

Chapter 10

Reforms in Higher Education in the Russian Federation: Implications for Equity and Social Justice

Joseph Zajda

Abstract The chapter analyses the impact of globalisation and market forces on restructuring of higher education in Russia. The chapter examines major policy reforms and shifts in the higher education sector in the Russian Federation (1996–2014), which resulted in a forced transformation of public universities and the growth of private universities and fee-paying students. The chapter discusses the spectacular growth of private students in state universities, the emerging social inequality and stratification in the higher education sector, and the implications for equity and social justice. The chapter also examines the impact of the internationalisation, rankings (Russia's poor performance in international rankings), accountability, standards and quality.

Keywords Global competitiveness • Global academic standards higher education • Higher education reforms • Marketization • Russia • Neo-liberal ideology • Social inequality

10.1 The Changing Nature of Higher Education in Russia

In 2012, the total number of HEIs was 1,080, including 446 private institutions and 634 state institutions, with some 6,490,000 students, including 1,036,000 students in private HEIs (Higher Education in the Russian Federation 2012). However, as many as 30 % of HEIs are likely to be closed, or amalgamated by 2016 (Nikandrov 2014. See also: <http://monitor.icef.com/2012/09/one-in-five-russian-universities-to-close-by-2014/>). According to Nikandrov (2014), former President of the Russian Academy of Education, there are two major problems confronting the HEIs in the

J. Zajda (✉)

Faculty of Education and Arts, School of Education, Australian Catholic University,
East Melbourne, VIC, Australia

e-mail: joseph.zajda@acu.edu.au

RF in the future. First, is the quality debate, particularly in many non-government HEIs. Second, is the impact of demographics on the higher education sector:

There are too few school-leavers to fill the many existing university vacancies. And, last but not least, now most students will end their university life with a Bachelor's degree, with only about 10 per cent of graduates continuing their studies in masters programs. The specialist five-year programs which were of chief importance before will now be an exception. Given all of these changes, the plans are to close or restructure about 30 per cent of universities by 2016. (Nikandrov 2014)

Already, the Russian higher education sector was experiencing a demographic crisis, where the number of students fell from 7.5 million in 2010, and was predicted to fall further to four million within the next few years (Nikandrov 2014). The higher education sector in the RF is characterised by number of structural changes, brought on by demographic factors, global competitiveness and internationalisation.

The first major change in the higher education sector in the new Russia, as with the former Soviet Union, was forced from above. It involved restructuring, decentralisation and privatisation, which affected traditional ex-Soviet universities and colleges. These reforms were brought on by shifting politico-economic imperatives in the governance, globalisation and the market forces. More specifically, they represented Russia's response to systemic reforms in higher education in the West, the imperatives of the European Union, and the Bologna Process.

The second major change was the expanding nature of the higher education sector in Russia after 2000. This was acknowledged by *The Human Development Report 2005 for the Russian Federation* (HDR 2005), which presented a picture of a 'major boom in higher education' (HDR, p. 51). It followed a similar boom in the higher education sector in the Eastern European countries. As Lingens (2004) noted, higher education 'has been expanding for quite some time', especially in the Eastern European countries (Lingens 2004, p. 3). This is particularly true of the spectacular growth in the enrolments in higher education (HE), notably in private universities in Russia between 1996 and 2006. Despite this growth, the proportion of university graduates in the 25–64 age group (this age group is used in international comparative studies) was 20.6 % in 2003, compared with 29 % in the USA, and 28.4 % in Norway (HDR, p. 51).

The third change was brought on recently by the global influence of a new ideology defining excellence and quality in the higher education sector. University ranking and the leagues tables become a global phenomenon. A key motivator for this recent push to improve quality in higher education, and to 'revamp and internationalise higher education is its poor performance in international rankings'. Alexey Repik (2013) of the Agency for Strategic Initiatives has said the reforms and investments will 'enhance the international reputation of Russian universities, which is essential to Russia's plans for its leading national universities to enter the top 100 of international university rankings'.

One way of achieving such a strategic goal is to establish international partnerships with leading research universities in the West. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has partnered with the Russian government, and the Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology to develop a world-class, high-tech school

offering graduate degrees in the sciences and technology. MIT will design the curriculum, programmes will be taught in English, and researchers will be encouraged to publish in international peer-reviewed publications—all of which will be attractive to international students and rankings. As more Russian institutions engage with international partners, the internationalisation of higher education in the country will take shape. Their willingness to engage internationally, after years of quiet, will surely excite the interest of all major players (<http://monitor.icef.com/2013/07/higher-ed-in-russia-the-international-agenda-takes-centre-stage/>).

