

ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM

Mailing address:

Prof. dr. M.P. van der Hoek
Public Finance and Management
Editor
P.O. Box 137
NL-3350 AC Papendrecht
Netherlands

Ms. Lyudmyla Havrylyuk-Yensen
Dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty
Ternopil Economic State University
Lvivska Str. 11
Ternopil 46004
Ukraine

Your reference

Our reference
07/vdH

Date
November 3, 2011

Subject
External Examiner's Report 2011

E-mail
vanderhoek@ext.eur.nl

Direct telephone
+31-78-6153453

Dear Lyudmyla,

Please find enclosed my external examiner's report 2011. If there is anything more I can do, please let me know. If desired, I am prepared to give one or more seminars at TNEU regarding one or more of my recommendations.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Peter'.

Peter

Encl.: 1

**External Examiner's Report 2011
Ternopil National Economic University**

**M. Peter van der Hoek
Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands
Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania
and
University of Electronic Science and Technology, Chengdu, China**

1. Introduction

On June 13-18, 2011, I visited the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management at Ternopil National Economic University.

I am pleased to observe that my visit was well-prepared and had been organized under the guidance of the dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management. My transfers to and from Ternopil were well-organized, my program was ready on arrival and appropriate housing was available.

It is pleasant to observe that my consultations with the Royal Dutch embassy in Kiev in 2010 have resulted in the presence of the embassy's second secretary, Mr. R. van Tooren, at the certificates granting ceremony in Ternopil in 2011. Prior to the ceremony he gave a speech, where the students had a chance to ask questions.

During my visit I reviewed the exams insofar they were in English and I read the bachelor theses submitted by the candidates. Moreover, I met with a number of persons, including:

- Bohdan Lutsiv, Vice-Rector International Relations;
- Lyudmyla Havrylyuk-Yensen, Dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management;
- Lydiya Kurant, Head of the Business Communications and Organizational Behavior Department;
- Viktoriya Kramar, Assistant Dean International Affairs;
- several teachers;
- several students.

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

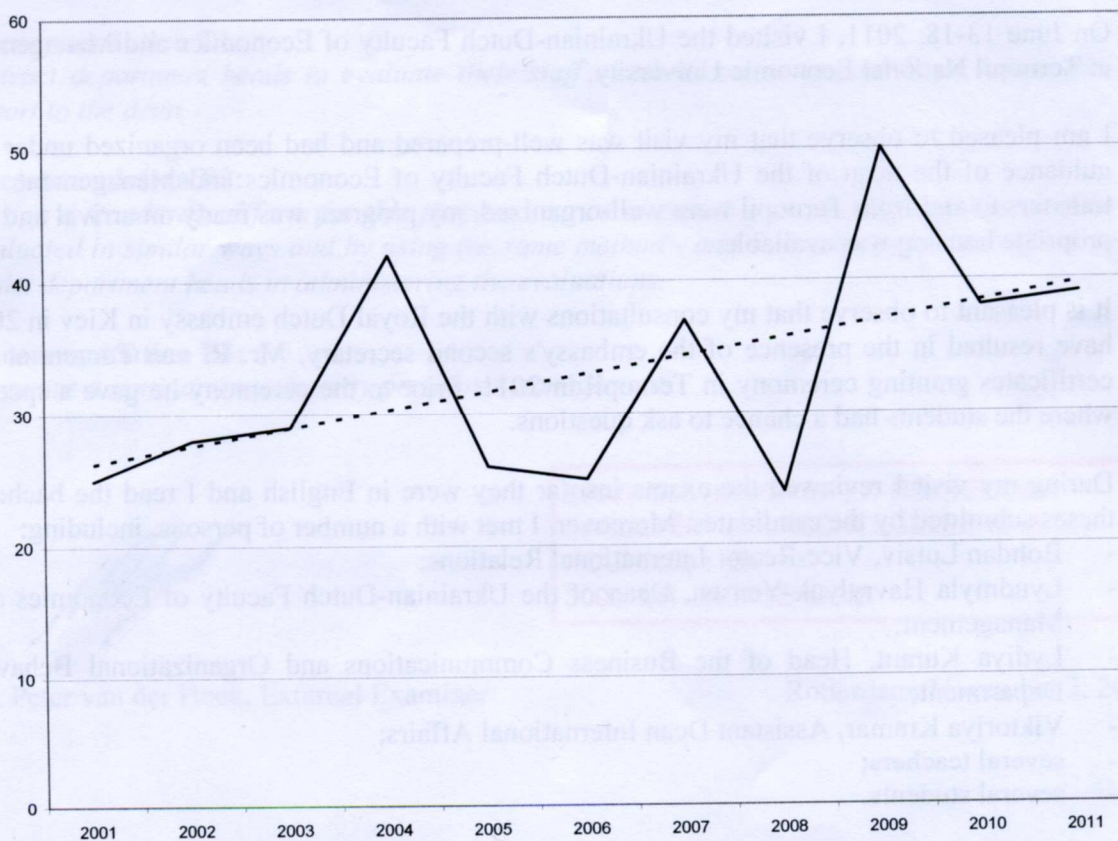
The Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management's achievements are remarkable despite the difficult financial and economic conditions the School faces. The Faculty has created both a master's program and a bachelor's program. It should be noted that the dean and staff members of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management are very dedicated, which is an important benefit for the students, the Faculty and the University.

