

# Higher Education in Ukraine: Briefing Paper

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## HIGHER EDUCATION IN UKRAINE: BRITISH COUNCIL BRIEFING PAPER

This briefing focuses on the reform of the higher education system in Ukraine and the opportunities this provides for greater collaboration between the UK and Ukraine sectors.

### INTRODUCTION

The higher education system in Ukraine is undergoing major reform. In July 2014 the new Higher Education Act became law, introducing significant reforms.

Two factors are particularly important in the reform process. Firstly, there is the part played by the sector itself, succinctly described by Mychailo Wynnickyj, Director of the Doctoral School, Kyiv-Mohyla university: *"Ukraine's new Law ... is revolutionary ... not least because it represents a unique case where a legal act was written not by ... politicians, but rather was composed, debated, modified as a result of compromise, finalised, and then lobbied by higher education professionals and students."*<sup>1</sup> In practice, the reform has been driven by a small group of highly committed rectors and academics centred in Kiev. Their work to reform the system started well before 2014 with nine bills tabled before Parliament between December 2010 and January 2013.

The second factor – and the one that provided the window of opportunity for reform – is the political context of Ukraine. In February 2014, the 'Euromaidan Revolution' (or 'Revolution of Dignity') toppled President Yanukovich and made way for the election of the new pro-democracy, pro-European government. Education was high on the new government's agenda, with HE prioritised as one of the key systems able to spearhead Ukraine's integration into Europe. Serhiy Kvit, formerly vice chancellor of Kyiv-Mohyla University and one of the leaders of reform, became the new Minister of Education and Science. Under the Minister Kvit, the group of academic reformers formed a working party charged with drafting the higher education bill and developing an implementation strategy. In August the bill became law. Introducing it, Liliya Hrynevych MP, Head of the Parliamentary Committee for Science and Education, said *'Given the long-term consequences for the country, the adoption of this law is one of the most important, if not the most important, decisions made by the Ukrainian Parliament after the Revolution of Dignity... This is the adoption of a democratic, pro-European system ... which begins a new era in the development of Ukrainian higher education. One primary purpose is to achieve true quality improvement in higher education ... and the transformation of our educational system to become truly competitive in the European Union'*.

### HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

The current higher education system in Ukraine is largely a legacy of the post-Soviet era. In October 2013, the new Minister of Education and Science, Serhiy Kvit, described it as *'far adrift of the standards required to meet European norms'* and needing reform to tackle everything from bribery to low academic quality and Ph.D. preparation. Ukraine needed modern European, not marginal post-Soviet, universities.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wynnickyj, M (2014) 'Thoughts from Kiev – on Higher Education' <http://www.ukiedaily.com/thoughts-from-kyiv/2014/08/thoughts-kyiv-60-08-2014-higher-education/>

<sup>2</sup> Kyiv Post Oct. 31, 2013, <http://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/op-ed/education-system-far-from-european-levels-331250.html>

Reporting on his first 100 days as Minister<sup>3</sup>, Kvit highlighted higher education reform and stronger levels of English in the university system as major priorities. He set out an agenda of drastically reducing the number of universities from 800 and of introducing new legislation to combat the problems in Ukrainian higher education *'most notably the inefficient use of funds, corruption and international isolation and improving quality'*. This would end the system of central ministry control, replacing it with much greater financial, academic and administrative autonomy for universities.

## **The Law on Higher Education**

It is important to note that the provisions of new law are underpinned by a democratic and pro-European agenda. The Act sets out the principles on which the State's policy on higher education is based:

- Promoting the sustainable development of society by producing competitive human capital and creating the conditions for life-long learning
- Ensuring access to higher education
- Independence of higher education from political parties and civil or religious organisations
- Integration into the European Higher Education Area and wider international integration
- Government support for research and innovation, including preferential financial treatment of universities engaged in research
- Supporting graduates to access and enter work and providing incentives for employers to provide graduates with their first employment destination
- Fostering the development of higher education institutions as centres of independent thought

Key provisions are:

**Defining the levels, degrees and qualifications of higher education**, related to a National Qualifications Framework. Certification awarded to graduates will include a Diploma Supplement produced according to European standards.

