**New trends in higher education**

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A transition to the market economy under conditions of a prolonged economic crisis and the demolition of the totalitarian system have quite a significant influence on the system of specialists training, in general, and the system of higher learning, in particular. In its turn, reformation mood amidst higher educational institutions staff has to a great extent cleared the way for perestroika and transition to the market economy: a number of University faculty members found themselves among the political and economic leaders of the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s.

It seemed natural that the first Decree of President Yeltsin was a famous Decree on Education which enunciated a leading role of the system of education in social development. However, the results of these reforms within the first four years look discouraging, if not catastrophic for the Russian system of education which was seen by many people - and not only in Russia - as one of the achievements of the Epoch of Communism. Let's consider Omsk State University as an example of what is going on in the sphere of Russian education.

Omsk State University was founded in 1974 by a special decision of the Party leaders in Moscow. State universities have always been elite educational institutions in Russia where the best professors worked and the best scientific schools were created. By that time Omsk had become the second (after Novosibirsk) industrial center of Siberia. So it was reasonable to set up the University here, the 13th institution of higher learning in the town. Unlike other educational establishments which oriented themselves on the training of specialists for particular professions, state universities were allowed to provide general or nonvocational education. Due to this they attracted progressive-minded scholars and free-thinking students. Local authorities, who had to accept this situation, did not care much about universities' development, construction of their new buildings and students' dormitories, as universities were financed direct from Moscow.

Cancellation of detailed regulation of university teaching process and financial control has become the most significant result of the reform. State Committee for Higher Education (now it is renamed as Ministry for Education) which is located in Moscow and is in charge of state universities within Russian Government determines "the rules of the game". This Committee supervises activities of public organizations which unite representatives of top universities. These are, first of all developing State Educational Standards Projects. These Standards assess the subjects and their scope to be taught at a university, so that the latter is able to certify students and award them appropriate degrees. The Standard determines the content of approximately 70% of a curriculum, the rest is for the University to do independently. Apart from devising standards, Learning and Methods Unions draw decisions concerning this or that university's ability to provide training in particular specialities. Without these approvals universities do not have right to independently implement specialist training and degree awarding.

In comparison with the previous situation the system of higher education has become much more liberal. In fact, any faculty member may teach what s/ he wants and the way s /he prefers, actual monitoring being conducted by Head of Department or Dean. Nothing similar to reports from American University teachers or Deans exists there. Many University Rectors are concerned about it, but so far nobody has been courageous enough to really exercise control, because teachers' salaries are so low that some of them might leave universities, regarding these inspection measures to be insulting.

The system of Standards is also being critisized. The Committee logic is clear: if the government finances universities, and if according to the result of their academic achievements students are given diplomas not of a particular university pattern, but of a pattern universal for the whole country, then there should exist a particular standardization of curricula contents. Moreover, the government is afraid that in the absense of standards some state educational institutions will radically reduce the curricula scope, which, in its turn, will lower the quality of state diploma of education. The essence of the criticism is that in reality the difference in diploma quality is universally recognized: university diploma are valued much more than those from other institutions of higher learning. Meanwhile, state universities, especially the ones located far from Moscow have to go through numerous statutory approval procedures before setting up new department divisions. For example, for the last two years Omsk State University has unsuccessfully been trying to get a license for training specialists in the field of finance and banking, though all the new commercial banks located in Omsk give employment to this University graduates in the first place. Without real control over curricula content, extremely complicated standardization and licensing procedures look artificial and bureaucratic, at least with regard to state universities. The latter should be authorized to independently create curricula, new and unconventional including, as far as all specialities are concerned.

Like in many other cases the Russian reform has stopped half-way. Another reason to critisize the Committee is the fact that the government systematically does not meet its commitments to finance universities. A new model of the system of education envisages governmental funding of universities from the federal budget in volumes necessary for training the number of students set by the Committee for a university in question. Every year the Committee informs a university about how many students and in which specialities it may enroll this time. In the case of Omsk State University this norm is about 600 full-time students annually. In the past the Committee provided the University with detailed instructions as to what sum of money it may spend and for what purposes. The University had four bank accounts, the main account control including 18 positions. Nowadays there are two bank accounts at the University's disposal (one - in roubles, the other - in foreign currency) with only three expense items of budgetary funds. These are teachers' salaries, students' stipends and other expenses covering equipment investments, running expenses and future development investments.

