

# HEEDING THE CALL: EFFORTS IN CURRICULAR AND GOVERNANCE REFORM IN RUSSIAN EDUCATION

A POLICY PAPER

A report on the November 6, 1997 conference sponsored by the  
International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX)

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# FOREWORD

On November 6, 1997, the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) hosted a policy forum to discuss the state of higher education reform in the Russian Federation. In response to findings in recent assessments of higher education in the New Independent States (NIS), IREX convened experts in Russian education, representatives of international financial institutions, private foundations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and Russian reformers to examine the challenges to higher

education reform in Russia and the impact of Western assistance efforts on the education system. The group focused on both curricular and governance reform of universities, the discussion of which has been summarized in this report. The points expressed in this paper reflect a broad range of experience and opinion from the panelists and audience. They do not necessarily reflect a consensus among those who took part in the proceedings.

## CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The dissolution of the Soviet Union has triggered turmoil and change in systems of higher education in the former Soviet region. Not all of these changes are unique to these countries. Russian higher education is only one among many education systems that are struggling to survive and flourish in a changing environment. Increasing globalization, integrating world economies, and rapidly changing technologies challenge universities to adapt. The Russian challenge is unique only in the scope of difficulties that reformers must face. Russian universities must function in a constrained environment of greatly reduced budgets and attention, where government and marketplace challenges to the integrity of university governance complicate decision-making, and where the cohesion of the university system as a whole is in question. The task facing Russian universities is to preserve the best of the past, while developing in pace with the rapidly changing environment. The social stresses associated with economic hardship have created significant obstacles to this agenda.

Some key points that the participants of the conference emphasized were:

- ◆ Assistance organizations working to reform higher education need to conduct extensive field research and assessment prior to program development in order to ensure that programs are tailored to the various educational needs of the specific region. Funders must take into account the context in which Russian educational institutions exist if programs are to be successful.
- ◆ Organizations developing programs must be able to recognize and assess the specific interests of all parties—educational institutions as well as private or public funders. Programs must be developed that take into account these differing agendas, but address the authentic needs of the participants.

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- ◆ Reform programs must encourage long-term contacts between the Russian institutions and their foreign counterparts. Programs that are of a limited duration are not as successful as those with a commitment to long-term, sustainable development.
  - ◆ Attempts must be made to link Russian universities, so that reform efforts can have greater impact through the dissemination of information and lessons learned to other institutions. Communication links within universities also need to be enhanced. Technological advancement and professional associations can play large roles in the development of these links.
  - ◆ Assistance efforts need to focus more on rural and minority areas to ensure that their populations are included in the development of the education system.
  - ◆ Assistance organizations should target institutions and programs that have broad local support and have already proven successful. Institutions with a demonstrated commitment to reform have shown better results in program success.
  - ◆ Social science curricula need to be emphasized and promoted to balance the current overwhelming emphasis on business and economics.
  - ◆ Reform efforts should be integrated with “multiple impact strategies” in order to encourage results at all levels of education.
  - ◆ Funding of universities from Russian sources must become more transparent, so that foreign aid organizations can identify and target particular areas of need.
  - ◆ Western assistance organizations should make a greater effort to share information and periodically review and assess programs. Individual organizations should work together to collect information and make it widely accessible to other organizations and specialists in order to facilitate the development of policy recommendations at the middle level (rather than individual cases or global statements).

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# I. PATTERNS OF CURRICULAR CHANGE AND THE ROLE OF WESTERN ASSISTANCE IN RUSSIAN EDUCATION REFORM

The rapid development of a market economy has greatly altered the role of higher education in Russian life. Russian universities now must struggle to survive in a free market. Changes in the Russian economy compel universities to find new sources of income. Universities can no longer rely on full financing from the government and are turning to other sources of revenue, including local businesses, management of university properties, and student tuition. In addition, the demands of the economy are reshaping their curricula. There is tremendous interest in fostering courses and programs in economics, business, management, and law. However, in the rush to develop the economy, the social science disciplines cannot be neglected. Universities must attempt to achieve a balance between economics-oriented programs and social science programs such as psychology, sociology, political science, and public affairs. These subjects must be integrated with economics education if sustainable social and economic development is to be achieved.