**Establishing Higher Education Activity Standards** setting out minimum requirements for staffing, courseware, physical infrastructure, information resources. Standards will specify the number of ECTS credits required for the degree; graduates' competencies; learning outcomes; and entry requirements. These apply to all public, private and research institutions.

**Management of the higher education sector:** the functions of the Ministry of Education and Science will be primarily concerned with setting and implementing national strategy and frameworks rather than the day-to-day operations of HEIs.

**Quality Assurance:** establishing a dual system of internal and external quality assurance HEIs will be responsible for quality assurance within the institution while external quality assurance which will be managed by a new National Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. The NQAA will assure the effectiveness of HEIs' processes and procedures; ensure publically available criteria for decision-making in line with standards and guidelines recognised for the European Higher Education Area

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<sup>3</sup> Lyudmila Tatsenko, British Council, 19 June 2014 <http://blog.britishcouncil.org/2014/06/19/why-ukraine-is-reforming-its-higher-education-system/>

**Higher Education Institutions** will be autonomous and self-governing, managing their academic and day to day operations. As well as research, teaching and developing students' abilities, HEIs should build human capital to ensure Ukraine's social and economic development, spread knowledge among the population and build international co-operation.

**Heads of HEIs** will manage all aspects of the HEI - financial and business operations; structure and staffing; performance; the healthy lifestyle of students; and ensuring open and effective public monitoring of the HEI. Heads will be accountable for their institution's education, research and innovation activities, as well as financial and business performance. Heads will be elected for a 5-year period by secret ballot. Those eligible to vote are all members of the teaching, academic and research staff, representatives of other staff members, elected representatives of students.

**Democratic and collegial governing structures** will be established in all HEIs (Academic Council, Supervisory Board, working and advisory bodies and a General Assembly).

**Students** are given participation in the management of HEIs at a number of levels.

**Scientific research and development and innovation activity at HEIs:** the law sets out the aim of making more effective use of resources in the development and implementation of priority research programmes through integration of HEIs and the national academies of science. A main area is ensuring that young researchers, graduate students and doctoral candidates in HEIs are directly involved in the research of academies.

#### *PROGRESS OF HE REFORM AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LAW*

In August 2015, the Minister wrote *"the passing of the law is only a first step. This is being followed up by a long process of implementation over several years requiring a joint effort by the Ministry of Education and Science, higher education institutions and other government ministries."*<sup>4</sup>

In reality there are significant challenges in implementation, arising out of the entrenched nature of the post-Soviet HE system, but also from the continued conflict in Ukraine's eastern region.

Describing the state of the system, the Minister wrote: *"In the years following Ukraine's independence, the education sector accumulated numerous problems, including a fall in the quality of education, an ineffective centralized system of control and financing, corruption, unequal access to quality education, a drop in the knowledge and skills of graduates, outdated teaching methods and isolation from new developments outside Ukraine ... (Reforming the sector is) in order to ensure that the education system corresponds to the needs of a modern economy and promotes Ukraine's integration into international scientific activities. The goals of this reform are quality education and equal opportunity. We are ... changing the rules of the game."*<sup>5</sup>

The vision and scale of change inevitably challenges and threatens many established players and interests, meaning that reform will not be achieved easily or without resistance.

The conflict in Ukraine's eastern regions adds a further critical dimension. While this continues, it severely limits government funding available for HE reform. It has also meant

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education and Science Newsletter 1 (August 2015)

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

that immediate priority has had to be given to managing the severe disruptions of universities in the conflict zone. In 2014 8000 students sought transfers to universities outside the region. HEIs were also seeking evacuation and, by August 2015, the Ministry had evacuated 16 universities and 10 research institutes. The conflict has also had other impacts on the sector. Euromaidan turned many students into activists and, in October 2014, the Rector of Kyiv Polytechnic Institute reported to the British Council that students were dropping out of classes to join the fighting in the Donbas region. Six KPI students had been killed there.

