

Establishing World-Class Universities in Russia: Case Study of a Federal University

*Tatiana Gounko, Svetlana Panina,
and Svetlana Zalutskaya*

INTRODUCTION

As a member of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), Russia has a mature tertiary education system providing wide access to higher education. Following several decades of decline in the science and higher education sectors, Russia now faces the challenges of reviving research and raising the overall quality of its once strong traditional universities. As with many other governments around the world, Russia has adopted excellence initiatives to raise the international profile of its research universities. Experts acknowledge that research universities are at the pinnacle of higher education and are central to economic and scientific development of nations around the world (Altbach 2013; Altbach and Salmi 2011).

T. Gounko (✉)
University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, Canada

S. Panina
North-Eastern Federal University, Yakutsk, Russia

S. Zalutskaya
North-Eastern Federal University, Yakutsk, Russia

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss recent government initiatives to develop Russian research universities and to examine how a specific federal university is implementing a new mandate of integrating research and teaching in furtherance of becoming globally competitive. We discuss these developments vis-à-vis the global context in which top research universities are increasingly viewed as an integral part of regional and global economic development. In considering current trends, we also draw on our academic experiences in Russian and Canadian universities. These experiences allow us to appreciate the challenges associated with the reform of university research and teaching. We also acknowledge that the reform process is continuing and, therefore, a final assessment of the initiatives discussed cannot yet be written.

Publicly available policy documents and focus group conversations with faculty members provide the main data for our discussion. We have examined federal policy documents and federal programs including *Research and Pedagogical Cadre for an Innovative Russia* (Government of the Russian Federation 2008) and *The Strategy for the Development of Science and Innovation in the Russian Federation until 2015* (Ministry of Education and Science 2006). Additional information has been obtained from primary and secondary sources such as government press releases, online communications, newspaper publications, university policy documents and relevant research articles. We have also consulted with a Russian federal university which, after receiving its status in 2010, has been implementing reforms to improve quality of teaching and research and to raise its international profile.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN RUSSIA

Russia has a complex research system characterized by separation between teaching and research. In the Soviet Union, scientific research was distributed amongst three sectors: the university system, the Academy of Sciences system, and the industrial and defense system (Graham and Dezhina 2008). With rare exceptions, universities and various polytechnic institutes were involved primarily in teaching. Most basic research was conducted in the specialized research institutes of the Academy of Sciences. This complex research system weakened the research strength of the universities (Altbach 2013). For many years, national and international experts discussed this situation. Specifically, the 1999 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 1999) report noted that the quality of Russian higher education had been negatively affected by the

absence of strong financial support for research, the limited infrastructure, and the intentional separation of research and teaching. Such separation of research and teaching is not found in many Western countries, such as Canada and the United States, where universities carry out most fundamental research.

Experts acknowledge that, since the 1980s, state education policy has undergone several transformations as it has oscillated between a highly-centralized and standardized Soviet system, a radical neoliberal approach and, again, a federally controlled system (Johnson 2015). Taking into account international policy trends in the 2000s, the Russian government has adopted a number of programs to reform higher education and rebuild its universities and science. Despite these continuous efforts, the 2012 *OECD Science, Technology and Industry Outlook* (OECD 2012) notes that the Russian Academy of Sciences and industrial branch institutes still account for the large portion of basic research, performed by universities in many OECD countries. At the same time, research publications and patents applications remain low. According to Thomson Reuters, Russian science lags behind most G20 countries in overall numbers of publications and citations (Vorotnikov 2014).

The latest articulated strategy to develop world-class universities and to strengthen research arrived in 2006, when the federal government launched a program called the *Research and Pedagogical Cadre for an Innovative Russia (2009–2013)* (Government of the Russian Federation 2008) and targeted support for leading universities. It also created two new categories of institutions—the national research university and the federal university. These are expected to become centers of innovation, technological development and personnel training; to strengthen university research; and to raise the universities' international standing. By establishing these Russian "ivy league" universities and concentrating its resources on a limited number of institutions, the government hopes that in the near future Russian universities will be able to rival the world's best universities (Holdsworth 2008).

