Ukraine’s Higher Education System: Reforms in Progress

Mychailo Wynnyckyj Ph.D.

Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and Lviv Business School
Erasmus+ Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE)Team
Adviser to the Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine
Higher Education in Ukraine: Facts and Figures

- Higher Education Institutions – 287
  - Public – 209, Private – 78
  - Number has decreased by 25% since 2014
- Students – 1,370 thousand
- Academic staff – 110 thousand
- National Academy of Sciences
  - 160 research institutes
  - 29,870 staff, incl. 15,530 researchers
  - 260 coop agreements with HEIs
- 5 Specialized Academies of Science
  - Law, Medicine, Agrarian, Education, Art

- Integration of NAS and Sectoral Academies with HEIs is a priority
  - Currently lacks political will
Key Reforms since 2014:

**New Law on Higher Education:**
- Completion of Bologna
  - 3 cycles – Jnr BA + BA/MA/PhD + DSc
  - ECTS – mobility & joint programs
- University autonomy
  - Academic but not yet financial
- New QA system
  - National Quality Assurance Agency
  - New Standards (420 experts involved)

**Law "On scientific and scientific-technological activities“ (2015):**
- National Science Council
- Participation in Horizon 2020

**Law “On Education” (2017):**
- “New Ukrainian School”
- Competence-based programming
- 12 year school trajectory
Priority reform areas in Higher Education:

• Completion of “works in progress”
  • National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance
  • PhD reform – adoption of a new legal framework for dissertation defenses
  • University Autonomy – passage of legal amendments allowing financial autonomy and improved institutional governance

• New MinEdu initiatives:
  • Reform of educational trajectory and content for “regulated professions”
    • Medical doctors / lawyers / teachers
    • Introduction of “short cycle” BA (2 years) in general subject areas as prerequisite for entry into MA programs in regulated professions
  • Requiring Mathematics for secondary school graduation – 3+1 to enter HEI
  • Introduction of “cooperative” education programs – study + work for credit
    • Particular emphasis on STEM and Computer Science – MA level
Some comments on the “works in progress”

• National Agency for Quality Assurance
  • Process of member selection re-started – applications accepted 1 Oct. 2018
  • New paradigm of accreditation: from verification to consultancy
    • Expert training / compliance framework development / capacity building in HEIs
  • High risk of renewed bureaucracy if process is unsuccessful

• PhD reform
  • Incomplete: new programming launched in 2016, but no new defense procedures
  • Challenges encountered during reform implementation:
    • Heads of “aspirantura” departments waiting for instructions from MinEdu
    • Entrenched “mentor” relationship/culture of supervisors vis-à-vis PhD students
    • Low trust: academic community recognizes need for change, but rejects all change proposals outright because of suspicion of motives of proposal authors
The challenge of reform trajectory

- **Internal communication**
  - Hierarchy
  - Instructions / control
  - Bureaucratic rules

- **Personal initiatives**
  - Innovative programs, group research, financial crisis

- **Horizontal management**
  - Recognized academic community
  - Externally imposed KPI
  - Toxic organization culture

- **External reputation**
Risks of university reform

• Institutional priorities (i.e. compliance with externally imposed KPI) can override priority of university as an academic community
  • Competition for funding / rankings leads to toxic environment for staff and students – increased emphasis on research to detriment of teaching/learning

• Balancing teaching and research – risk losing high quality BA
  • EU model of cooperation between research institutes and universities with concentration on MA and PhD requires culture change in Ukraine

• Paradoxically, Ukraine needs increased inter-institutional competition among students and decreased competition between administrators
  • Sports, extracurricular activities, alumni and student pride must improve
  • Competition for gov’t funding, rankings, research grants must horizontalize
Ukrainian Higher Education: Opportunities for Cooperation

Together we are called to build recognized academic communities
What an amazing challenge!

Mychailo Wynnyckyj
mychailo@ukma.edu.ua
HEI Autonomy and the “reputation” paradigm

• While searching for a “better” (less corrupt, more objective, less bureaucratic, etc.) system, our academic discourse has become toxic
  • Extremely low institutional trust generates skepticism of “non-state” degree granting system: “Bad universities will simply print diplomas!”

• Those few institutions (or experimental units within universities) that have ventured to ignore external KPI’s have created wonderfully creative, vibrant communities
  • These communities / programs are generally poor and short-lived due to lack of funding

• Our challenge is to build recognized academic communities
  • For this we need examples / coaching / cooperation / recognition