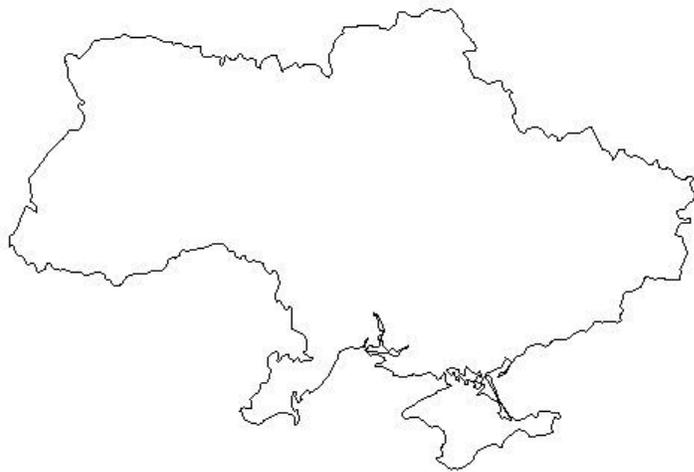


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***The Ukrainian Standardized External Testing Initiative (USETI)
Road Map***



Submitted by:
American Institutes for
Research
With:
American Councils for International
Education

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1. Introduction

The following are recommendations to the Ukrainian Center for Educational Quality Assessment (UCEQA) and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MOES) on the further development of external standardized testing as a tool for university admissions. Recommendations are made by the Ukrainian Standardized External Testing Initiative (USETI), a component of the Millennium Challenge Corporation Threshold Country Program for Ukraine (MCC-TCP), with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The MCC-TCP is a program based on a bilateral agreement between the governments of the United States of America and Ukraine. In this SOAG, the government of the Ukraine identified corruption in higher education, and in particular corruption in the admissions process, as a particular impediment to developing transparent practices in society. The expected outcomes outlined in the SOAG included: legislative development to secure testing processes, security of test sites, and census testing of all applying to higher educational institutions (HEIs) and the establishment of a passing score.

USETI, as a project was developed with 6 specific components aiming to achieve these outcomes:

Test development

Test security

Legislative foundations for institutionalizing testing

Public awareness

Test preparation materials and access

University admissions reform

The following Road Map recommends steps to develop external testing in Ukraine in line with the 6 components of USETI listed above. This Road Map is the product of observations and recommendations made by USETI consultants and staff from the beginning of project through August 2009. As of September 2009, while this Road Map was compiled, recommendations made in the past have been considered by both MOES and UCEQA and some have been incorporated already in plans for 2010 testing.

2. Recommended Next Steps for Testing in Ukraine

General Recommendations

1. Invest in continuous **organizational and professional development** and **quality assurance**, and institutionalize habits of strategic management
2. Commit to short-term and long-term **planning**, and ongoing, active participation in international communities of practice.
3. Achieve clarity on **exam purpose** as a way to crystallize paths to reaching varying goals.

Recommendations by Component

Test Development: Reinforce and build broad **test development** capacity for multiple purposes.

Test Security: Solidify test security and test administration tools.

Legislative Foundations: Secure and operationalize **legislative foundations**.

Public Awareness: Use **public outreach** to turn public support into public mandate.

Test Preparation: Further universal access to **test preparation** via direct intervention and stewardship over responsible test prep industry

University Admissions Reform: Further **university admissions standards** that are strong and clear, but allow customized usage to meet varied circumstances at HEIs

2.1 General Recommendation 1: Invest in continuous organizational and professional development and quality assurance, and institutionalize habits of strategic management

UCEQA should design and implement a plan for its organizational development, addressing both material and human resources and a strategy for the assurance of the quality of its procedures and products

2.1.1 Organizational development

UCEQA development and operational responsibilities are rapidly expanding. New tasks or improving the execution of existing tasks will bring along new responsibilities, resource needs and structural changes in the organization.

Recommendation

UCEQA would benefit from a strategic plan that would address short and long term development goals

2.1.2 Professional development

A young organization, UCEQA is still in its first stage of development and working with staff that was trained on the job for a relatively short time and only had limited opportunities to get experienced

Recommendation

UCEQA should develop and implement training schemes for all ranks of staff, according to the functions they fulfill.

2.1.3 Strategic Management and Quality Assurance

Strategic management and quality assurance are closely linked. An important management tool would be a description of all procedures that lead to the products UCEQA is responsible for and the quality criteria that should be met by these procedures and products

Recommendation

With the help of its experts the UCEQA management should draft a description of processes and products it is responsible for, and the quality criteria it aims to meet. This then would become an important component for a more comprehensive quality assurance plan that would also include measures for in- and external audits (also see 4.1.5), continuous improvement and communication of quality criteria to stakeholders and the audience at large.

2.2 General Recommendation 2: Commit to short-term and long-term planning, and ongoing, active participation in international communities of practice.