In addition to this, the federal government also introduced major competitive grants and financial incentives to foster institutional reforms, innovative approaches to teaching and integration of research, and to increase the number of internationally recognized publications. According to Johnson (2015), conceptualized by the Russian reformers and their international partners, such as the World Bank and the OECD, the current reforms' mechanisms include competitive grants, external evaluations of research

productivity, industrial-style benchmarking, and performance indicators. These were adopted directly out of the global neoliberal toolbox.

All of these regulatory tools were means to the end of the federal state reconsolidating its dominant or steering role, as well as levers to try and compel the top tier of universities and research institutes to consolidate and improve their internal efficiency and research productivity. (Johnson [2015](#), p. 301)

To achieve its ambition of raising the international reputation of Russian universities and encouraging alignment with European and global standards, in 2012 the Ministry of Education and Science established a Council on Global Competitiveness Enhancement of Russian Universities that will oversee a project known as *5–100*. The goal of the project is to enable at least five Russian universities to enter the top-100 in world university rankings by 2020. Participating universities represent different regions of Russia and include both federal and national research universities (Alekseev [2014](#)). To implement necessary changes, these institutions have, and will continue, to receive significant government funding. It is expected that a new university model will be created throughout Russia, and universities will introduce new management systems and become centers of innovative technology and human capital development. According to the government forecast, within five to six years, at least 20 Russian universities will adopt a new institutional model and, by 2020, some of them should join the ranks of leading world universities (National Training Foundation [2012](#)).

THE NORTH-EASTERN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY

The North-Eastern Federal University (NEFU) was founded in 1934 as Yakutsk Pedagogical Institute and received its state university status in 1956. Located in the city of Yakutsk, northern Russia, it is the largest higher education institution of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). For many decades, Yakutsk State University was a sole regional university preparing specialists in various fields of study including medicine, education, humanities, sciences and engineering. A new phase of the university's evolution started in 2010, when it joined a network of Russian federal universities established in every federal district of Russia. Today, the university is comprised of 11 institutes, 8 faculties, 146 departments and 3 regional branches. It employs nearly 1700 faculty and educates 20,000 students.

By 2020, the university is expected to become a nationally and internationally recognized modern scientific, educational and cultural center of north-east Russia. The current NEFU institutional mission is to educate competitive specialists, carry out research and develop innovative technologies contributing to social and economic development of the peoples of north-east Russia (Mikhailova et al. 2013).

During this short period of its life as a federal university, the NEFU has undergone a remarkable transformation. It has implemented significant structural and curricular changes and is fulfilling a Regional Development Plan (2011–2019) to become a scientific, cultural and innovative center of regional and national importance. Its current comprehensive website—which provides information in five languages: Russian, Yakut, English, Korean and Mandarin—can compete with those of some Canadian universities.

Summing up the university's progress to date, its rector, Professor Mikhailova, expressed both joy and optimism:

The NEFU is one of the best 50 Russian universities in technical, natural and mathematics sciences ... Besides, for the first time, the university is among the best 200 universities among the BRIC countries. This is particularly impressive as ours was one of six thousand institutions! (Tayursky 2014, p. 1)

The university has been also expanding its international outreach. Due to its unique geopolitical place and closeness to the countries of the Asia Pacific and Arctic regions, the university has been collaborating with dozens of universities, colleges and research centers from around the world. The NEFU has established connections with partners in Korea, Japan, China, the USA, Canada, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland, and continues cooperation with universities in Great Britain, Germany, France and former Soviet states.