Financing per normative (i.e. percentage ratio of en rolled students/ratio of percentage to enrolled student body) is another significant change in university functioning. University rectors enthusiastically accepted financing per normative since, on the one hand, they are tired to persuade the Committee of the necessity in every rouble spent. On the other hand, efficient decisions concerning resources application can be made only locally. In the period of the 1992 hyperinflation when a new financing system started functioning, Omsk State University decided to spend additional funds on teachers' salaries. 26 monthly salaries were paid during 12 months. At that time it seemed that only two-three crisis years should be lived through to hold teachers' staff. In 1993-1994 Omsk University purchased several generations/classes of computers PC 386 and 486. However, since mid -1994 the Government actually stopped financing universities by other expense item. The crisis broke out. Fearing the possibility of being closed institutions of higher learning did not cut down admission of students in 1994 or in 1995. Fearing public protests, the Government neither closed any higher educational establishment, nor reduced enrollment, though it was clear that federal budget funds would not be enough for both this number of students and institutions. The latter have to find resources to cover their expenses on their own. Practically all the universities have established Boards of Trustees, Alumni Associations and asked for local authorities' assistance. These sources do not give enough money. To do research in universities has become complicated due to weakness of their production facilities and production crisis, as a whole. In this situation, it seems that the only way for universities to survive is to provide fee-paying educational services.

In the period of crisis enterprises can't show great demand for educational services. Financial organisations resort to special agencies services rather than to universities to train their specialists. The only actual customers are governmental agencies (employment agencies) . Governmental agencies have state budget funds specified for unemployed retraining. These agencies strictly audit estimates of costs on education and do not allow to significantly increase expenses on teachers' payment. That's why the university on the whole receives very little sums from this source, while teachers working for these agencies can get 5 - 6 times more money than when instructing students. It's interesting, but despite this difference in salaries teachers seem to consider their work with students more important and serious than the one by a contract with agencies. Of late, community demand is especially strong in the so-called "top priority" professions, primarily in the spheres of law and economics, the early years of perestroika being obviously the peak in the latter. But recently law specialities lead without question. Probably, this is due to the fact that our entrepreneurs believe that in this country it is not possible to gain economic wisdom and business skills from textbooks and that university professors can't explain what's going on in Russian economy, while "law is worth studying". In the past, Omsk State University admitted 100 students per year to instruct in "Jurisprudence". Nowadays this number has been reduced to 75, but at the same time the University enrolls over 100 extra students annually, the so-called "beyond-the-plan students", i.e. above the number set by the Committee. Still this doesn't help meet the needs: the number of applicants is by far larger. And that is despite a high (as to regional scale) tuition fee of $1500 and even $2500 a year.

Within Omsk University budget structure the share of receipts from educational services exceeds 40%. This sum of extra earnings approximately equals running expenses, and,consequently, is not enough for the University development. According to our estimates, twice as much is needed to make renovations and to purchase minimum of required equipment plus to provide University functioning at the -end-of -the-70s level. The main secret of the University vital capacity in 1994 - 1995 is that local authorities permitted institutions of higher learning not to pay their bills for public utilities, primarily, for central heating, in Siberia the bills for the latter running as high as wages fund. And nobody knows how long this situation will last. Mind, that the University gets extra earnings from "beyond-the-plan" students tuition fees at the Departments of Law and Economics as well as for extension courses in new specialities, such as management, marketing, commerce, social public services, psychology. The University could earn more, if other departments were able to market their programs. The problem is that the main departments were set up in the period of the global opposition between the USSR and the USA. Those main departments are the Departments of Mathematics and Physics which today have the most highly qualified staff, computer classes, laboratories and best-stocked library. For several years in a row these departments can't or can hardly enroll the set number of students, still they are the main users of the University's assets. Like the majority of industrial enterprises these departments are not ready for conversion, but choose the ? of passive survival". Under the democratic procedures of choices the University authorities are not able to radically reform existing curricula. Such a situation is likely to be in industry on the whole, too.

Perhaps, this fact helps understand why of late there is an obvious tendency among young people to get humanitarian education. They see what a disastrous position enterprises of defence industry, research institutions and universities have found themselves in. So today the younger generation chooses humanities. Omsk State University can be proud of the fact that it was the first state institution of higher learning in Russia to open the Department of Theology among its new specialities of humanitarian cycle. Some divisions of the History Department, such as Ethnography and Archaeology, as well as those of the Arts Department, Linguistics and Journalism, in particular, are popular among students. We can't but mention a great desire among students to study a foreign, sometimes, two foreign languages while at the University, and not only as an obligatory subject during the set period of time- one and a half through two semesters - but also at some elective, intensive or extension courses.

Finally, we should add that according to our estimates under radical reconstruction towards active marketing of new educational programs the University would be capable to normally function even at the current level of financing. If the University changes the 1:8 faculty-students ratios established now in Russia to 1:15 or 1:20, it will cope with paying teachers competitive salaries. Unfortunately, by the end of 1996 the university had to pay its first bill for central heating. So there emerge the main problem: to be or not to be.