Proper planning is crucial to sustain the development of a testing system, and to win public support and confidence.

2.2.1 Planning strategically with stakeholders

One of the main recommendations made by USETI consultants is for UCEQA to engage in the process of strategic planning that includes the voices of pivotal decision makers. UCEQA has been forced to work from inertia from year to year. MOES policy makers have attempted to keep up with political will and decisions in directing UCEQAs work. It is important however for all decision makers to make strategic plans to expand the external testing process for several years in advance. This is important for proper administrative planning of the processes involved in delivering a testing system, but it is also important for the public acceptance of the system as one that inseparable from education itself.

Recommendation

UCEQA would benefit from the guidance of a steering committee or executive board, which could assist in long term planning of testing. The body should incorporate representatives of key stake holders in educational policy, such as representatives from Secondary School and HEIs, and include the main stake holders of external testing: the MOES and UCEQA. Such a body, responsible for the development of testing processes need not be large and its mission should be to devise long term plans and goals. These proposals and outlines should be shared with current political stake holders, who then also are instrumental in implementation. This body should also consume analytical information, statistics and results gathered through testing and use the outcomes to inform plans and goals it devises.

2.2.2 Taking advantage of 2013 window of opportunity

The 2012 – 2013 academic year, will see the introduction of the 12th grade in the secondary school system. This will mean that in 2012 there will be no graduating class from secondary school, which will also mean that there will be fewer applicants to HEIs.

Recommendation

The MOES and UCEQA should take this opportunity to properly analyze past experience with standardized testing for university admissions. It could also be an opportunity to introduce new systems to cement external testing in the future. The number of test takers will be quite low in this year and therefore UCEQAs “load” will be lighter.

Considerations that might be taken into account:

Could students begin taking subject tests for admissions in 11th grade for subjects where the curriculum is completed in 11th grade? This could add to efficiency in administration since subject test administration could be staggered throughout the 12th grade school year, rather than during a single month, which has been the norm. It would also give students the opportunity to better understand their chances of admission to specific HEIs.

Could 2012 be the year that an abilities test is introduced (see below)? The 2010 and 2011 admissions cycles could introduce an ability test on an experimental basis, and full introduction could take place in 2012. This could be particularly helpful if such an abilities test is be introduced specifically for those having graduated school in the past, since 2012 would include mostly such individuals.

2.2.3 Engaging with international best-practices

Standardized testing exists globally. Some countries have established systems; others are in the process of introducing standardized testing or only recently introduced systems. As USETI’s ability to support the inclusion of international standards in Ukraine’s developing system ramps down, stake holders and policy makers must establish direct engagement with relevant international communities to discuss pertinent issues. Attending to best practices is critical to not repeating mistakes made, and can often catalyze problem solving.

Recommendation

The MOES and UCEQA should make participation in international forums on testing standards a priority. This should include membership in international associations and participation in conferences and seminars. Funding for such purposes should be secured and such opportunities should be treated as justifiable professional development. It is also important that key policy makers participate in such events, particularly when it is clear that international counterparts will be of equal stature.

2.3 General Recommendation 2: Achieve clarity on exam purpose as a way to crystallize paths to reaching varying goals.

Initially external test scores were to be used for both securing a state “high-school diploma” (derzhavny attestat) and for university entrance. However, an underlying goal of the exam was also to monitor the quality of education and provide data for improving its quality.

These three test purposes are distinct and cannot easily be reconciled within one test. While for awarding a high school certificate a summative test assessing whether the student has achieved the national curriculum targets at a minimal level of sufficiency may do the job, for admission to university the student will have to satisfy yet different criteria that are

predictors for future success in academic studies. Such tests tap analytical and problem solving skills that are above the high school certificate level. For national assessment of educational progress tests are needed that operationalize national curricula in a detailed way, measure performance precisely at all levels and relate outcomes to factors that may influence these outcomes. A certificate test may thus be too easy and not predictive for university selection and not detailed enough for monitoring purposes, and so on.

UCEQA is the only entity in Ukraine with foundational abilities to develop and analyze variously purposed tests and also can play an authoritative leadership role to of build support for these initiatives and for their use in delivering and improving education.

2.3.1 School leaving certification

There is room for using standardized external testing for school leaving certificates. However, policy regarding such must be fair toward all students including those who are not interested in applying to HEIs upon graduation. The purpose of a standardized test upon school completion is to certify that a student has mastered knowledge and understanding taught in school at a sufficient level. Policy can make room for various levels of standardized tests that would allow students to show their level of proficiency depending on their plans for future study.

It must be noted that the system of standardized external testing as it has developed in Ukraine has also attempted to minimize the stress that school leavers are under in having to take too many exams and tests in the process of school leaving and university admissions. For the most part, this has influenced the reason that external tests today do serve a dual purpose.