The Best Paper Award that I had proposed in previous reports was established in 2010 in the form of an additional certificate stating that the student was the winner of the Best Paper Award of that year. In 2011, it was difficult to select the Best Paper Award winner as several students had submitted good papers. My impression is that the Best Paper Award has already gained the status it deserves.

2. Term papers

- a. There were 39 candidates who had submitted bachelor theses in order to receive their certificates. Although this implies a stabilization of the number of candidates for a certificate compared to 2010, it is the third highest number in the past 11 years. Only in 2004 and 2009 there were more candidates than in 2011. Figure 1 displays the development in the number of candidates in the past decade.

Figure 1. Number of candidates, 2001-2011



Source: External Examiner's reports, 2001-2011.

Four of the previous years - 2004, 2007, 2009, and 2010 - show relatively high numbers that are well above the annual average of 33.0 candidates. Overall, the past decade shows a rising trend as the trend line in the Figure displays. It seems worth to compare this development with other faculties both at Ternopil National Economic University and other universities in different regions of Ukraine. In addition, it seems interesting to search for an explanation of the fluctuating numbers of candidates. Demographic and economic devel-

opments may be explanatory factors, but other factors including the Faculty's reputation may provide part of the explanation. I am willing to be involved by providing counseling and advice for this exercise.

- b. The students have received clear and elaborate written guidelines and useful information for writing a term paper. In addition, they have received methodological recommendations for writing course papers. However, some of the students appear to have neglected the guidelines. Obviously, they have problems in writing an academic paper. Moreover, some candidates submitted their papers well after the deadline even as late as June 14, 2011.
- c. Each paper has been supervised by one supervisor, who provided the students with feedback on earlier versions of their papers. The students have been given a chance to revise their papers by incorporating the supervisor's comments. Obviously, this procedure is very valuable as it creates a learning effect for students. Regrettably, not all students took the opportunity to revise their papers.
- d. I have read all 34 papers that have been submitted.¹ Generally, the quality of the papers is similar to that of the papers in the past few years. The supervisors are all from the Department of Communication and Organizational Behavior. Thus, they are primarily language teachers. As a result, papers may have been mainly judged on the use of the English language rather than the economic content.
- e. Although the students are required to sign a plagiarism statement and a signed statement appeared present, indeed, for each candidate, plagiarism continues to be a serious problem. Students search the web for texts that they can cut and paste into their papers. In previous reports I recommended to apply plagiarism detection software. An alternative for supervisors might be using Google. In a number of cases I observed (by using Google) or suspected plagiarism at least to some extent.
- f. Generally, the papers give rise to the following observations:
 - The English is in many cases reasonable, but quite a few papers have been written in poor English. The supervisor's evaluations are sometimes inadequate. Examples are that she evaluates the English as good (or even perfect), whereas the paper has been written in poor English; and that she considers the paper well-structured although there is no clear structure.
 - A number of papers are purely descriptive and do not contain any analysis. Rather, the candidate presents a number of facts or a piece of history, while their relevance for the paper is unclear. An (extreme) example is the paper that presents a list of totally irrelevant details including account numbers of correspondent banks as well as the banks' SWIFT and BIC codes.
 - Many papers do not present an adequate research question. Rather, students sometimes write that they aim at studying a particular subject. Formulating a good research question is a necessary condition for a good paper. However, it is not a sufficient condition. One candidate included a research question in her paper, but regrettably to no effect.
 - Some papers do not lead to any conclusion or present vague or trivial conclusions. An example of a meaningless conclusion is: "Some of the most traded currencies are the Japanese yen, the euro, the Swiss franc, the pound sterling, the Australian dollar, the

1. The number of papers is smaller than the number of candidates because 5 papers are joint work and have been written by two students.

Swedish krona, the Canadian dollar, the Norwegian krona, and the Hong Kong dollar." An example of a dead wrong conclusion is: "The Russian ruble played a role as key reserve currency."

- Some students prove to be very naive witness the following quote: "Why can't Ukraine use all the available resources in order to improve the state's economy and provide better living conditions? ...It is really very easy for our country to do....just improve the transport system and roads, etc." This is small talk rather than academic writing.
- In most papers a systematic literature search is lacking. The availability of literature (just by chance?) seems more decisive for references to be included in the paper than a literature search.
- Clearly, some papers have been written in combination with an internship. In these cases students tend to rely heavily on the information the company provides. They seem to take it for granted that it is complete and correct and do not search for information from independent and objective sources. One of the papers seems an internship report rather than a bachelor thesis.
- Some papers heavily rely on non-academic sources including newspaper articles and speeches given by businessmen, which often leads to simplistic conclusions and in some cases also to jumping to conclusions.
- Bibliographies are sometimes poorly organized, for example by listing references randomly rather than alphabetically, or alphabetically according to first names rather than last names, or 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

I have understood that most of the courses taught in English have been tested orally. I have seen a final test in Psychology and a test for the course MUNAD-31.