Quality Assurance of Teaching and Research

One of the main areas of the ongoing institutional transformation is quality assurance of teaching and research. Since 2010, the university administration has introduced specific policies to ensure that faculty improve teaching quality and actively engage in research projects. Specifically, the university has established a Quality Management Division, and adopted

specific policies including *Quality System Management: Faculty Evaluation Criteria* to promote and monitor the quality of teaching and scholarship. The Division, headed by a Director, is a separate administrative unit employing eight permanent staff members responsible for the development, improvement and monitoring of the university's quality. Its main objective is to ensure that the university meets international quality standards. The Division reports directly to the university rector, who actually hires and fires its director.

In order to promote teaching and research excellence, in 2012, the Quality Management Division developed a policy, *NEFU Faculty Evaluation Criteria*, for assessing faculty "professional competency and productivity" and for awarding merit increments (MIs) based on the university's priority areas. The policy establishes several types of merit increments (permanent, one-off, additional, and so on), delineates award procedures, defines the activities and responsibilities of the Expert Team responsible for awarding MIs, specifies award amounts on a points basis and monetary value, and lists the types of evidence required for awards (e.g., publication copies, electronic evidence, copy of reviews, and so on). Faculty members can be awarded MIs for both teaching and research, provided that they perform their assigned duties well.

At the end of every semester, faculty members can apply for awards or MIs for research projects, student supervision and scholarly publications. Peer-reviewed publications in scholarly journals, textbooks and teaching materials recognized internationally and nationally are valued the most highly. For example, a professor supervising a Master's student will be annually awarded 80 points for advising in Russian and 120 points for advising in a foreign language. A publication in an international journal listed in the internationally indexed database and which contributes to the university ranking is worth 100 points.

An author or authors of a publication in a journal with a two-year impact factor (IF) recognized by the Russian Index of Science Citation (RISC) will receive 30 points. The English version of the journal does not count as a separate publication. Faculty may also receive one-off payments for publishing a recognized textbook to a ceiling of 200,000 (Russian rubles) (approximately US \$3330), divided by all authors; and research publications recognized through the Scopus and/or the Web of Science to the maximum of 35,000 (approximately US\$580) for each author (up to three authors). A monograph included in the RISC is worth 75,000 (approximately US\$1243); the same monograph available through the

Web of Science and/or Scopus database is worth 200,000 (approximately US\$3330) divided by all authors. A faculty member who successfully defends a PhD dissertation will be awarded 100,000 (approximately US\$1658) on presenting a published descriptive abstract (*autoreferat* in Russian).

While most of the awards are reviewed and determined by the members of the Expert Team, a university rector has the right to grant an award to a faculty member or a group of professors for “the utmost important” contribution to the development of the university. In such cases, the amount of the award is determined by the rector. The Expert Team is established so as to provide an independent evaluation of faculty professional activities, to oversee the distribution of awards, and to ensure fairness and transparency of the process (NEFU 2014).

Faculty Perspectives on Reforms

In 2014, we conducted focus group discussions with six faculty members of the NEFU. All faculty members hold Candidate of Sciences and Doctorate degrees, and positions equivalent to associate and full professors. Their areas of expertise are in education, philosophy and sociology. Several have been involved in research in higher education and have regular administrative duties. We wanted to hear their assessment of the new university initiatives. We asked faculty members to reflect on the changes that had taken place since the university had gained its federal university status, and how these changes affected faculty working conditions and their ability to perform the essential responsibilities of teaching and research. Faculty members commented on a number of developments including the introduction of research incentives, an increased academic mobility among students and faculty, adoption of more student centered policies and pedagogy, and greater bureaucracy. “Our management structure has changed; there has been an increase of the administrative-management personnel and bureaucracy. At the same time, we see more academic mobility of students and professors. The status of students has also been raised.”

Research Incentives

All participants of the study acknowledged growing value and recognition of research activities, including research collaboration and dissemination. Without exception, the faculty stated that research has become a priority for the university. This is evident in specific policies designed to encourage

research activity among faculty and to increase the number of publications and research projects across the institution. Research centers, including the Research Institute of Northern Ecology and the Olonkho Institute (a Yakut language heritage project), science laboratories and various schools (e.g., the School of International Studies) are now part of the university's research community. The University encourages its research centers to pursue research in matters directly related to north-eastern Russia and the Arctic region. The fields of research include regional languages and literature, as well as medicine and biology.