There have been positive developments in both the curriculum and content of Russian higher education since the 1980s, specifically in the social sciences. International financial support and advice have been vital throughout this period of reform. However, donors, aid organizations and the recipients of aid have often had differing goals, a situation that has created certain ambiguities. Foreign advisors and aid organizations must understand the context and environment of the institutions and programs they wish to influence. There is a need for more research into the particular problems that individual institutions face. In addition, there must be recognition that these problems cannot be solved immediately. Although there have been significant changes in many areas of Russian education, old ways and attitudes have a tenacious power. Long-term changes will not be generated from cursory

exposure to new ideas and methods. Western curricula and methods of pedagogy cannot be applied directly to the Russian education system. There must be attempts to create long-term contacts between Russian and foreign institutions in order to allow programs to develop fully to fill the distinctive needs of Russian society.

While reform is necessary and inevitable, donors must have the discipline to develop programs that both complement and improve upon the existing strengths of Russian higher education. The Soviet educational system was highly developed, articulated, and rigorous, especially in the hard sciences. Aspects of this system are valuable and worth retaining. However, the changing character of Russian society will make it necessary to pay more attention to the differing demands of various religious and ethnic groups and to issues of gender. At the same time, the question of equity must be raised. Work must be done in rural and minority areas to ensure that those segments of the population are not left out of the education system.

In meeting the demands of a post-Soviet society, the very psychology of education in Russia is being challenged. The authoritarian command structure is no longer suitable for democratically administered institutions. Programs that the West offers as examples are based on collaborative models. The implementation of such models in the Russian education system will require the development of a new psychology of education. Old ideologies and mentalities must change if new courses and programs of study are to be implemented in the Russian education system.

There is a great deal of excitement and interest in the role technology can play in the reform of the Russian education system. Tremendous demand for

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teaching materials exists in Russian universities (textbooks, reference works, and so forth) The hope is that computers, the Internet, and CD-ROM libraries can fill the gaps in available materials in many universities Distance education also holds promise for less accessible locations In addition,

technology will be instrumental in linking reforms in institutional patterns, governance, curricular change, and faculty training At the same time, pedagogical approaches in using these mediums will have to be adapted to Russia and to local settings in order to introduce these new technologies in the classroom successfully

## **CASE STUDY:** **Ryazan State Pedagogical University**

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In 1991, Ryazan State Pedagogical University (RSPI) and Indiana University engaged in a collaborative partnership to improve the conditions of education at the Russian university The project, funded in part by a grant from the United States Information Agency under the College and University Partnerships Program, focused on distance learning, global education, libraries, governance, and research It was determined that the most important task in improving the quality of instruction was to improve the overall conditions at the university

During the project, substantive reform occurred in distance learning and global education However, the most successful part of the program was the development of the university library Due to the energetic and resourceful efforts of the local librarian at RSPI, and because of the sustained help offered by staff at Indiana University, huge strides were taken in integrating the university to the Web, and hence, to international databases It can be argued that the library could serve as a

fulcrum for modernizing and internationalizing what had once been an insular institution This innovative use of technology to facilitate the globalization of information could be applied at other universities as well

Advances in administrative practices were much less revolutionary, governance proved the issue most intractable to change and least transparent It was concluded that perhaps it was unfair to expect new governance practices to emerge, when it seems that only a strong "khoziain" at the helm, one much like the old-style Soviet boss, can keep institutions afloat in a perilous economy However, sustained contact did open up administrative practices Some improvements could be seen in the enthusiastic efforts to launch global education and to introduce it in local secondary schools, in research (primarily through a greater awareness of the international research environment through contacts with colleagues abroad), and in the need for peer reviews and merit assessments