The main headlines and challenges in the new law are:

### **Structural reform of the higher education system**

The 20 years following the break-up of the Soviet Union, saw a huge explosion of universities with large numbers of local institutions being set up. Abuses of the system became widespread. More students meant more money - student numbers tripled and many unqualified students obtained degrees. Ukraine ended up with one of the highest HE participation rates in the world with 70% of 18 year olds enrolling in HE (1.7 million students in a country of 45 million people). The new government has sought to 'optimise' the system and under the new law, accreditation has been withdrawn from many institutions on the grounds of low quality. In February 2015 Serhiy Kvit the Minister, reported "*at the beginning of 2015 there were 802 higher educational establishments in Ukraine, now they are 317 and by the end of the year there will only remain some 270*".<sup>6</sup> Eventually, the aim is to have no more than 100 HEIs.

### **Institutional autonomy and leadership**

Re-defining the functions of the Ministry and the universities, the new law provides for institutional autonomy and self-governance.

There are significant challenges here. Autonomy is not widely understood across the sector - in particular, the accompanying responsibilities and accountabilities and the scale of the democratic structures and systems needed by HEIs to implement it. Democratisation of institutional management and governance envisages devolved and distributed leadership in which rectors, staff and students have defined roles and responsibilities. The levels of readiness and competence of many rectors is a challenge - attitudes, knowledge and skills are rooted in the post-Soviet era where management took the form of diktats from the Ministry. The National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences (one of the leading reform institutions) described the need for a 'paradigm shift' requiring a very different mind-set. Some rectors may resist this.

### **Financial reform**

The new law envisaged that financial reforms would take effect in January 2016. One aspect of this is the funding model for student places – and the Ministry is actively investigating options and looking at the experience of other countries. The issue of financial autonomy for universities, however, poses a huge challenge. While fighting continues in Ukraine's eastern regions, the Ministry of Finance retains strong central control of money. Yet, even without the fighting, expectations are that the Ministry may prove extremely resistant to ceding financial autonomy to universities. Until recently, the retention of all university monies in the Treasury, caused considerable problems with European and partnership grants - once in the Treasury, these become part of the State reserves and were not automatically available for universities' use. This issue has now been resolved, with universities being allowed in future

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine official website <http://old.mon.gov.ua/en/news>

to deposit monies from grants and earnings in one of the three State Banks, rather than the Treasury.

The bigger issue of financial autonomy, is likely to constitute a significant barrier to progress for some considerable time.

### **Quality**

As well as tackling the quantity and low quality of many of the current HEIs, the law aims to build a rigorous national quality assurance system aligned to European and international standards in which quality will be assured through a dual process of internal and external QA. The new National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education has still to start functioning.

Internal institutional quality assurance lies with the HEIs – a significant challenge, since few have a clear understanding of the modern concept of quality. First steps will be to create awareness – and acceptance - of this, followed by establishing appropriate institutional QA systems. This will certainly require changing attitudes, as well as university leadership and management processes.

### **Integration of Higher Education and Research**

Currently there is a Soviet-era legacy divide between research and education, with teaching/education being carried out mainly in the universities and (largely theoretical) research in the National Academy of Science and the six sectoral national academies of science. The first level research degree is Doctor of Philosophy and the second level Doctor of Science. The major proportion of research funding is allocated to the Academies (93%), while the majority of PhD holders (70% or 106,000) work in the universities. The new law envisages integration between research carried out in the universities and the academies, so making better use of financial, physical and human resources and potentially increasing Ukraine's competitiveness in the European and global research areas. It also aims to increase the level of research in universities as well the amount of research based teaching. Under the law universities will be eligible to apply for designation as research universities, entitling them to additional research funding.