Participants also noted a remarkable shift in the way the university now evaluates research and scholarship. For example, since 2011, the university's focus has been on raising its international reputation and promoting research collaboration through establishing joint laboratories and research teams and through promoting internal grant programs. The university provides funding for these projects and uses various approaches to monitor and evaluate results. Specific policies and criteria to document, evaluate and reward research and scholarship have also been adopted. These policies are designed to promote research activity and raise the university's international standing.

Paradoxically, while all participants recognized profound changes in the way academic research was encouraged in the university, they noted that they needed more support from the university administration. They noted that funds for conferences and international collaboration were limited and often difficult to obtain. "Monographs and conference participation are not awarded; they are not included in award criteria."

Most professors did not have a personal professional development fund that could be used for conference attendances and other academic activities. They also wanted more resources for professional development, especially in the areas of academic writing, publishing and foreign languages, particularly English. This is how one of the participants described the situation:

The university encouraged us to publish in foreign journals listed on the Web of Science; they value these publications the most. Well, the problem is that just a few of us can professionally translate our works into English, let alone write in English. We are not English majors. Besides, it is difficult to find qualified English translators who also need to be paid for their work, mostly out of our own pocket. This is unrealistic considering my current salary.

Some participants pointed out inconsistencies that exist between various departments in how research merit awards are distributed and valued. According to the participants, in the previous year, every university faculty distributed awards differently. For example, the Faculty of Foreign Languages weighed each point for a journal publication at 300 (US\$10 at the time), while the School of Education awarded only 66 (US\$2.5 dollars) per point. “There is no transparency during the evaluation process. I received 3960 [US\$130] for my publication, while somebody received 18,000 rubles [US\$600] for a similar publication. Where is the fairness here?”

This is how another participant described the merit pay system: “I have to pay approximately 10,000 to publish my article in a refereed Russian journal. I can use some of my merit payments to compensate for my publishing expenses, but it does not cover them. I cannot really recover the money I have paid for the publication even when I get my merit pay!”

Faculty Salaries and Working Conditions

In Russia, low faculty salaries are the most frequently discussed issue amongst faculty and academics. Participants unanimously expressed their dissatisfaction with their academic salaries. “I am not happy with my salary...” “Our salaries are among the lowest in our region. Even school teachers’ salaries are much higher compared to ours.” Faculty members worried about a deteriorating quality of life due to low salaries and the constantly rising costs of living in Yakutsk, and Russia in general. “Our living expenses continue to climb—housing, utilities, and a nutritious food basket while the salaries are still low.” When asked about the average salary of an associate professor, one participant estimated that she was paid the equivalent of approximately US\$1100 per month. “This is what I am paid, considering that I have been working at the university for over 20 years and have various national teaching awards and other recognitions. I also have one and a half teaching load. Otherwise, my salary would have been only US\$800 .”

Another participant stated:

My salary is small. I don’t have money to pay for publications and can only submit my research to free journal, which takes forever ... At the same time, I have publish and report my research activity every 6, 9 and 12 months. It is very difficult to live on this salary. It does not cover living expenses; utilities. Food is expensive; our winter clothes are also expensive—fur boots,

hats and coats, our climate requires all these. I cannot even afford textbooks anymore, too pricy. The Internet really saves us now. Although I have to pay 2000 a month for it. I cannot afford this at work.

However, the participants' assessment of their salaries does not correspond with recent statements by the university rector, Professor Mikhailova, who announced that, since 2009, academic salaries had doubled and even tripled (Tayursky 2014). Some categories of professors, such as research professors, are rewarded for research activities and earn considerably more than regular faculty members, who are primarily involved in teaching.