The fourth change is to expand the recruitment of international students, whose numbers are indeed growing. The OECD figures for the 2011/2012 academic year demonstrate that there were some 158,000 foreign university students in the Russian Federation. According to the Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service, the number of foreign students enrolled in 2013–2014 reached 160,307 compared with the year 2000/2001 of 58,992 (RFFSSS 2015).

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At the same time, and paradoxically, this unprecedented growth coincided with a declining level of funding from the state. A highly regulated and centrally controlled higher education sector, in its attempts to respond to forces of globalisation, and market imperatives, was forced by the state, to introduce radical reforms that focused on finance, quality assurance, accreditation, curricula innovations, standards and excellence. The state now allowed greater autonomy, and encouraged the public and private universities to become more ‘entrepreneurial and competitive’ (see Levy 2006, with reference to market-oriented reforms in major Asian countries). It facilitated the emergence of the entrepreneurial university in Russia. Universities were encouraged to obtain funds by charging tuition fees, and finding potential donors and sponsors within the business sector.

In Russia, as in Eastern and Central Europe, the new and radical policy shift was to open public universities to fee-paying students ‘after the quota of free places is exhausted’ (Levy 2006, p. 123). The marketisation and privatisation of higher education in Russia is symptomatic of the introduction of deregulation and performance-based incentives, rewards and pressure to obtain funding, all due to increased competitiveness both globally and locally (see also Bache 2006; Tilak 2005; Turner 2004; Zajda 2005, 2015). Reich warned of the dangers of following the USA in the ‘marketisation’ of higher education. He described what he called ‘the destruction of public higher education in America, and how the UK can avoid the same fate.’ Similarly, Turner (2004) argued that the discourse of market competition and consumer choice now dominates higher education in many countries, where students and their parents, who offer financial support, are ‘consumers’, and universities are ‘providers’. Higher degree qualification is a ‘product’ to be ‘purchased’. Reich’s warnings, together with Turner’s critique of the pitfalls of marketisation of higher education, are even more applicable to Russia, which is undergoing rapid privatisation of the higher education sector.

10.2 The Structure of Higher Education

The structure of higher education in the Russian Federation is a hybrid of the old and the new. Higher education institutions are referred to as *VUZy*, from the Russian *vysshee uchebnoe zavedenie* (higher education institution). This acronym is used to refer to all types of higher education institutions in Russia. *VUZy* consist of universities, polytechnic institutes, which specialise in engineering, science, and technology, specialised institutes and academies, music and performing arts institutes and pedagogical institutes.

After the latest reforms in the higher education sector, there are now six levels of study in higher education:

Level 1: 2-year incomplete Diploma

Level 2: 3 to 4-year Bachelor's degree

Level 3: 5-year Diploma (*Diplom*)

Level 4: Master's degree (BA, plus 2 years of further higher education)

Level 5: Kandidat Nauk (Candidate of Sciences)

Level 6: Doktor Nauk (Doctor of Sciences)

Under the Soviet system until 1991, the most common first award of universities and other higher education institutions was a 5-year tertiary Diploma (*Diplom ob okonchaniï vysshego uchebnogo zavedeniia*—Diploma of completion of higher education). The next degree was a 3-year *Kandidat Nauk* (Candidate of Sciences). Despite the use of the word *nauk* ('science') in the common title, it was awarded across the full range of academic disciplines. To be admitted to the Candidate of Sciences students had to pass a number of preliminary examinations, including a foreign language. They had to study for at least 3 years, completing courses, undertaking supervised research and preparing a dissertation for public defence, not unlike the doctoral thesis oral examination in the USA. The highest award, which is still being offered, was *Doktor Nauk* (Doctor of Sciences). This is a research-oriented degree and is awarded by major dissertation. It normally requires at least further 3–5 years of doctoral studies and as a condition of award, doctoral candidates are expected to publish between 10 and 20 major research papers in scholarly journals (Zajda 1992, pp. 17–18).