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## II. REBUILDING THE SYSTEM: EFFORTS AND DIRECTIONS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE CURRICULUM REFORM

Research and comprehension of context are critical to the successful introduction of curriculum reform in Russian institutions of higher education. Assistance organizations should rely on extensive needs assessments and field research in order to understand how to tailor social science courses to the particular needs of the region. In this process, the interests of all parties involved in the development program must be assessed, including the specific interests of the region. It must be recognized that the separate entities—donors, project designers, and recipient education institutions—all have different agendas. In order for an aid program to be successful, these differing goals must be defined and addressed. One danger of the assistance process is that the values of the donors tend to insinuate themselves into programs. Although the aid process should not be value-neutral, assistance providers must be aware of what values are being emphasized.

Assistance organizations need to closely involve their Russian partners in the design and development of programs of educational reform. At the same time, they must also be candid about brokering the needs of all parties involved. In the assessment process, organizations must be aware of the interests of their Russian partners and must be able to identify and address authentic needs.

Foreign aid organizations and their Russian partners are unified in their recognition of the need for social science education. Social science programs are necessary to balance the current emphasis on economics and business education. An understanding of social forces and processes, and an historical

knowledge of the costs involved, will facilitate a smoother transition to a market economy.

Successful business people in the United States are often those with a liberal arts education. The social sciences are an essential part of the training individuals need to be leaders. Accordingly, it would be useful if assistance organizations could develop programs through which American business people with a background in the liberal arts could meet with, and serve as models to, students in the Russian classrooms.

Because the social sciences, and history in particular, degenerated into dogmatism during the Soviet era, curricula do not address the current needs of the economy or the population. This problem can be addressed in several ways: by reinvigorating theory, by utilizing social science approaches in economics and business courses, and by creating courses in topics such as business ethics and economic history.

Attempts to introduce foreign models into Russian education call for a complete understanding of the Russian context into which they are introduced. It is not enough to translate Western texts or to transplant Western curricula in Russian universities. These resources must be transformed to be of use in a particular locality. In order to facilitate this goal, innovative processes, as well as the products of education, must be imported and adapted. Assistance organizations should rely on the experience of local experts in determining course structure. In addition, the needs of communities can be met by tailoring courses specific to each region, such as subjects addressing conflict resolution or migration.

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### III. RETRAINING FACULTY FOR NEW CURRICULA

Any attempt to retrain faculty in Russian institutions needs long-term commitments. In case studies presented, programs that had fostered long-term linkages between Russian institutions and their foreign counterparts and had introduced reforms through a gradual adaptive process were very successful. Changes in attitude and approach require patience and commitment. Language training is important so that faculty can effectively communicate with others in their field outside of Russia.

In addition, it must be recognized that faculty do not function in a vacuum. The existing environment complicates the task of retraining faculty, as it does with every other aspect of Russian education reform. The faculty is financially strapped, and often must find outside work to supplement their salaries. This decreases the amount of time they can spend on teaching and research. Even if a faculty member receives excellent training in the United States, he or she may often have to return to an environment hostile to change.

Both Russian government and university administration policies have a strong influence on the ac-

tivities of the faculty. The administration must therefore be closely involved in the retraining process. The rector is especially important. Because the administration of universities is still largely centralized and authoritarian, a reform-minded rector can have a strong influence, as was the case in Ryazan. At times, it seems that less prestigious regional institutions are more open to influence and reform. In order to have the greatest impact, outside organizations must attempt to choose individuals or institutions that have already shown a commitment to reform.

Russian higher education is still very much a hierarchical system. There is little communication between universities or faculties in any given field. Technologies such as e-mail can be instrumental in fostering a vertical system of communication between faculties and administrations. Attempts also must be made to create a horizontal communication system, so that faculty in different institutions can share ideas and resources. Examples of such a system may be a university consortium or professional associations.