When asked to evaluate their working conditions, most participants described them as satisfactory. However, they also identified the need to improve them by providing adequate office space and proper equipment, such as personal computers, so that they could fulfill their research and other academic activities. Office space is not available to most of the professors. The following are some of the comments made by our participants regarding working conditions at the university. "We usually share a common office with our colleagues. We can leave our books and materials there. I prepare for my classes at home; it is hard to do this with so many people around. Only research professors have separate offices." "We desperately need office spaces, desks, computers, and other equipment." "I have no desk and no computer at work. Most of my colleagues are on the same boat."

"In other departments, professors share office space and have access to computers. It is very noisy and hardly anybody can do research in such conditions. I and my colleagues do research mostly at home, sometimes in the library. ... Humanities have really poor research facilities. Faculty in the Department of Translation don't even have any desks in their shared office."

The absence of adequate office spaces presents a serious problem for both professors and department administration staff, especially when the university's mission is to become a leader in research and higher education. According to one participant, the university now expects professors to do more in terms of research. "We are required to publish and apply for grants, especially those that provide some money for the university. We also have the so-called 'second part of the day' [after classes] when we are supposed to engage in research."

Furthermore, the participants wished to see changes in their professional status at the university. "We want the university administration to raise faculty status and our role in the corporate culture of our university."

Some felt that their opinions were often not considered in administrative decisions. The long-standing top-down approach remains the main decision process at the university. Department chairs, deans and upper-level administration maintain considerable power over important institutional matters, including faculty hiring, promotion and rewards.

Most participants noted that institutional collegiality was still lacking. “Over the years, several of my colleagues were let go because the chair personally did not like them. In one instance, a person was constantly given inappropriate teaching assignments and eventually left. This is just one case of how a chair can make one’s life miserable.” “Our current chair has held this position since 1998! For some people this is a life-long appointment, and you need to learn to get along with them if you want to have your job.”

Yet, several participants expressed some optimism about future developments at the university. “The university is currently developing a new faculty contract and salary grid. There will be a ‘base part’ that all faculty members have to fulfill and a ‘stimulus part’ that will be awarded based on additional activities [research, publication etc.].” The latter part essentially represents a merit increment system. Faculty members have been involved in discussions of the new contract and merit criteria, which are now being developed by the University Council, teaching and human resources departments. A draft of the document will be circulated across university faculties, and a new contract is expected to be introduced in 2016.

A New Wave of Bureaucracy

All the participants noted a considerable increase in their overall workload. With the structural changes, they acknowledged an unprecedented growth in administrative and management personnel and its powers. According to one participant, “a new wave of bureaucracy” arrived as a result of this growth. Seemingly unending requirements for multiple reports and general paperwork take up even more of the professors’ time. “We now have to fill in forms to prove the quality of our lectures and seminars.” This is how one of the participants described the situation:

I can tell you that the amount of paperwork is out of control. In addition to my already heavy teaching load, now, I have to report on how many hours I spend improving my teaching methodology, developing courses and materials, and mentoring students. I also have to describe my administrative duties and report on research activities. There seems to be no end to this.

Another professor stated that: “It often feels that my job is to carry out bureaucratic directives, accounting for every hour I spend at the university. This is very de-professionalizing.” Some faculty suggested that the amount of time they now devote to preparing reports is taking more time than before; this is adding to their teaching load and taking time away from research and writing.

Some of our participants stated that they were already resigned to the demands for never-ending reporting and form-filling, accepting these as an evil they had to live with. While they were clearly unhappy with the amount of reporting and paperwork, they did not see any alternative to the existing institutional procedures. “I guess we will have to put up with this new wave of bureaucracy, no matter how irritating it is. If we want to improve the quality of our university and research, we have to be accountable. I don’t really mind doing this.”