10.2.1 Restructuring of Degree Programs

Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, its top higher education body—the State Committee for Public Education, the Committee had approved in 1989 a new two cycle degree structure, offering BA/MA. The 3–4 year Bachelor's degree (*Bakalavr*), was to be followed by 2-year Master's programme (*Magistr*). This new Russian degree program was derived from the US/British model (Zajda 1992, p. 18). It was implemented gradually by some higher education institutions in the Soviet Union, including, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Baltic States. This Western-inspired model was

introduced more widely after 1992 by the State Committee on Higher Education of the Ministry of Science. The 1994 government decree on the adoption of state standards for higher education specified degree structure as follows:

- Four-year Bachelor's degrees
- Specialist 5-year Diplomas
- Master's degree
- Kandidat Nauk (Candidate of Sciences)
- Doktor Nauk (Doctor of Sciences)

In the light of the Bologna Process, a higher education institution, given its autonomy and self-government, was now able to decide on the introduction of the new BA/MA courses. The traditional structure of Candidate of Sciences and Doctor of Sciences remains unchanged.

10.2.2 Changing Enrolment Patterns

Since the break up of the USSR in December 1991, most higher education institutions have seen their budgets reduced significantly. Despite this, enrolments continued to grow, especially after 1996, when the economy started to improve. If in 1993 some 2,624,000 students were enrolled in 535 State VUZy, then by 2006, over 7,000,000 million students were enrolled in 1,300 VUZy—both public and private institutions. Entrance to VUZy is still by competitive entrance examination and, unlike in the past, when many students (77 %) received stipends (*stipendii*), now up to 60 % of state universities students are full fee-paying students. By 2008, their numbers are expected to reach 70 % (Zajda 2006, p. 253).

During the early 1990s, due to economic recession, unemployment and poverty, demand for university places fell to 2.2 applicants per place in 1994, but in 2006 competition for higher education increased between 4 and 25 per place, depending on the prestige of an institution and the chosen field. The most sought after college was the Moscow College of Performing Arts, with 37 applicants per place, followed by the Academy of Federal Security Services, with 35 applicants. The Moscow State Pedagogical University (MGPU) had four to six applicants, and the MGU (Moscow State University) had 2.8 applicants per place.

10.3 Higher Education Growth in Russia

The higher education sector in Russia continues its spectacular growth, especially in private universities. During the 1996–2012 period, private universities increased from 193 to 446, representing 231 % growth (see Table 10.1). Of these, 89 private higher education institutions were located in Moscow alone. The total number of students in the higher education sector during the 2001–2006 period increased from 4.8 million in 2001 to 7.2 million in 2006, or by nearly 50 %. Due to a 'major boom'

Table 10.1 Students in higher education public and private institutions: 1996–2012

No. of state HEIs		No. of students	No. of private HEIs		No. of students
1996	502		193		
1997	573	2,801,000	244		183,000
1999	595		349		4,070,000 (total)
2000	621	4,800,000	387		630,000
2003	685	5,228,700	619		718,800
2005	655	4,866,700	645		1,079,300
2012	634	5,454,000	446		1,036,000

in higher education in Russia, the number of graduates increased from 401,600 in 1995 to 972,000 in 2003, representing ‘2.4-fold increase over an 8-year period’ (HDR, p. 51). In 2006, the first year intake was 524,500 students, which included 57 % state funded places. However, the total number of private students in the higher education has also increased to 56 % in 2006. Between 1995 and 2012, the total number of students in higher education has increased from 2.8 million to 6.5 million, a 2.3-fold increase, or by 232 % in a decade.

10.3.1 Admission and Access to Universities

Access to all higher education institutions continues to be by competitive examination (*konkurs*). Students must have completed successfully their secondary education. According to the Russian Constitution (article 43, clause 3), everyone is guaranteed the right to have access to free of charge higher education. In reality, at least 50 % have to pay for their education. It is estimated that only one-third of new students enter higher education institutions on merit. The other one-third of prospective students has to take special preparatory courses. Many hire private tutors to ensure that they can pass entrance examinations. Although education reforms were designed to promote equity in higher education, these entrance requirement hurdles—good grades in specified major school subjects, and high scores on the entrance examinations, make it difficult if not impossible, for students from lower SES to enter a university. The financial costs for tutoring and fees for fee paying students become a ‘heavy economic burden for Russian students and their families’ (Survey of National Higher Education Systems 2004, p. 57).