The Psychology test contains 15 true/false questions, 10 sentences in which the student has to add a word, and 6 multiple choice questions. The multiple choice questions have different numbers of alternatives (2 questions with 4 alternatives, 2 with 5 alternatives, 1 with 6 alternatives and 1 with 7 alternatives. This seems unbalanced. A fixed number of alternatives (usually 4, in some cases 3 or 5) is preferred.

The MUNAD-31 test has a heading in Ukrainian and contains 12 open questions and 8 multiple choice questions (of which 7 with 3 alternatives and 1 with 4 alternatives).

4. The future

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

If the observation above is true, it seems equally difficult for an outsider to identify the causes of the perceived lack of further improvements. Nonetheless, I will present some possible hypotheses below:

- a. The higher the level, the more difficult it is to achieve further improvements. This might be one of the explanatory factors.
- b. The problem of plagiarism may jeopardize the prospect of continuation of the improvements, as I already signaled in my 2007 report. This might have become reality. As indicated before, I suspect plagiarism in a number of papers, which reduces the papers' quality.
- c. Insufficient financial means may pose problems in employing sufficient and sufficiently qualified supervisors. I have no insight in the extent of support that 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 most important 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 continues to be high and is promising for the future. Reviving the process of continuous improvements of the Faculty's level should be possible provided that it will receive sufficient support from the University in terms of funding, personnel and incentives.

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

- (a) The content of the papers can be improved by instructing the students to:
 1. formulate an adequate research question and possibly testable hypotheses;
 2. search the literature systematically, for example by using EconLit;
 3. use scholarly sources as opposed to newspapers and speeches given by businessmen;
 4. include clear conclusions in their papers.
- (b) The format of the term papers can be improved. Not only the language, but also other aspects including the structure, sources, references and bibliographies can be ameliorated. Generally, the skills of academic writing and research could be strengthened.
- (c) 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 an external examiner. An exam consisting of a combination of open and multiple choice questions seems to combine the advantages of both question types.
- (d) Plagiarism continues to be a growing problem that needs to be addressed seriously. It should be stressed that students who plagiarize commit forgery even if they would not have signed a plagiarism statement.

- (e) 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* or *Organization Ethics*) to its curriculum either in the bachelor's or the master's program.
- (f) Continuing education is key to maintaining and/or increasing staff members' professional level. This may be considered a component of the human resources management.

5. Recommendations

Under the leadership of Lyudmyla Havrylyuk-Yensen, Dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management, the school has established a track record of being able and willing to work on addressing the problems mentioned above. It should be noted, however, that the Faculty's possibilities and means are limited. As a result, the scope for the Faculty's leadership to realize improvements is also limited. If more means would be allocated to the Faculty, more of the problems could be addressed adequately.

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 content (including structure, research questions, literature search, sources and conclusions) and the format (such as lists of references, bibliographies, etc.). A number of papers are poorly organized and/or journalistic rather than academic in nature. Some 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:

Organize the supervision such that each candidate has two supervisors: an economics teacher and a business communications/language teacher.² Students should submit two hard copies, one for each supervisor, in addition to an electronic copy. This would facilitate bringing about a double learning effect to the paper in that it may improve both the students' English language skills and the students' understanding of the content. The paper could thus be used for two separate evaluations:

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

² It should be noted that the availability of supervisors seems a problem for the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty that can only be solved with (more) support of the University's central level. Given the reputation the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty has built over time, it might be possible to convince the University's central level to increase its support to this high quality Faculty. This would be in line with the recommendation of the European University Association to support internationally oriented staff members. See European University Association, Institutional Evaluation Programme, Ternopil National Economic University Evaluation Report, July 2009, p.12).

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 exam questions.

Recommendation B2:

Include both multiple choice and open questions in exams where possible. 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 for teachers on "Drafting examinations".

C. Plagiarism

The plagiarism problem continues to grow. Plagiarizing students seem to take it for granted that their chances of being caught are negligible. The use of plagiarism detection software would increase the chance of being caught to nearly 100%. Thus, solving the problem with the application of plagiarism detection software should have a high priority. If this appears impossible, Google may be used as an alternative.

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 plagiarism detection, while it would also send a clear signal to the students that there is a very high chance to be caught if they plagiarize.

Recommendation C2:

Add to the guidelines that:

- *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 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 would be new). If the new or revised paper is acceptable and passes the plagiarism test, 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, they may be further improved by adding instructions about a well-formulated research question and a systematic literature search. In addition, continue selecting the best paper and awarding a Best Paper Award.

Recommendation D1:

Add to the guidelines instructions about the significance of research questions, systematic literature searches, the right format and an academic attitude and writing style. These aspects should be part of the course "Academic writing" (see recommendation A1).

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 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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