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

During the 2000s, the Russian federal government adopted a new education policy in order to ensure Russia’s global competitiveness and raise the status of its universities. In designing and implementing its vision for higher education, the government drew heavily on the neoliberal approach with its emphasis on competition, efficiency and performance-based assessment (Gounko and Smale 2007; Smolentseva 2015). Stressing the need to align the Russian economy with global markets and foster flexibility, innovation, productive and allocative efficiency, accountability and transparency, educational quality and development of human capital, the government introduced private sector mechanisms directly from the neoliberal and “new public management” toolbox (Johnson 2015). The university excellence initiatives discussed in this chapter have also emerged from this toolbox, in line with the global trend to create “centers of excellence” (Salmi 2009b).

The issues addressed by our participants—including changes in university management, a focus and support for research activity, increased workload and paperwork, and low salaries—have been discussed by many higher education experts. Researchers (e.g., Deem et al. 2007; Johnson 2015) suggested that—in Europe, Russia and globally—there has been a clear trend towards stronger and more centralized management systems in universities, and there seems to be no organizational alternative for

the management of publicly funded organizations (such as universities) to New Managerialism.

Historically, a top-down approach was a characteristic feature of the Soviet government and institutional leadership. Even though, since the 1990s, higher education policies have aligned with global neoliberal models and norms, in practice, the Soviet-era legacies have endured. According to Johnson (2015), Russian higher education policy has developed in ways “that would maintain the mutually-beneficial relations and interdependence between the federal state, regional interests, and state-funded universities” (p. 297). Mixing traditional top-down and recently introduced new public management approaches, the federal government still maintains substantial control over university resources and policies. By virtue of its hierarchical position, it is able to place legal and technical requirements on universities to ensure eligibility for the receipt of federal or local funds (Gounko and Smale 2007).

In terms of university management, researchers observe a trend toward stronger and more centralized management systems. Following the logic of the new public management, the federal government “was simultaneously pulling back in some ways (devolving at least partial responsibility for control of property, financing, and quality onto the universities themselves), while at the same time asserting new mechanisms for testing, quality assurance, and supervision” (Johnson 2015, p. 303). The government made various attempts to reform university management by trying to implement strategic planning, accounting, fundraising, professional staff development, and broader use of new information and computer technologies. However, after several years of excellence reforms, the quality of management in most universities remains a challenge. As the government expects leading universities to implement innovative management systems and to improve efficiency and accountability, academics feel pressured to comply with multiple administrative procedures and tasks they often do not fully understand. The infamous university bureaucratization, attributed to current reforms, produced a new class of bureaucrats in charge of education reforms in universities. Unfortunately, professors often do not take part in the decisions affecting teaching and research. Instead, they have to carry out directives and complete reports (Panfilova 2011). Considering the growing demand for university accountability (Salmi 2009a), the question of how to balance encroaching managerialism and academic autonomy will continue to be debated by academics, administrators and policy makers.

While acknowledging recent focus and support for university research, our participants also noted insufficient support and resources for professional development. Yet, faculty participation in academic reforms and their professional growth are central to the improvement of research and teaching in Russia. As Philip Altbach and Jamil Salmi (2011) argued, world-class universities require well-educated academics to perform their teaching and research responsibilities at the highest level.

The goals of the 90 billion (approximately €2.3 billion) Federal Program to upgrade Russia's research and academic potential are: to improve the quality of research and teaching personnel, to attract talented young researchers, and to strengthen the quality of research publications. Despite many previous initiatives to attract young people to academia, Russian universities have been losing promising researchers to other sectors of industry and foreign universities. Recognizing that these issues cannot be resolved solely by market mechanisms, the federal government presently argues for a comprehensive approach to the revival of Russia's academic research. It has proposed to raise researchers' and professors' salaries; to improve work environments, research facilities and access to international research; to acknowledge the importance of continuing professional development; to be mindful of the career advancement of young academics; and to improve living conditions (Government of the Russian Federation 2008). The Russian Ministry of Education and Science has also noted that salaries and academic resources in science and higher education need to become comparable with those in other economically developed countries. While Russian universities report increases in professors' earnings, the overall situation with academic salaries has not changed significantly. A recent study of monthly average salaries of public higher education faculty by Philip Altbach et al. (2012) showed that the average top salary in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) in US\$ in Russia is US\$910, which is considerably lower compared with the average top salaries of US\$9485 paid in Canada. The decline in income and their quality of living forces academics to take additional teaching loads, which are already higher compared with those in Western research universities where professors have modest teaching responsibilities and sufficient time to undertake and publish research. Altbach and Salmi (2011) pointed out that where teaching loads are relatively high—as is the case in many developing countries—research commitment and productivity tend to be relatively low.