Integration is an area of significant challenge. While many universities question the impact of the Academies' research (arguing that evidence of impact is neither gathered nor assessed), leading academicians who wield huge influence, remain strongly opposed to reform.

Regardless of the arguments around integration, the Minister (and the major universities) remain committed to more research being done in universities. In the Ministry's August newsletter, Serhiy Kvit writes *"I would especially like to stress one particular aspect of the reform of higher education. We must bring research and development back to universities, because higher education cannot exist without research and vice versa. Real universities which aspire to renown within Ukraine and internationally must not only teach and issue degrees but also carry out academic research."*<sup>7</sup>

### **Higher education links to the labour market**

One of the significant deficiencies in the higher education system is its disconnection from the labour market. In his 100-day report, Serhiy Kvit points out that Ukrainian students are not studying the subjects their country needs. Around 70% of Ukrainians attend university,

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<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Education and Science Newsletter 1 (August 2015)

but there is little relationship between the degrees they study and the country's economic needs. Although, theoretically, Ukraine has strengths in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects, dating back its role in the Soviet aerospace industry, there is still an imbalance, with large numbers of students studying law and economics<sup>8</sup>. The Prime Minister, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, emphasised that linking education to the labour market had to be a key concern for higher education reform. *'This is what we have not managed to solve in over 20 years. For 10 years the most popular profession was that of lawyer. Then for 10 years, economists. We need to focus on the goals of the country.'*<sup>9</sup>

University-business links are in their infancy in Ukraine, with little history to build on. Most employers have little ability to exert influence on universities and there has been little push from students to link university study with jobs. The Diploma remains the main goal for both students and parents – and neither think of this in relation to finding a job. There are no central data on employment of graduates, not are there standardised mechanisms or support services to help students find jobs. While the best universities try to facilitate employment for their graduates, for many, parental connections or the black market are the realities of job-finding.

### **Professional development of higher education staff**

The law sets out new roles and responsibilities for academic and teaching staff at all levels. For example, they are expected to design and deliver new (Bologna compliant) curricula, employ new (interactive) teaching methods, understand and use competence frameworks, monitor, assess and give feedback to students, provide academic and personal support. There is also a range of new administrative duties and responsibilities.

All of these require significant training and development. Currently, while many university staff participate in training and development, there is little evidence of their ability to transfer learning into practice. This suggests either poor quality training providers or lack of institutional support for changing practice.

### **Students' roles**

Under the new law, student self-government is an intrinsic part of the democratic and public management process of the sector. Students will participate at national level through membership of the National Quality Assurance Agency - of the 25 NQAA members, two are student representatives, elected by the student body. Within HEIs, student representatives will vote in the election of rectors, as well as being members of academic councils and working and advisory bodies.

However, students have little understanding of what it means to be part of an autonomous university community. For the most part, they are treated as little different from children in universities and within a master/servant relationship at PhD level. While, both the Ministry

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<sup>8</sup> Lyudmila Tatsenko, British Council, 19 June 2014 <http://blog.britishcouncil.org/2014/06/19/why-ukraine-is-reforming-its-higher-education-system/>

<sup>9</sup> Meeting of working group on implementation of the new Higher Education Law at Kyiv National University Taras Shevchenko <http://www.mon.gov.ua/en/>

and the progressive universities, recognise the need to empower students, they also recognise that they have yet to think through how to achieve this across the sector<sup>10</sup>.

### **Integration of Ukraine into the global research and higher education area**

Currently only two universities, Kyiv National University named after Taras Shevchenko and V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, are in the top 500 places in the world league tables. While some of the major universities have numerous bilateral agreements and research partnerships, levels of international engagement across the sector are relatively low when compared with universities in Europe and in other developed countries. English language ability is a major factor here, significantly restricting academic and student mobility.