Recommendation

Should policy makers decide to use standardized testing for school leaving certification then the intent of the test must be clear: to ascertain that students have mastered knowledge and skills taught in the school curriculum at a satisfactory level. This is especially true for the evaluation of those NOT intending to apply to HEIs at the time of school graduation. For students wishing to enter an HEI, an advanced level of school leaving tests may be developed to assess knowledge and skills beyond the standard expectations of a school curriculum, at least in those subjects related to their field of intended study, which could be used toward admissions decisions by HEIs.

The above would require that standards for each subject be set for mastery on various levels, which in turn would be operationalized in tests on various levels and students would take the level necessary depending on their future plans. In developing such a system however, policy makers must be realistic about the human resource effort and financial expectations of such a system.

2.3.2 University admissions

Tests for university admissions should identify those who are capable of continuing education at the university level. What must be taken into account in Ukraine is the system of higher education, and the fact that many mature individuals are interested in professional development, often changing fields, and returning to HEIs. In Ukraine one must return to the level of bacalavr if he/she wishes to obtain a specialty in a different field. There are programs available today that were not available 15 years ago (such as Business, Management and Public Relations), that mature adults would like to pursue. Also, the concept of lifelong learning has rooted in Ukrainian society.

Recommendation

External testing for university entrance must take into account these factors, and must make room for individuals who may have completed school at a time when the curriculum and educational content were radically different. As noted above, school leavers intending to apply to HEIs upon graduation could take advanced level school leaving tests that could be considered in admissions decisions.

For those who graduated school many years ago however, an alternative should exist. One such alternative could be an ability test to gauge reasoning abilities of HEI applicants. In 2009 a Concept Paper on ability test was developed and submitted to the MOES, with support from USETI. Ultimately policy makers might implement a system where all university admissions would be largely decided based upon scores from an ability test. Advanced subject tests, taken at school leaving by school leavers, could also be an additional criteria for determining admission, as would school transcripts.

2.3.3 Evaluating the Quality of Education

Monitoring the quality of education should not be solved solely with a tool that is meant for school leaving or university admissions. To properly monitor educational quality in secondary schools a system of such monitoring must be established, which would monitor educational achievements during the learning process – not only when pupils are leaving school – and identify factors influencing educational progress. Key to such a system is the availability of clear and measurable attainment standards, descriptions of relevant knowledge and understanding that should result from teaching the intended curriculum, and proficiency levels at which these can be demonstrated. Once this has been developed a system could be implemented in Ukraine for monitoring the outcomes of education and relate these to factors that may influence these outcomes.

Recommendation

In 2009 a concept paper on institutionalizing a monitoring system was developed with support from the Project for Equal Access to Quality of Education. MOES should continue to research the issue of quality monitoring and pursue possibilities in this regard. An important aspect of this effort should be the development of instruments (background questionnaires) that relate outcomes to factors influencing these, such as teacher behavior, quality of text books, student motivation and student background. Another important factor is a sampling design that would allow for identifying differences between school types, regions etc, and developments over time and across the country

Ukraine has also participated in international monitoring programs, TIMMS and PISA on an experimental basis. Results of such project should also be taken into account in terms of monitoring quality.

A main issue is proper use of results, statistics and information gained from these programs to inform adjustments to curriculum and teaching, with the end goal of increasing the quality and relevance of education. For this, guidance from trained psychometricians and assessment experts is indispensable

3. Recommendations by Component

3.1 COMPONENT ONE: Reinforce and build broad test development capacity for multiple purposes.

Test development processes have grown immensely in UCEQA in a very short period of time. Thanks to training delivered through direct technical assistance UCEQA's methodologists are stronger and international best practices are being considered in UCEQA processes. For 2009-2010 UCEQA plans to pilot tests, secure its item bank and make wider use of psychometric analyses

3.1.1 Item and Test Development

Through USETI, over 130 individuals received training in item writing and test development, including UCEQA subject specialists. To be sure, the trainings have increased the professional skills in writing items and developing reliable and valid tests for UCEQA personnel, as well as for individuals not directly working for UCEQA. UCEQA must be willing and able to use the skills gained to increase the quality of tests.

The abilities of all trained individuals (not just strictly UCEQA employees) can be tapped to step-up item production. The internal processes of item development must make room for the use of items drawn from outsourced professionals, while still managing risk. It is important that UCEQA maintains strict procedures in item development with regards to test operations. Leaks of any items could be seen as an opportunity for corrupt practices, which would have detrimental effects on the public's perception of transparency.

It is also important that UCEQA issues specifications for item development and test assembly that foster professional practices and include blueprints that guarantee validity and optimal reliability of the test.

Last but not least item writers and test developers, should have access to, and take into account psychometric analyses of previous testing sessions.