Another pressing concern for the Russian government and the universities as they strive for world-class status is the low number of publications

in internationally recognized venues. Universities encourage and reward publications, especially in top-rated international journals. They place additional value on research published in English. Most science and scholarship databases operate exclusively in English. Today, international and Russian academics are expected to publish and present in English, which has been recognized as the *lingua franca* or the Latin of the twenty-first century (Altbach 2004). But a lack of English language proficiency is a major difficulty for many Russian academics. As the language of instruction in Russia's universities is Russian, academics tend to publish in Russian-language journals. According to Ivan Sterligov (2014), this pattern of publication is a result of iron curtain politics and the size of Soviet and Russian science. Of the 3500 Russian scientific journals, only 170 are listed in Web of Science (WoS), whereas half of all Russian Web of Science indexed articles are published in those 170 journals. Publications in English are cited more often than those in Russian. Citations of Russian research papers are almost 19 % lower than average global figures. Most cited papers are published by physicists, astronomers, mathematicians and chemists. The Web of Science, an online subscription-based scientific citation index, is accepted in Russia as one of the main tools with which citation indices of Russian academics (Novakovskaya 2014) are evaluated. According to Eugene Vorotnikov (2014), in 2012, President Putin issued a decree aimed at increasing Russia's share of publications in the Web of Science to 2.44 % by 2015.

If Russian universities want to participate in global higher education competition, they need to pay particular attention to the rising role of English as the language of higher education. Experts also recognize that it is easier to attract leading international scholars if English is the working language of a university. As the dominant language of the modern academy, English is already replacing Russian as a key language of communication in the former Soviet Union (Altbach 2013). Since English is at the pinnacle of scientific communication and English-language products dominate the international market place (Altbach 2004), non-English speaking countries will have to raise their English language proficiency so as to not be left behind by countries such as the United States and Canada.

As Russia is implementing its university excellence initiatives, several important issues must be considered. According to Salmi (2009b), top research universities are characterized by a high concentration of talent (faculty and students), abundant resources for research and learning, and favorable governance that encourages leadership, strategic vision, innovation,

flexibility and resource management without cumbersome bureaucracy. In reforming higher education and establishing research universities, many countries are invariably looking at successful research universities and emulating an informal global research model, which is essentially based on the US research university. To some extent, Russia is adapting Western organizational and governance ideas (Altbach 2013; Altbach and Salmi 2011).

CONCLUSION

The pressure to build world-class universities, which are considered essential for global competitiveness and economic growth, and the recent proliferation of international league tables have prompted many governments to legislate “excellence initiatives” (Altbach and Salmi 2011). Similarly, Russia has implemented a series of programs to raise the prestige of Russian science and make its universities globally competitive. Pursuing its intentions to make Russia’s universities centers of research and excellence, the government has upgraded a number of existing universities, awarding them special status and allocating them significant financial resources.

In its early stages, excellence reform pointed out successes and challenges in restructuring the old higher education and research system. One thing is obvious—fundamental changes in academia will take more than decrees and money. Salmi (2013) reminded us that “Developing a strong culture of excellence, especially in research, is the result of incremental progress and consolidation over several decades, sometimes centuries” (p. 1) Are Russian universities ready for this?

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