10.3.2 Private and Fee-Paying Students

By 2003, some 53 % of the university students were full fee-paying students. At the same time, the number of new students in state universities grew by 24 %—from 487,100 in 1994 to 603,800 in 2002. Between 1994 and 2002, the largest increase

in the number of first-year students—some 250 % was recorded in private colleges (from 157,000 in 1994 to 384,000 in 2002). It is estimated that some 80 % of students in private and between 60 and 70 % in some state VUZy are full fee-paying students. The Law on Education, which defines the quota of private students (25 % in the faculties of law, management etc) is ‘rarely observed’ as cash-strapped universities prefer to enrol full-fee paying students (*Rossiiskaia Gazeta* 2003, 9 January).

The growth of private students is one way of funding the higher education sector in Russia. The phenomenon of private and fee-paying students has been accepted as a given in Russian society, particularly among the more ambitious and upwardly mobile families, who are prepared to pay, by western standards, high fees, for university education:

Private tertiary education in Russia has increasingly become a normal phenomenon. Today, some 56 percent of higher education students are fee-paying students and the percentage continues to grow. A tuition fee for one year of study at a ‘good’ university costs between US\$3,000 to US\$3,500, or between US\$5,000 to US\$7,000 at a ‘super prestigious’ university... Those who failed to pass the entrance exam... need to borrow from banks. (Sergeev 2006)

Furthermore, Russian society has accepted not only high tuition fees, but a steep increase in tuition, a natural consequence of increasing competition for desirable institutions and prestigious faculties. Public-opinion polls showed that in 2003 almost 87 % of families were in favour of higher education for the children. In 2003, 87 % of high school graduates entered universities (2005).

10.3.3 Private Universities

Private higher educational institutions (HIEs) began to grow in the early 1990s, and by 1995 there were 208 private HEIs, including the New Humanities University of Natalia Nesterova. In 2003, some 700 private colleges and universities were inspected and it was found that 90 % were guilty of serious breaches, as they did not comply with the relevant articles of the Law on Education (*Parlamentskaia Gazeta* 2003, 28 January). Many private institutions were subsequently de-registered. Some of these private universities were found to be operating from tiny basements or even virtual offices, charging huge fees, and offering worthless university diplomas. By 2006, there were 645 private higher education institutions, but only 367 were accredited tertiary institutions, giving them the right to award state degrees. Some HE institutions were deregistered and closed down by the Ministry of Education. In 2012, there were only 446 private HEIs left.

10.4 Recent Developments in Higher Education in Russia

In Russia, as in Europe and elsewhere, higher education institutions, influenced by globalisation and market forces, which bring about competition for a share of the market, have been forced to undergo a radical transformation—from a traditional and state-funded academic institutions to an entrepreneurial university. In Russia, some of these on-going changes include:

- Increased demand for higher education places
- The emergence of new strategic market goals
- The internationalisation of education policy, curricula and research
- The reorganisation of knowledge within the Unesco and OECD-driven knowledge and society paradigms.
- Creation of major national state universities (from amalgamated VUZy)
- Privatisation of the higher education sector
- Financial incentives for innovative universities

10.4.1 Restructuring of the Higher Education Sector

Higher education reforms have affected all higher educational institutions. The response to globalisation, market forces and the Bologna Process Russia is also introducing its own 'league tables' of universities. In the near future, higher education institutions are likely to be categorised, according to Fursenko (2006), into three main groups:

Group 1: 15–20 'Flagship universities' (*vedushchie universitety*). These will include Russia's leading major and internationally-renowned research universities

Group 2: 150–200 major universities and higher education research academies (*sistemoobrazuiushchie VUZy*), offering specialist training

Group 3: Other higher education institutions (some 1,300 smaller HE institutions)

All Russian HE institutions will be encouraged to apply, on a competitive basis, for their status and position in the league table. One successful in gaining the rank within the Group 1–3 range, they will be accredited as 'Group 1' leading university for 5 years.

The Group 1 HE institutions will be better funded and academics will receive 30 % extra pay increase. These leading universities will be totally funded by the state. Group 2 HE institutions will receive state funding for BA/MA degrees only (Sergeev 2006). In Group 3, the state will fund only BA programmes, the rest has to be self-funded.

In Russia, the new league tables will represent a rough and ready judgement of university performance, and guarantee the appropriate level of funding. Hence, 17 top universities received excellence awards ranging from 400,000 million roubles to

1 billion roubles (*Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, 28 Dec 2006). Another 20 VUZy were rewarded in 2007 for innovation, teaching and research, with the total of 10 billion roubles. The concept of ‘league tables’ of university performance produced by policy makers, higher education administrators, and the media, represent, at best, a rough and ready judgment of university performance.

