

External Examiner's Report 2008
Ternopil National Economic University

M. Peter van der Hoek
Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands
and
Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

1. Introduction

On June 10-15, 2008, I visited the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management at Ternopil National Economic University. I went through the exams insofar they are in English and I read the bachelor's theses submitted by the bachelor candidates. Moreover, I met with the following persons:

- Yevgen Savelyev, Vice-Rector;
- Lyudmyla Havrylyuk-Yensen, Dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management;
- Lesya Kolinets, Director of the Center of European and International Studies of the Faculty of International Business and Management;
- several lecturers;
- some students.

The meetings were very informative and I am grateful to those willing to spend time on meeting and sharing their views with me.

It is admirable what the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management has achieved despite the very difficult financial and economic conditions. The addition of a master's program has further improved the faculty's scholarly standing.

I value to note that my visit was very well prepared and organized under the guidance of the dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management. It was a pleasure to observe that the transport had been organized well, that my program was ready and that appropriate housing was available.

2. Term papers

- a. The bachelor students were required to submit their bachelor papers by December 24, 2007. However, this deadline has not been enforced as a number of papers appeared to have been submitted in 2008. There were 24 candidates. Three of them were current master students, who had not received a certificate in 2007. They had submitted their paper in this academic year in order to still earn their certificate.

- b. The students have received clear and elaborate written guidelines and useful information for writing a term paper. In addition, they received methodological recommendations for writing course papers. However, some students appear to have neglected the guidelines. Obviously, they have problems in writing an academic paper.
- c. I have read all 24 papers that have been submitted. Generally, the quality of the papers was similar to that of the papers in 2007. The supervisor left the decision about granting the certificate in a number of cases to the external examiner.
- d. The supervisor did a great job by providing me with written comments. Students have received feedback on earlier versions of their papers and they have been given a chance to revise their papers by incorporating the supervisor's comments. This is very valuable for students as it creates a learning effect. However, it implies a huge workload for the supervisor. The faculty should be aware of this additional burden.
- e. Plagiarism remains a big problem. I suspect that a number of candidates – including one of the master students – have committed plagiarism. There are web sites selling papers including custom-written papers. My impression is that students do not (yet) use these sites. Rather, they search the web for texts that they can cut and paste into their papers. In previous reports I recommended to apply plagiarism detection software. I understood that this year an attempt has been made to do so. However, it seems that there were some problems in applying the plagiarism detection software. Hopefully, next year it will be possible to subject all papers to this software.
- f. Like last year, I observed that the papers have not been signed by an English language teacher suggesting that the papers' language has not been checked.
- g. As noted above, the papers are comparable to those of 2007. Generally, they give rise to the following observations:
 - Some papers have been written in poor English.
 - Some papers have a poor structure and are poorly organized.
 - Some papers are purely descriptive and/or journalistic and do not contain any analytical elements.
 - Some papers do not lead to any conclusion or present vague conclusions.
 - Bibliographies are sometimes poorly organized, for example by listing references randomly rather than alphabetically, by not including the year of publication and/or the place and publisher, etc.
 - Some papers contain references to sources that are not included in the list of references and vice versa.

3. Exams

- a. I have understood that most of the courses taught in English have been tested orally. One of the candidates took only two exams due to the fact that he had moved from another university to TNEU and had already taken most exams at the other university.
- b. I have seen three written exams in English. I went through the examination questions of these courses and observed that the tests consist of open questions and are partly based on

cases presented to the students. The exams do not contain multiple choice questions or true/false questions.

c. Observations related to grading and examination questions:

1. Sometimes a student earns points without giving a real answer to the question. For example, a case is presented about a manager who should carry out a number of tasks including watching the cash register when the cashier has a break. However, the manager does not watch the cash register and money appears to be missing. One of the things students are required to do on the basis of this case is giving a recommendation about how to prevent that money will be missing from the cash register again. One student's recommendation is that the manager should watch the cash register when the cashier is having a break. Obviously, she overlooked that this is a given as it is what the manager already should do according to the case presented. Yet, the student received the maximum number of points for her answer.
2. Some students appeared to have submitted typed answers. Obviously, they had been given the chance to answer the questions outside the class room. I do not know the reason for this.

4. What next?

The Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management has achieved considerable improvements over time under the leadership of its highly committed dean, Lyudmyla Havrylyuk-Yensen. As a result, the current level of both teachers and students is remarkably higher than, say, five years ago. However, it seems that further improvements have not been achieved over the past academic year even though this is hard to evaluate by an outsider and during a short visit.

If the previous observation is true, it seems equally difficult for an outsider to assess whether the perceived lack of further improvements is a temporary phenomenon or not. In addition, it is even more difficult to ascertain the possible causes of a lack of further improvements. Nonetheless, I will present some possible causes below:

- a. It is a well-known fact that the higher the level, the more difficult it is to achieve further improvements. This might be an explanatory factor although it does not seem to be a very strong one.
- b. In my 2007 report I already signaled that the problem of plagiarism may jeopardize the prospect of continuation of the improvements. It might be that this is now becoming reality, but if so it does not seem to be a very strong cause either.
- c. I have no insight in the extent of support the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management receives from the university's central level. If there has been a change in this field, it might be the strongest cause of a lack of further improvements. If this is true, the problem for the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management would be that it has only a very limited influence on the support received from the university. The responsibility rests at the university's central level.

I am convinced that the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management's potential is still high and promising for the future. Thus, continuing the process of improving the Faculty's level should be possible provided that it receives sufficient support in terms of funding, personnel and incentives.