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## **CASE STUDY:**

### **Nizhnii Novgorod State University**

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Nizhnii Novgorod State University (NNSU) is expanding its course offerings in order to remain competitive in the education market. A key to their reform efforts is the simultaneous increase in the quantity and quality of course offerings. In the past five years, the history faculty has expanded its departments to include a Department of Contemporary History and International Relations. An American Studies Program was formed last year. During the coming year, NNSU plans to open an Institute for Regional Studies.

In order to improve the quality of courses, the history faculty found it necessary to limit the range of courses offered. The university is translating and publishing new materials, developing textbooks, and attempting to open a dialogue between college departments and universities both within Russia and internationally. The faculty has published a complete catalog listing academic activities and courses offered by the college in order to attract more students and faculty. NNSU also strives to maintain

the quality of its courses by encouraging young specialists who have participated in study-abroad programs to return to the university to teach.

The Contemporary History Department of NNSU is engaged in the Russian University Social Science Partnership Program (RUSSPP), which is sponsored by the United States Information Agency, and implemented by IREX. The program was designed to improve existing courses and design new ones, to acquire and adapt educational materials that support new courses and curricula, to improve teaching methods, and to foster enduring relationships between US and Russian partners. NNSU is working with the Political Science Department of Villanova

University on an institutional basis, which will hopefully develop into a long-term sustainable partnership between the universities. To help accomplish its goals, RUSSPP supports faculty exchanges, equipment donations, textbook purchases, and collaborative research.

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## IV. STABILIZING THE UNIVERSITY: GOVERNANCE REFORM IN RUSSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Changes in higher education were begun under perestroika and continued after the fall of the Soviet system. Russian higher education has been reforming to meet the challenges of a changing society and economy. Education laws have been passed, with mixed results in the actual implementation of these changes. Other than the obvious difficulties of retraining faculty and rewriting curricula, there are a number of institutional changes that must be formulated. One major aspect of these changes is the self-governance of institutions. Rectors of universities were previously expected to follow the ruling of a central authority. Now there are laws that guarantee the autonomy and freedom of higher education institutes. However, in many cases actual change has lagged far behind legislative mandates or has become a lower priority than simple institutional survival. In addition, greater autonomy for the institution as a whole has seldom translated into increased faculty participation in governance.

Funding has become a primary concern now that the government has less money to offer for the man-

agement of universities. Thus, universities must scramble to develop survival techniques, looking to outside sources for income. Educational institutions have begun charging fees for some of their educational services, using university properties as a source of income, and competing for international donations.

To better advance the interests of the universities, communication and cooperation must be established among the universities and with local communities and constituencies, other institutions, and the global community. The government will undoubtedly continue to disassociate itself from the universities. As it does so, higher education in Russia must develop contacts with other entities that can offer aid and support. Regional resources, such as businesses, alumni, or donor organizations, will have to fill the void left by the departure of centralized power. In addition, universities will need to communicate with each other to discuss common problems and share common solutions. Professional organizations should play a larger role in university life.

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## V. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF UNIVERSITIES

Given the myriad problems facing the Russian education system, solutions will not be simple. Commercialization and computers are sometimes offered as panaceas for the problems. However, market sources clearly will not cover all costs, considering that in the US experience, only five to ten percent of university budgets come from private industry. Technology, while promising, is expensive and creates the danger of a disparity of access and benefits. In addition, even if there is widespread access to computer resources, the content of those resources, whether Russian language or otherwise, will ultimately determine their usefulness. If student fees are to be introduced, there must be a realization that universities cannot depend on the *nouveau riche* to cover all their operating costs. There must be broad support from within the local community if universities are to survive and thrive.

Good leadership is essential to reform in Russian higher education. In the eyes of some participants, the most successful administrations are those run by a rector who delegates authority. Dynamic university management depends on open communication between administrators and faculty. In addition, leadership that stems from the body of pedagogy creates a more fertile environment at the uni-

versity. As the system now stands, researchers do not want to become leaders in their departments or universities because the duties prevent them from conducting research, and because leadership positions are considered a “dead end.” However, in a system in which scholars govern themselves, more attention can be paid to the needs of scholarship, while faculty morale and university prestige can be raised.