UCEQA should also consider ways to pilot items before they are used in tests. To date this has been difficult due to security concerns, however this practice would increase test quality tremendously. This is not only true for the objective (closed) items, but also for the open ended questions, and in particular for the marking schemes for these questions, which often are neglected

Recommendation

UCEQA management, including mid-level management, should be responsive to ideas and recommendations made by all individuals who received training. Mechanisms to include such recommendations and ideas should be included in internal processes in test development. UCEQA should institutionalize an item banking system which would be flexible enough to incorporate input from those non-UCEQA employed individuals trained in item writing, while adhering to necessary security measures. The issue of item-banking is further described below; however, by adhering to some of the recommendations, UCEQA should be able to incorporate the skills of outsourced individuals while having control over final content of operational tests.

UCEQA should review the test specifications that are used for guiding the item writers to achieve the following goals: (1) foster discussion and peer reviewing rather than solitary work and (2) doing away with unnecessary restrictions to the creativity of item writers

Item development and test construction processes should draw in expertise from UCEQA subject specialists. These specialists have received an introduction to test development and test construction. Further training is necessary, though; item writers must understand and trust the psychometric analysis of previous items and tests, and of their own work. Item writers and test developers should be familiarized with statistical information that encapsulates what works and what doesn't work in a test item. Issues that are clear problems can only be avoided in the future if item writers and test developers are cognizant that they exist.

A system to pilot items before their inclusion in operational tests should also be considered. One way is piloting of items by embedding these items into live tests while excluding them from determining student scores. This will only work, however, in situations where items are not disclosed. It is possible to embed items in school tests on a sample basis and use them one or two years later

3.1.2 Item Banking

UCEQA has been developing its item bank over the past several years. In this process UCEQA has gained more and more information and skills to develop an internationally recognized item banking system. As UCEQA continues to grow in this field it is essential that procedures are set up that ensure proper feeding of draft and finalized items into the bank, as well as the security of the banks themselves and all materials stored in them. In itself working with item banks for generation of tests rather than working for specific tests adds to the security of testing.

Recommendation

UCEQA should set up an item bank with all functionalities necessary for the management of the item development process and generation of tests, along with proper procedures for accessing the bank at different levels (who has the master key, who can access specific subject sections, etc)

UCEQA should not be afraid to use outsourced item writers producing items for this bank. By outlining specific criteria for outsourced item writers to follow, and by contractually securing the roles and responsibilities of such outsourced personnel, UCEQA will have a measure of control over input, with the review process and test construction standards ensuring added security.

3.1.3 Psychometrics writ large

Psychometrics is a relatively new field in Ukraine. Yet, using psychometrics in the process of any educational measurement is key to guaranteeing the reliability and validity of the results and to maintaining and bettering the quality of tests. Also in developing and applying performance standards psychometrical assistance is indispensable

Thus far introducing psychometrics as a discipline in the system of higher education in Ukraine has been limited. It would seem that there is room for broadening the current discipline of "psychological testing", offered in Ukraine, to include basics in psychometrics as used in educational measurement. More research by specialists in psychometrics and further dialogue with Ukrainian counterparts is necessary to truly establish any program in this field. The scope is far greater than that of a two year project, because it would involve intensive training of Ukrainian specialists.

Recommendation

MOES must be willing to invest in creating a pool of psychometricians. On the short term this would mean sending one or two trainable specialists abroad to receive customized training at one of the world's institutes for educational measurement. Stakeholders should be willing to make such opportunities a priority, including actively seeking donors (in country and abroad) if necessary. On the longer term this should involve identifying a HEI that would be committed to developing a program, recruiting potential instructors and investing in training and recruiting students. Ukraine can draw upon existing partnerships with foreign specialists to secure proper advising, consulting and training. . It is important that those involved in such development not overextend the possibilities and would be best to concentrate on a small pool of specialists to train in the future.

3.1.4 Educational measurement programs specifically

In the 2008-2009 academic year an Educational Measurement program was introduced in all pedagogic HEIs in Ukraine, in an effort to familiarize future educators specifically with the basics of this field. USETI assisted in introducing this course, including training for instructors from the institutions. It is important that as this course grounds itself and grows, and that principles of educational measurement be internalized by Ukrainian educators. An important auxiliary effect will be a larger pool of potential item writers.

Recommendation

Besides securing the inclusion of the education measurement courses in the pedagogical institutes, more training must be given to those instructors responsible for teaching such courses. Research into the field must continue and the pedagogical establishment must be educated.

The MOES, having introduced the course, should be involved in furthering training and research. Ideally, the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences could work with the MOES to develop a sound preparatory course for current instructors. In this case the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences could continue to research the field and deliver enhanced training. The MOES must however be willing to invest the resources necessary for a solid base for this course. It is understandable that in some HEIs the course will flourish more than in others, with some HEIs becoming recognized specialists. Laying the proper groundwork for this evolution is critical.

The MOES should also create a platform for sharing of best practices gained at home and through interaction with international communities. Faculty from HEIs involved in various international projects and national research should be consulted in further training modules and curriculum development, and access to key decision makers in this field (the point people at the MOES) should be open.