The following points need to be addressed to revitalize the process of further improvements:

- (a) The format of the term papers can be improved. Not only the language, but also other aspects including the structure, references and bibliographies can be ameliorated. Generally, the skills of academic writing could be strengthened.
- (b) Both the format and the composition of the examinations can be further improved. Oral exams have some advantages. For example, they may be efficient, in particular if the number of candidates is small, while errors and inaccuracies of questions can easily and timely be rectified. However, oral exams also have some disadvantages. One major drawback is that the grading of oral exams tends to be more subjective than the grading of written exams and in particular more subjective than the grading of multiple choice exams. Another disadvantage is that the quality of oral exams cannot be monitored, certainly not by the external examiner. An exam consisting of a combination of open and multiple choice questions seems to combine the advantages of both question types.
- (c) Plagiarism continues to be a problem that needs to be addressed.
- (d) Given the widespread problem of corruption in Ukraine, the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management may want to consider adding a course on *Ethics* (or more specific a course on *Business Ethics*) to its curriculum either in the bachelor or the master program.
- (e) Continuing education is key to staff members to maintain or even increase their level. This may be considered a component of the human resources management.

5. Recommendations

The Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management has a track record of being able and willing to work on addressing the problems mentioned above. My reading of the papers and my discussions with staff and students give rise to the following concrete recommendations that may assist the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management in its ongoing efforts to increase its academic level further.

A. Quality of term papers

The quality of the term papers varies considerably. This pertains both to the substance (including structure and conclusions) and the format (such as referencing and compiling bibliographies). A number of papers are poorly organized and/or journalistic rather than academic. A part of the students appear to have a problem in writing papers that meet academic standards.

Recommendation A1:

Organize a student seminar or practical work on "Academic writing" and include it as a required component in the curriculum.

Recommendation A2:

Require students to submit two hard copies of their term papers: one to their economics supervisor and one to a Department of Foreign Languages. This would facilitate to connect a second learning effect to the paper in that it could improve the students' English language skills. The paper could thus be used for two separate evaluations:

- 1) an evaluation of its economic content;*
- 2) an evaluation of the English language.*

Recommendation A3:

Enforce the submission deadline. As December 24 may be too tight for the final version, consider to set January 15 as deadline for initial submissions and a later date, for example March 31, for submissions of the final versions.

B. Quality of exams

My insight in the quality of exams is limited given the fact that I have seen only few written exams. Generally, however, teachers tend to have a blind spot for mistakes or shortcomings in their own examination questions. Moreover, the number of multiple choice questions should be adequate.

Recommendation B1:

Encourage teachers to comment on each other's draft examination questions.

Recommendation B2:

Include both multiple choice and open questions in exams. The number of multiple choice questions should be large enough to allow for a statistical analysis of the validity of both the individual questions and the examination as a whole.

Recommendation B3:

Organize a seminar on "Drafting examinations" for teachers.

C. Plagiarism

I suspect that a number of the papers are again partly based on texts copied from the Internet. My impression is that plagiarizing students still take it for granted that their chances of being caught are negligible. The use of plagiarism detection software could increase the chance of being caught to close to 100%. Thus, solving the problem with the application of plagiarism detection software should have a high priority.

Recommendation C1:

Require students to submit an electronic copy of their papers (in addition to the two hard copies, see recommendation A2 above). This would facilitate the application of plagiarism detection software, while it would also send a clear signal to the students that there is a real chance to be caught if they plagiarize.

Recommendation C2:

Add to the guidelines that from the academic year 2008/2009:

- *All papers will be subject to a plagiarism check by using plagiarism detection software and that as a result the chance of being caught will be close to 100%.*
- *No certificate will be granted at the graduation ceremony if plagiarism has been detected. In these cases students can submit a new or revised paper by August 31 (because the enforcement of this rule is new). If the new or revised paper is acceptable and passes the plagiarism check the certificate will still be awarded in September. In all other cases no certificate will be granted.*

D. Incentive for students

Although good written guidelines for writing a term paper are available, students do not always follow the guidelines. To provide the students with an additional incentive, the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management may consider introducing a best paper award.

Recommendation D:

Consider the introduction of an award for the best bachelor paper and in the master program for the best master paper. Winners should receive a plaque.

E. Human resource management

Human resource management is necessary for an organization to function properly. Evaluations of personnel are a regular component of personnel management. Crucial is that the evaluations of staff are carried out transparently and by using the same method for all categories of personnel. Evaluations of staff are a form of two-way traffic. It is not only the department head who evaluates a staff member, but also the staff members who evaluate the working conditions. For example, it gives staff members the chance to signal the lack of certain materials, or the occurrence of certain conditions affecting the quality of their work, or the need for training to maintain or improve their skills in the framework of continuing education, etc. The evaluation should be considered a staff member's right.

Recommendation E1:

Instruct department heads to evaluate their staff members on an annual basis, while they report to the dean.

Recommendation E2:

Design a standardized form for this purpose - so as to ensure that all staff members will be evaluated in similar ways and by using the same method - and instruct a personnel officer to assist department heads in administering the evaluations.

Recommendation E3:

Organize a seminar on university personnel management.



ERASMUS UNIVERSITEIT ROTTERDAM
FACULTEIT DER RECHTSGELEERDHEID
POSTBUS 1738
3000 DR ROTTERDAM

M. Peter van der Hoek, External Examiner

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