Russian university planners must make difficult choices about what institutions to fund and which programs to emphasize. Not every institution can become a major research center. Hard decisions must be made about the kinds of institutions needed—pedagogical or research. Within the universities themselves, problems abound. Universities are overstaffed, there is a trend toward consolidation and downsizing. Additionally, with the lack of communication between universities, there is little discussion of how best to meet regional needs or avoid redundancy of programs or fields. Understanding local needs is necessary for both universities and assistance organizations. Universities might expect to receive funding from area businesses and organizations if their projects are considered useful to the region.

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## **CASE STUDY:** **Kazan State University**

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Kazan State University (KSU), one of the oldest universities in Russia, faces problems similar to universities throughout the NIS. Rector Yuri Konoplev pointed out that in the past three years at KSU there has been little federal funding, which has been sufficient for student stipends and faculty salaries but not for research and maintenance.

However, the corresponding independence from central authority has allowed KSU to survive changes in university governance. Professional services and year-round education programs bring in additional sources of funding. An active quest for regional and international grants has further supported the university's efforts, and global outreach through e-mail and the Internet has provided vital access to contemporary textbooks, computer programs, and CD-ROM materials.

KSU is one of few universities in Russia active in reforming governance. The Fund for Economic and Social Development (FORRA) and the Chamber of Commerce of Tatarstan have worked with the university on a project entitled "Strategic Planning of University Continuing Education for State Officials and the Industry of Tatarstan." This project and others have led to plans for a proposed strategic management program to use applied research and analysis in consulting and provide professional training for administrators of higher education institutions of the Greater Volga region. The program would address real issues facing administrators: reform of management structures, the need for additional sources of funding, cultivation of international ties with universities and businesses, development of mission statements for universities, allocation of resources within universities, and creation of service departments for public relations and community outreach.

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## VI. UNIVERSITY FINANCING AND THE ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

University financing in Russia is limited by small budgets that must be spread over a large number of needs. According to one participant, some 80 percent of the budget of institutions of higher learning comes from the federal budget. Local and regional governments provide 4 percent. The remaining amount must be generated by educational institutions themselves. Approximately 8 percent comes from tuition, the final 8 percent from various commercial activities and rent from university properties. However, the practice of covering university costs through various forms of non-cash transfers at the local level complicates such calculations.

Russian institutions often depend on a shadow economy to support their programs. In order for Western aid organizations to function well, these funding practices must become more transparent, so that actual costs and needs can be assessed.

The lack of resources in the countries of the former Soviet region has had a devastating impact on the conditions of education. The most pressing concerns are not in higher education. Preschool, elementary, and high school education have been devastated, the number of dropouts is increasing. There is already the prospect of a generation in crisis, insufficiently trained for the future. When considering how to leverage private funds, these issues should be considered along with the problems of higher education.

Assistance programs might usefully employ multiple impact strategies to address the current crises affecting elementary and secondary education as well as higher levels. Such programs could encourage the sharing of services or personnel among institutions on each level of education. A concrete

example would be the provision of a CD-ROM library with resources that could be shared among several types of schools or universities. Reforms that impact many levels will address problems facing all institutions of education and will help ease the growing disparities between levels of education. Further impact of reform can be spread through wide and open dissemination of program outcomes. To break down barriers to communication among universities, grants can be made on the condition that there be cooperation between various institutions.

The most successful educational development programs are those with broad local support. In many cases, a structure is already available on which to develop and improve programs. Pedagogical institutes and educational advising centers, which provide public access to educational resources and offer extracurricular activities, are examples of existing local institutions that can have a positive impact on many levels. Private funding can be directed at a project that has already been started and is showing successful results. Foreign organizations can offer matching funds as an incentive for local businesses to participate in building education in their region.

