. Still, when interviewed, more than 90 percent of interviewees thought the papers they published were of little use and admitted that most of the papers they had written resulted from copying and combining ideas from papers published by others.

#### CONCLUSION

The process of academic drift in UATs highlights a basic contradiction between policy and practice. Instead of ac-

tively collaborating with the industry using applied technical expertise, they display a strong organizational inertia, largely because of long-standing macropolitical orientations prioritizing academic research. College and university rankings, developed by government or nongovernmental entities, weight scientific and technological innovation heavily. The persistence of the traditional evaluation system also rewards publishing and acquiring projects. Unless policymakers acknowledge, and succeed in controlling, these tendencies, academic drift will keep UATs from fulfilling their original mission. ■

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2018.94.10530>

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## University Autonomy and Accountability in Russian Higher Education

ANDREI VOLKOV AND DARA MELNYK

*Andrei Volkov is academic policy adviser at the Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO, Russia. E-mail: andrei\_volkov@skolkovo.ru. Dara Melnyk is graduate research assistant at the Center for International Higher Education, Boston College, US. E-mail: melnykd@bc.edu.*

We are currently experiencing the heyday of university transformation, as many higher education systems, including in Russia, are looking to upgrade their universities from the national to the global level of operation. During this process, independent strategic thinking by university leadership is critical, and this is only possible with sufficient autonomy.

#### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Throughout the 300-year history of Russian higher education, the level of university autonomy has oscillated. Originally, institutional design was borrowed from Germany, and the first university charters contained a bold level of autonomy—in contrast with other public institutions in the Russian empire. By the middle of the eighteenth century, universities had become hotbeds of liberal thinking, and in an effort to curtail this trend, Emperor Nicholas I significantly reduced their rights. Then, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Alexander II restored their initial, relatively high level of independence, as part of the process of Europeanization of the country.

In the 1920s, the Soviet government redrew all social structures, including higher education. Universities were

stripped of all powers to administer their own affairs, and control over curricula, funding, the awarding of degrees, admissions, governance, and faculty appointments became centralized. At that time, university autonomy would have been an impossible ideal to strive for; independent strategic thinking was unthinkable. The Cold War and the arms race forced the Soviet government to look for a new approach to training scientists and engineers. A group of higher educational institutions with special rights in governance and curriculum design was established. Two good examples of such institutions are the well-known Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology (“Phystech”) and National Research Nuclear University.

The period that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union can be termed “the abandoned 90s”: sudden autonomy was granted to institutions that were completely unprepared for it. The share of young adults receiving university education surged from 17 percent to 60 percent, and the number of “quasi universities” grew exponentially, as every institution offering postsecondary education of any kind claimed the title of “university.” Simultaneously, the brain drain on institutions reached an unprecedented scale. Russian higher education institutions were in a state of disarray, with unprecedented autonomy and little accountability.

In the early 2000s, the university landscape started to change. In exchange for their commitment to develop, universities were given significant resources and new statuses. One by one, elite university groups (including the well-known 5–100 Academic Excellence Initiative) were formed.

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**Throughout the 300-year history of Russian higher education, the level of university autonomy has oscillated.**

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These institutions were forcefully pulled out of organizational apathy, and some of them used the momentum to reimagine themselves. (Meanwhile, federal standards became increasingly lax.) What these initiatives essentially did was provide conditions for development. However, development *per se* requires genuine autonomy—and enough strategic initiative to make use of it.

**THE COST OF AUTONOMY TODAY**

Autonomy does not mean that higher educational institutions can do what they please. The price to pay is taking responsibility for their decisions and being accountable before their primary stakeholders: students, alumni, faculty, and the general public. If a university is responsible for its

aims and actions, its scholars decide themselves what to research and teach and how, and students design their study tracks. Blaming “the system” becomes difficult.

A historical lack of autonomy in Russia has resulted in chronic deficiencies in terms of strategic thinking, and in meaningless, formalistic institutional missions. This has lowered the status of universities in public opinion—if a university does not take itself seriously, why should it be taken seriously by the public? On the other hand, a completely unregulated higher education system is doomed to entropy, while well thought-out regulatory policies can be immensely beneficial for growth. For instance, the 5–100 Academic Excellence Initiative, engineered to propel top Russian universities toward global competitiveness, has proved to be a strong catalyzer for innovation in higher education.

The 90s, with their tidal wave of “quasi universities,” taught Russia to fear that if universities’ autonomy suddenly increased, institutions would become completely unaccountable and quality would plummet. The standard view is that autonomy and accountability are at the opposite ends of a spectrum, that they are antithetical to one another, and that either extremist perspective leads to a lose-lose situation: high autonomy and zero accountability result in the abuse of public trust; low autonomy and high accountability inevitably lead to replicating and impoverishing education and research activities.