As more and more educational specialists become better versed in issues of educational measurement they should be incorporated into the testing community. The input of such professionals could be an immense added value to the system. It would represent responsible strategic planning for the MOES to already consider venues through which policy makers and those responsible for external testing could include the ideas and skills of these persons. A simple format would be to develop an association of educational measurement specialists, which would bring together MOES specialists, UCEQA personnel, outsourced item writers and those involved in educational measurement. The Testing and Monitoring in Education (TIMO) journal would be a logical publication for such an association to debate issues, form consensus and share best practices.

3.1.5 External Auditing of Test Administrations

To date test administrations have been internally audited. Part of the reason for this is the limited number of specialists involved in testing (educational measurement specialists and psychometricians) in Ukraine. Most such specialists are directly involved in the development and administration of testing. External auditing has also been ignored because of the fact that thus far only 2 nationwide sessions have taken place and the need may not yet be as apparent.

The use of external testing is meant to bring about transparency in the process of assessing education. To act as a check and balance for institutions directly involved in developing and carrying out testing policy and administration, and to insure transparent practices with the general public and the “consumers” of testing (schools, HEIs and test takers), it is important to make external auditing norm of the system. Proof of the value of such auditing can be found in the public monitoring practices of test administrations and admissions campaigns, supported in part by USETI in the past. The majority of “consumers” were convinced in the transparency of the system thanks to such monitoring.

Recommendation

Besides continuing robust public watch-dogging of test administration, auditing of the quality of testing instruments and procedures should also become a norm. In this case the MOES and UCEQA need not (indeed should not, so as to protect distance) establish the institutions responsible, but policy makers should secure systems that would make such auditing possible. This can be achieved through government tenders to institutions that can take on the task, or through entities that can secure non-government funding. To date it is difficult to say that there exists a watchdog institution with requisite capacity (in reviewing scoring and scaling practices based on samples and conducting independent validity analysis) in Ukraine, however, MOES, and UCEQA as a partner of testing systems, should actively encourage this process and should commence establishing guidelines, which would clearly spell out procedures and insure access to information. Studying institutions and auditing procedures established elsewhere would be recommended (e.g. Ofsted in the UK and the Dutch Inspectorate in the Netherlands, who both evaluate national testing on an annual basis)

3.2 COMPONENT 2: Ensure security in test construction and administration.

Securing test content is critical for any testing enterprise. UCEQA has always made security a central priority in its operations. USETI has assisted in procuring security equipment for printing facilities and consulted on legislative issues regarding security violations.

3.2.1 Preventing Leaks of Test Content

Protecting the content of tests has been a central focus of UCEQA’s security procedures. However it is important to remember that test security and test quality go hand in hand and security measures should not compromise test quality. As the community of testing specialists grows issues of proper security of test items and content will increase.

Recommendation

As noted above (Test Development Processes, Item Banking) recognized methods of item banking should assist in protecting test content. Contracts, clearly stating that information submitted to UCEQA is the property of UCEQA and becomes “corporate intelligence” should be implemented. It is also important that outsourced item writers be compelled to understand that their input, and confidentiality of this input, is strategic to making the system work. While there are cultural issues to be taken into account, policy makers and UCEQA

management can effectively increase the sense of responsibility of outsourced item writers by continuously emphasizing the value of their contributions to tests. Outsourced item writers will believe in their role and adhere to issues of confidentiality more if they not only see the effects of the system working, but also if they are recognized as pivotal actors. To some degree this is a public outreach exercise. It is just as important as convincing the general public that external testing is more fair and transparent.

Securing the item bank is critical and access must be limited. Subject specialists, as key content specialists, will need to be relied upon to ensure confidentiality, while being professional enough to ensure quality content. Such individuals must be trusted from the outset and vetting processes for job placement must ensure that trustworthy.

3.2.2 Proper Training of Proctors and Markers

Although securing operational tests physically is important to test security, physical security is just as important during test administration as it is during marking. Putting effort into securing the content of exams prior to a test administration will not be justified if there are leaks during the test administration or unfair practices during marking. Proctors must report cheating and have the necessary authority to dismiss a student for such practices. Markers involved in scoring open items must grade according to specific guidelines.

Recommendation

It is clear that UCEQA is taking steps to increase the responsibilities of proctors by reducing their number while at the same time increasing the number of test administrations each individual is responsible for. It is important that training for proctors continues and that the training be uniform for all proctors. The importance of written instructions (manuals) that explain how to handle and report violations in testing rooms and at test sites is critical.

Training and monitoring the work of markers is just as important. Again, written scoring rubrics are key, and the inclusion of samples of scripts of various scores would be helpful to markers to understand what score might best fit the scripts they are reviewing. It is also important that marker training include not only written rubrics, but interactive, hands on methodology work. Markers should practice grading scripts during training and the reasons for scores should be discussed. This will help markers be more uniform in their work and make the review process more standardized. Inter-rater reliability practices should become standard.