One important step towards integration into the European and global research areas is that in March 2015, Ukraine formally became an associate member of the Horizon 2020 programme. In November 2015, Ukraine also joined Creative Europe.

#### *OPPORTUNITIES FOR UK HIGHER EDUCATION AND BRITISH COUNCIL INITIATIVES*

In 2012-14, under its International Higher Education programme, the British Council funded a number of UK-Ukraine conferences and study visits; also six exploratory grants for UK-Ukraine university partnerships in the discipline area of energy.

The passing of the 2014 Law on Higher Education, however, will fundamentally change both the landscape of Ukraine higher education, and the opportunities for UK sector involvement. The British Council has, therefore, chosen to focus its activities in specific areas which it believes offer the greatest benefit to the UK higher education sector. For the most part these opportunities are not about short term returns but about building future returns through a longer term strategy of collaboration.

Our understanding of the Ukraine context suggests that future opportunity will be built most effectively by supporting those major system reforms where the UK sector has particular expertise to offer and experience to share. Building opportunity will not be achieved simply by flying in UK 'experts'. This will need to be combined with on-the-ground links with UK HEIs who are able to provide practical support. For UK HEIs we anticipate that this will open routes to longer-term opportunities, such as researcher exchange and collaboration, academic and student mobility (which in turn should position them well for an increased share of funding through EU programmes such as Horizon 2020, Erasmus+, and Creative Europe).

The British Council is developing the following initiatives with the dual aim of supporting the Ukraine sector reform and of providing support for UK HEIs to build collaboration with Ukraine HEIs:

**Higher Education Leadership Development Programme:** The British Council is collaborating with the Institute of Higher Education of the Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine and the UK Leadership Foundation for Higher Education with the support of the

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on attitudes of young people in Ukraine see "*Hopes, Fears and Dreams: The views of Ukraine's next generation*" [http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/hopes\\_fears\\_and\\_dreamsvii.pdf](http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/hopes_fears_and_dreamsvii.pdf)



Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine to deliver a three-year Higher Education Leadership Development Programme in Ukraine. The programme aims to develop the leadership potential of Ukraine universities to support the process of reforming the university sector. It will involve teams (five people from each participating university) of managerial, academic and student representatives to support systemic university capacity building. A call for proposals has been put out to Ukraine HEIs and ten will be selected to take part in the first stage of the programme (February 2016–February 2017). Over three years, 40 HEIs will have the opportunity to go through the programme.

The British Council will fund a number of **Change Partnerships** as part of the above, in order to enable each Ukrainian HEI change team to pair thematically with a UK institution to support its change project.

**Quality Assurance:** The British Council in collaboration with QAA has provided initial support to the Ministry on quality assurance, with plans for longer-term partnership working between UK and Ukrainian HEIs on internal institutional quality assurance. The timing of this remains dependent on the final setting up and workings of the new National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education.

**Research Communication Skills:** The British Council is rolling out its Researcher Connect Programme, to help early-career researchers learn the skills and practices needed for effective international research collaboration, including proposal writing, article- and poster-writing, and email communication.

**Student Governance:** To support the capacity of student representatives to participate in university governance, the British Council will offer training for Ukrainian student unions and funding for networking and collaboration with their UK counterparts.

**English Language Teaching / English Medium Teaching:** The British Council is working with 20 universities across Ukraine, to improve the English language skills, and the teaching skills, of university teachers of English, and lecturers of other subjects who need to teach through English. 3,000 students will be given free access to online English language courses as part of this sub-programme.

**Partnership and Mobility Grants:** The British Council will offer a range of small, medium and larger grants to support mobilities and partnerships between UK and Ukrainian HEIs. These can be in support of the various activities outlined above, or other important themes such as employer engagement and student employability. Grants can also be accessed to allow HEIs to meet to develop applications for the large EU programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020.