**AUTONOMY and ACCOUNTABILITY**

The standard view, however, is not the only possible way to think about the autonomy–accountability dialectic. Universities can simultaneously boast a high level of autonomy and demonstrate a high level of accountability. What should be done to make this possible in Russian higher education?

- First, top universities should be encouraged to exercise the right to design and modify their curricula, choose the language of instruction, and determine tuition fees and admissions procedures.
- Second, it is necessary to switch to long-term, competitive, performance-based, block-grant funding. At present, the Russian government funding is allocated through line-item budgets, which means that funds allocated to universities are granted with strict guidelines on how to use them. This system inhibits strategic investments and planning for ambitious projects.
- Third, universities must direct their efforts toward diversifying their income. Currently, top Russian universities are enjoying increased government funding. While this is critical to propel Russian higher education to world-class level, being dependent on a single funding source is limiting the universities’ autonomy and ability to manage their own development.

- Fourth, intellectual initiative in strategic planning, as well as the final say regarding university strategy, should not belong to the central agency, but should be decentralized. Error is human, and the probability that the central agency will make a strategic mistake that will affect every university in the system negatively is very high. Local experiments, on the other hand, foster innovation, and mistakes made locally do not affect the whole sector. For Russia, the way to do this might be strengthening local boards of trustees, comprised of lay members and representatives of key stakeholders. This would again establish links between university governance and the public, students, alumni, and faculty. Currently, boards of trustees in Russian universities merely act as audit committees that spend most of their “board time” approving financial and legal transactions. Instead, their main function should be ensuring their universities’ accountability to stakeholders. In order for this to become possible, boards of trustees must be given, in particular, the power to select, appoint, and dismiss the executive head of the institution. ■

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2018.94.10531>

## Competitive Strategies of Vietnamese Higher Educational Institutions

Do MINH NGOC

*Do Minh Ngoc is management lecturer at the Faculty of Management and Tourism, Hanoi University, Vietnam. E-mail: ngocdm@hanu.edu.vn.*

In an unrelenting effort to renovate the educational system, the Vietnamese government has embarked on a Higher Education Reform Agenda (or HERA) for the period 2006–2020, which grants institutional autonomy to universities and colleges, allowing them to decide their own size and finances. While the Agenda is nearing its end and tertiary institutions have completed a pilot project from 2014 to 2017 as part of HERA, it is time for Vietnamese higher education institutions to start reflecting on strategies to prepare for necessary changes moving forward, ensuring their sustainable development and existence.

### THE REVOLUTIONARY AGENDA

Since the *Doi Moi* (Renovation) policy of 1986, the Viet-

namese higher education system has gone through groundbreaking changes, including eliminating the monopolistic control on education by the state, and the permission to open private universities and colleges. However, academic institutions are still subjected to centralized planning and financially reliant on government funding. Understanding that a transformation was inevitable in order to improve the quality and relevance of its higher education institutions in a market-driven economy, the Vietnamese government approved HERA (known as Resolution 14/2005/NQ-CP) in 2005. One of the key elements of HERA is allowing universities to decide on student quotas and program content and to manage their own budgeting activities. In general, HERA has been well accepted by the public and by the universities themselves, and is expected to completely renovate the tertiary education system. So far, as a result of HERA, all institutions in the country have been granted independence and the quality of research and teaching staff has improved.

Although the government still partially finances their operations, the autonomy of tertiary institutions continues to be the ultimate goal, as confirmed by the deputy prime minister at a recent conference reviewing the pilot project for the period 2014–2017. Ultimately, universities and colleges will not be any different from independent enterprises, and thus, this article adopts a strategic management perspective to analyze their common strategies. Generally, universities serve mainly domestic students and their strategies at both corporate and business levels aim to facilitate growth and expansion.

### CORPORATE LEVEL STRATEGY

Many institutions have been implementing a strategy of cooperation at the corporate level by developing joint academic programs with foreign counterparts. This is a result of the 1987 government policy to leverage international collaboration in order to diversify the financial resources of the education system. The first such alliance was made in 1998 and the number of international joint programs has increased ever since. Joint program options range from diplomas to undergraduate and graduate degrees, and to PhD degrees. Students enrolled in these programs pay very high fees, get access to foreign curricula, receive degrees from foreign institutions, and can choose to spend half of the program in Vietnam and the other half abroad. International joint programs generate significant income for the institutions, help improve academic quality, enhance reputation, and attract more students through an improved offer of programs.

### BUSINESS-LEVEL STRATEGIES

The *market penetration* approach intends to increase sales of current services on the current market, which means recruiting more students to existing courses. Vietnamese