3.2.3 Public Monitoring

For the 2008 and 2009 test administrations, USETI was able to support the work of the Civic Network OPORA to administer public monitoring of the administration of sessions. The Committee of Voters of Ukraine was also involved in monitoring with support from the International Renaissance Foundation. Public monitoring proved to be an effective tool in minimizing possible violations, as well as gaining public support in the issues of transparency.

Although the use of properly trained proctors will assist in mitigating violations it is important for public monitoring to continue until testing is cemented in the system of education. The biggest issues will be securing funding for monitoring organizations, and making sure that monitoring continues to be an action of civil society, rather than a government controlled enterprise. MOES and UCEQA support for the activity, as representative institutions of the government, are essential, but responsibility for monitoring must remain in the hands of NGOs.

Recommendation

The MOES and UCEQA should actively promote public monitoring to possible in-country donors to support these processes. Outreach to NGOs and CSOs to interest them in finding funds for carrying out such activities is also extremely important. Endorsement of such organizations should be considered by both the MOES and UCEQA. In time, test prep or companies might be contributors to the effort.

3.3 COMPONENT THREE: Secure and operationalize legislative foundations.

Although USETI was successful in assisting with the preparation of basic legal amendments that institutionalize testing in the education process, there will be other legislative issues that will arise as testing grows. The experience of USETI in assisting with legislative development issues concerning testing has shown that gaining the consensus of all stake holders is key to the success of such endeavors. Such consensus does not come about easily and must continuously be nourished.

3.3.1 Bill #4241

Bill #4241, which contains amendments to current legislation that would secure the use of external testing in admissions, was accepted in first reading on April 15, 2009. The bill was returned to committee, changes were made and accepted by the committee and is currently in the Verkhovna Rada “docket” for discussion and review.

Recommendation

The MOES and UCEQA should advocate for support of draft bill #4241. This legislation is essential for securing the use of external standardized testing in admissions to HEIs.

3.3.2 Legislative and Policy Development Venue

There are several issues that come into play when developing legislation or policy. Each “player” will be interested in promoting those interests he sees as key. For this reason it is important that key stakeholders have the opportunity to discuss and debate issues so that they may find common ground and work together toward achieving common and individual goals. USETI’s ELPEG provided a venue through which MOES, UCEQA, and key legislators from various factions and specialists in the field could come together to find consensus and move forward and drafting legislation, regulations and other normative documents. This is important in order to gain the necessary political support for reform processes.

Recommendation

The MOES should continue the tradition of cooperation with the VR Committee on Science and Education. On issues of testing, UCEQA should of course also be called to the table. A possible venue for such cooperation could be the standing round-table, initiated by MOES in 2008, where all stakeholders came together to discuss the role of testing in admissions and the admission rules for 2009. The VR Committee on Science and Education hearings can also be used.

3.4 COMPONENT FOUR: Use public outreach to turn public support into public mandate.

Sound public outreach will be extremely important to maintain in the coming years. Although to date the public has been showing support for the implementation of external testing in admissions, it will take several years for the system to become the “norm.” Also,

there will most likely still be changes to the system in the coming years, as policy makers and UCEQA come to a common ground on sustainable practices.

Outreach to Schools

As UCEQA plans to use HEIs as test registration and administration sites in 2010 (thus moving it out of the secondary school system), it is important that information about testing procedures, subjects, registration and changes be delivered to schools. Almost 75% of test-takers are school graduates in any given year. Not all schools have access to electronic information and some schools are fairly remote. Budgetary restrictions will have to be taken into account as well, since the costs of direct mailings can be quite high.

Recommendation

UCEQA's regional centers (RCEQAs) will need to continue to work with schools through local educational departments and teacher training institutes. Paper information should be made available to these institutions in the necessary quantities. On a national level information should regularly be posted in the MOES newspaper "Osvita Ukrayiny", which is delivered to all schools, in the country, and the MOES should assist in making sure that school administration and faculty know that information can be found there.

With regard to informing pupils/school graduates, USETI highly recommends making robust use of "Osvita Ukrayiny". Unpaid articles and announcements, which might be secured with the help of the MOES, would of course be ideal; however the cost of placing information in this periodical is very inexpensive. The newspaper is sent to all schools in Ukraine. It is true that not all administration and faculty read the periodical, however in smaller cities and particularly in villages, where electronic information resources are sparse, it is an important conduit.

3.4.1 Public Relations Departments

Both the MOES and UCEQA have public relations departments, and each UCEQA regional center has a press point person (usually director of the regional center). While coordination between UCEQA and its regional centers on specific messages is usually quite high, there have been instances where such was lacking.