Russia, like the higher education sector in the UK, Canada and elsewhere, has adopted the three-tier structure to overcome the system’s numerous shortcomings. These seemingly innovative structural reforms mirror similar findings to be seen in the UK universities, where Oxford and Cambridge always top the league tables, and are invariably cited as ‘the best’ universities in the country (Turner 2004). In the case of Russia, it is usually the Moscow State University (MGU), which is, as expected, at the top of the league.

The Funding formula now increasingly reflects enrolment figures, excellence and quality in delivery, and research output. Smaller higher education institutions, including poorly performing and inefficient research institutes have been either amalgamated or closed

10.5 Evaluation of Higher Education Reforms

It needs to be stressed that higher education in Russia—was one of the most highly centralised and state-controlled education systems in Europe, if not in the world, and, in terms of ideology, and power, only rivalled by China. As a result of globalisation, and the market forces, it was transforming, by means of ‘the reciprocal interaction among global, national, and local forces (“glo-na-cal”)’ into a new academic hybridisation that may change its identity and image (Pritchard 2006, p. 92). Forces of globalisation have fuelled, at times, radical, controversial, and anti-egalitarian reforms in Russian higher education, affecting governance, management, financing, curricula, standards, and quality assurance. One of the most radical changes, as a result of global competition, was adapting the traditional Russian (ex-Soviet) model to an Anglo-American model of higher education that is becoming the norm globally. Furthermore, unprecedented and unexpected growth in student numbers created problems with course delivery, human resource management, and quality assurance.

Between 1997 and 2012, the numbers of students increased by nearly 257 % (from 2,801,000 students in 1997 to 6,490,000 in 2012), without a corresponding increase in state funds. This may well represent the largest increase in the number of higher education students in the world.

Higher education policy shifts in Russia mirror macro-social changes due to market forces—namely the reduction of state power and control in some European countries and elsewhere. Yet, as a new hybrid of centralisation-decentralisation-autonomy, it is also exhibiting an increased policy and program regulation—designed to monitor quality assurance in an expanding and deregulated higher education sector in Russia between 1997 and 2012. The most telling sign of an

almost ‘runaway marketisation’ in Russia is not only the rapid growth of private, more entrepreneurial and competitive universities, but also the opening of public universities to fee-paying students. The term ‘runaway marketization’ was used by Levy (2006) to comment on the impact of the market-oriented reforms that facilitated the growth of privatisation in higher education in major Asian countries like China, Japan, Korea, and Malaysia.

Globalisation and the market forces have forced students to re-define themselves as ‘consumers’, who expect results for their investment. Some universities have become too commercial, where academics are expected to secure substantial grants and lucrative consultancies. Academic tenure, promotions and salaries are affected by the entrepreneurial culture. Furthermore, the new league tables in the higher education sector in Russia—promoted by the Putin’s administration and the Ministry of Education in 2012, will contribute, undoubtedly, to a rising gap between better-funded universities and centres of excellence and their poorer cousins. Hence, social stratification, inequality and differentiation within the higher education in Russia are likely to mirror all too familiar patterns of cultural reproduction and correspondence theories, which were used in the 1970s to explain inequalities in higher education in the West.

10.6 Conclusion

The market-driven reforms in higher education in Russia had some positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, they advocated greater autonomy, flexibility and self-governance. These allowed the institutions to become more entrepreneurial and more competitive. However, these reforms, perhaps unintentionally, have created a new and rising gap between the new ‘flagship’ and well-funded research universities and other more traditional institutions. Poorly funded and resourced institutions are now at the bottom of the new league tables of HEIs. President Putin’s reforms, in response to internationalisation, and Russia’s poor performance in international rankings, targeted innovation, excellence and quality in education, and recent incentives include substantial financial rewards in the shape of major state grants for excellence in research and teaching. On the negative side, privatisation, and marketisation has created a new entrepreneurial culture, where the market allocates finances to non-academic matters, thus, undermining the academic core (Levy 2006, p. 121). Nikandrov (2001), President of the Russian Academy of Education, argued that the ‘quality of education in Russia had deteriorated’ (Nikandrov 2001, p. 206; see also, Nikandrov 2014). The other danger, he noted is emerging ‘social stratification in education’, which affects the quality of education available for those who can afford it, which has serious implications for equity and social justice.

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