In many instances, barriers to change are caused by government policies. Laws need to be implemented to encourage philanthropy and support of education by local business. Businesses demand legal structures that are comprehensible and equitable. In such an environment, assistance organizations could approach businesses with programs that met the needs of both universities and private enterprise. A banking structure could be established with an interest in education finance. ❖

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## VII. CONFERENCE AGENDA AND PRESENTERS

### INTRODUCTION

Daniel C. Matuszewski, President  
IREX

### PANEL PRESENTATION

*“Patterns of Curricular Change and the Role of Western Assistance in Russian Education Reform”*

Stephen Kerr, Professor of Education  
University of Washington

Mark Johnson, Assistant Professor of History  
Colorado College

Aleksandr Kornilov, Associate Professor of  
History  
Nizhny Novgorod State University, Russia

Mikhail Rykhtik, Assistant Professor of History  
Nizhny Novgorod State University, Russia

### ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS

*“Rebuilding the System: Efforts and Directions in Social Science Curriculum Reform”*

Discussant  
Marie Westbrook-Takhounts, Visiting Faculty  
Curry School of Education, University of Virginia  
Research Analyst, TDS Consultants

*“Retraining Faculty for New Curricula”*

Discussant  
Ben Eklof, Associate Professor of History  
Indiana University

### PLENARY SESSION

Moderator  
Paul Ashin, Vice President for Academic Programs  
IREX

### PANEL PRESENTATION

*“Stabilizing the University: Governance Reform in Russian Higher Education”*

Yuri Konoplev, Rector  
Kazan State University  
Republic of Tatarstan, Russia

Yevgenii Kniazev, Head of International Office  
Kazan State University  
Republic of Tatarstan, Russia

### ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS

*“Strategic Management of Universities”*

Discussant  
Harley Balzer, Associate Professor of Government  
Director, Center for Eurasian, Russian, and East  
European Studies, Georgetown University

*“University Financing and the Role of the Private Sector”*

Discussant  
Anthony Jones, Chair of the Department of  
Sociology, Northeastern University

### FINAL PLENARY SESSION

Moderator  
Paul Ashin, Vice President for Academic Programs  
IREX

Conference Rapporteur  
Mikal Mast, History Department  
Indiana University

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*The participants of this conference worked on a personal basis and do not necessarily subscribe to all the views in this paper. These views do not necessarily represent the views of IREX or the US Department of State.*

# ABOUT IREX

The International Research & Exchanges Board is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting mutual understanding and international cooperation between the United States and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Eurasia, and Northeast Asia

In collaboration with partners in the public, private, and academic sectors, IREX sponsors educational exchanges, professional training and institutional development programs, and international seminars to achieve three mutually reinforcing goals

- ❖ to foster scholarship, strengthen university leadership, and improve policy analysis and development in the US,
- ❖ to help partner countries successfully develop their intellectual, social, economic, and political communities by improving research capabilities, expanding access to information resources, bolstering professional associations and civic institutions, and increasing corporate and media skills,
- ❖ to forge partnership links between universities, policymakers, professional and civic associations, and corporate and media groups in the US and abroad

IREX receives funding and support from its member universities, major foundations, US government sponsors, leading corporations, and committed individuals in the private sector

# PROGRAMS

Through a series of integrated programs, IREX

- ❖ Provides field research opportunities for American specialists and analysts,
- ❖ Administers US-based as well as on-site education and training for international leaders, professionals, and scholars,
- ❖ Assists in the creative restructuring of overseas universities and their curricula, finding them committed US university partners where possible,
- ❖ Promotes the creation and development of institutional partnerships between US universities and professional associations and their international counterparts,
- ❖ Supports, through technical assistance, the development of self-sustaining, independent media in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union (NIS)
- ❖ Promotes the use of the Internet for scholarly and professional communication,
- ❖ Fosters cooperative programs of development for libraries, archives, and information systems,
- ❖ Designs new courses and training programs for corporate and professional needs,
- ❖ Develops and implements conferences and workshops addressing contemporary issues for policymakers, scholars, corporate representatives, and the media