Recommendation

A new team has come into the PR department of the MOES. Every effort should be made to keep coordination of messages on policy regarding testing issues between the MOES team and the UCEQA team. If solid foundations are set now, it is more likely that productive, solid relations will flourish. More importantly both teams must understand that the more coordinated their messages the less confusion and lack of trust within the public. This does not mean that either side should attempt to control public relations, but that regular coordination and clear messaging will keep the public well informed, and inspire continued public faith.

3.4.2 Analyzing Public Perceptions

The MCC TCP has supported projects to gauge public awareness and public attitudes toward external testing in admissions. Both Component 1 (ACTION) and Component 5 (USETI) of the TCP carried out public polling. Media monitoring, including the analysis of media items, was also possible through media consultants working with USETI and with support from the World Bank Equal Access to Quality Education Project. Through press monitoring, the public had a say in policy decisions, and both the MOES and UCEQA were able to "troubleshoot" when necessary.

Recommendation

The MOES should find resources to continue gauging public opinion. This is true for all aspects of reform in policy, not only for testing. There are various organizations and institutions that have, and will continue, to carry out polls regarding certain reforms, however methodologies are not always sound. Most importantly MOES should make it a priority to analyze results and make room for findings in policy decisions and PR messages. With regards to external testing, MOES should share data with UCEQA.

The new team in the PR department at the MOES has a background in analyzing public opinion. MOES could either continue to outsource monitoring or this could be done in house. Such monitoring will assist in understanding public concerns, and will also help with messages that need to be developed and coordinated between MOES and UCEQA.

3.5 COMPONENT FIVE: Provide further universal access to test preparation via direct intervention and stewardship over test prep industry.

The system of standardized testing has become more familiar to future test takers. Rural teachers have been very active in finding information to assist their students, and UCEQA issued a compendium of sample tests in 2008 which remained in schools, as did operational used test booklets from both the 2008 and 2009 testing sessions. USETI assisted with printing foreign language sample tests in “Osvita Ukrayiny”.

3.5.1 Distribution of Sample Tests

Although it is important that a testing agency distribute test and item samples to its users, voluminous disclosure is not necessary. What is important is access. Although UCEQA has posted preparation materials on its site, as noted above, rural schools in particular do not necessarily have access to electronic information, and students from villages and towns are usually less experienced at obtaining information from the internet.

Recommendation

UCEQA should work with the MOES in order to deliver samples in paper to rural schools. Such samples could have the same format as test booklets, and do not necessarily have to be costly. UCEQA could use its regional centers for distribution, which would distribute centrally via local departments of education. UCEQA can use items that have already been disclosed, the validity of which has been proved from psychometric evaluation, to construct sample tests.

3.5.2 b. Relationships with Private Sector of Test Preparation Industry

It is problematic for UCEQA to be solely responsible for test preparation. The costs involved in such an enterprise drains UCEQA’s already limited budget. The human resources involved are also an issue, since item writers and subject specialists are already overwhelmed with constructing operational tests. Although the quality is questionable, there is a nascent test preparation industry beginning in Ukraine. Private tutors offer services and printed sample tests are available for purchase.

Recommendation

UCEQA should not try to control test preparation initiatives, nor should the MOES. A system of quality review could be established through which UCEQA provides endorsement. This would require some effort from the side of UCEQA in order to review materials,

standards and professional stance of institutions applying for such endorsement, and UCEQA should consider how best to establish such a system. Should the MOES decide that endorsement should be run through the MOES; the MOES must be certain it also has the human resource capacity to review materials standards and applications. Either way, a system (including criteria) will need to be developed. A system of endorsement of private tutors could follow a similar pattern.

It should be noted that currently, many of the materials already available for purchase include a quote of purported endorsement from the MOES. It is most likely the case that publishers of such materials have received certification from the MOES of some kind, but that the materials in question have not been through any specific review process. USETI highly recommends that the MOES look into such endorsement and verify the quality of the materials, inasmuch as there are numerous reports from consumers and educators that the materials include tremendous mistakes (media items from both 2008 and 2009 seems to suggest this).

3.5.3 Training Workshops

Because of UCEQAs bylaws and registration it is not clear whether UCEQA may charge for services or not. To enable revenue generation, UCEQA may establish a state enterprise (vs. a state agency under the MOES).

Recommendation

UCEQA should clarify the issue of what kinds of services might be in demand. USETI has assisted in training over 130 individuals in item writing and test development. Again, as noted above (test development processes), some of these individuals will become directly involved in developing tests. Many however, will not. UCEQA could reach out to these individuals to help them establish training programs for others. These training programs could be used to train professionals in test development, which would be useful for a professional test preparation industry as well as for widening the pool of individuals who would meet criteria for UCEQA employ, or as providers of outsourced items.

Such training courses, where the individual who wishes to receive training would pay a fee for service, could allow UCEQA, or its state enterprise, to then recycle funds into developing printed sample tests for all test takers.

3.6 COMPONENT SIX: Further university admissions standards that are strong, but supple enough to enable usage by HEIs operating with varying needs.

Standardized testing has catalyzed reform efforts in university admissions policy. It can be stated as fact that in 2008, admissions policy was completely overhauled. The 2009 and 2010 rules of admission were/are, for the most part, completely different than they were in even 2008. The central criteria for admissions in both years was/is the results of external testing. Having considered certain plusses and minuses of using testing as sole criteria, the current bill in Parliament (see above legislative development bill #4241) includes provisions to weigh in the results of school leaving grades.

3.6.1 Stability

The MOES is currently in the process of better understanding how to use test scores in admissions. Two years of nationwide testing have not allowed policy makers enough time to analyze the use of the scores and other admissions information. A trial period for

approbating new policies is natural. However, the MOES needs to decide on a time frame by which more or less stable rules will be implemented. These rules by no means should be set in stone, but rather they should be flexible enough to not only deal with the dynamics of establishing and implementing new criteria into practice, but to also deal with the dynamics of changing needs in the system of higher education.

Also, for purposes of managing change, dramatic alterations in the rules for admission from year are probably not advisable. Alterations might affect public opinion negatively and thus hinder reform, particularly if the public does not see an end in sight to experimentation.

Recommendation

It is clear that the results of standardized tests will be the main criteria for university admissions. It has also become clear that using results as sole criteria has specific backwash effects on the secondary school learning process (motivation to do well throughout school experience diminishes). The MOES could at this time begin to devise rules for admissions that would include tests scores as a primary determinant, while allowing consideration of other factors as well.

With rules for admission flexible enough to allow for adaptation responsive to varying circumstance, the MOES should consider announcing a time-frame for any changes to be implemented. For example, as noted above, 2013 will be the year in which the first 12th graders will graduate secondary school. MOES could at this time state that for until 2013 the rules for admissions will not change. This could be done after drafting the 2011 rules for admissions or on the basis of the 2010 rules for admissions. This would calm public anxiety, and also give the MOES agency to begin to develop those rules after such a “moratorium on change” of sorts. It would also allow the MOES to develop the new system with ample time for implementation.

3.6.2 University Autonomy

Universities naturally are vying for some autonomy to be included in the standards being developed for admission. There are HEIs who want only very strong students, well prepared and already excelling in their fields. There are also HEIs that might consider less prepared students and work to assist these students in honing their skills. Medical institutions may pay more attention to scores in biology than math, while technical universities may pay more attention to results in math over Ukrainian language. For some universities test results will be more important than grades received in school, while others may want to include an application that would also allow them to consider volunteer or community service and/or academic achievement.

The rules for admission developed by MOES could state overall benchmark criteria for universal implementation. Mathematical equations can be developed that allow universities to weigh the criteria they are interested in, and requirements can be set for each criterion. External testing results could be heavily weighted, but overall standards could still allow universities to establish their own passing scores. Secondary school grades, academic achievements and student activism outside of school could also be assigned a range of acceptable weights

The MOES, as in the past, could still maintain responsibility of approving the algorithm for each HEI to insure compliance with admissions rules. The MOES could also establish time frames on changes to such conditions by HEIs, to insure applicants receive timely information on any changes

3.6.3 KONKURS system

USETI assisted in establishing the “KONKURS” web site which stores information on admissions decisions by HEIs, and allows applicants to consider their chances for admission and view their own status in the application process. The system has not only been helpful for applicants, but has also acted as a check against possible violations in admissions processes at individual HEIs.

Currently the KONKURS system is supported by USETI sub-grantee Center for Educational Policy. Confronting funding and capacity issues for the system should be a priority.

Recommendation

Because KONKURS was run by an NGO there could be no complaints of MOES or UCEQA altering information on the system. To date there have been no questions of misuse of the system by individuals or individual HEIs. The idea that information was processed by a non governmental institution not only kept the public from blaming government institutions for misuse, but also seems to have worked to gain a trust in the system from the public. It is highly recommended that KONKURS continue to be run by a third party.

KONKURS does not require major funding. However, it will need to be sustained and technology will need to be updated from time to time. In this case the MOES and UCEQA should encourage private and public donors to continue to support the system, and could endorse the system for government tenders.

3.6.4 Outreach to HEI Administration

The MOES has been keen to include university administration staff and rectors in reform efforts. As reforms in admissions and other reforms in higher education continue, it is important to continue outreach efforts. University administration must be engaged as active stakeholders rather than recipients of directives from above. It is important that proper venues be made available for genuine debate and discussion and for the fruits of discussion to have real impact on decisions.

Recommendation

The MOES should use all possible venues to open the lines of discussion. There are regular seminars and round tables hosted by MOES with rectors, where information can be shared regularly and help in implementing initiatives can be enlisted. MOES could encourage the creation of a standing committee of university administration representatives which could be an informal body carrying message to the MOES from universities. Although formally an association of rectors exists, it has not mobilized itself to have an effect. The MOES might also reach out to such existing institutions for input.