

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Title of the thesis:	Changes in higher educational system after the Bologna Process: The case study of foreign students in Ukraine
Author of the thesis:	Olena Dyachenko
Referee (incl. titles):	Mgr. Jan Kohoutek, PhD.

Remark: It is a standard at the FSV UK that the Referee's Report is at least 500 words long. In case you will assess the thesis as "non-defendable", please explain the concrete reasons for that in detail.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20)</i>	10
<i>Contribution (max. 20)</i>	7
<i>Methods (max. 20)</i>	12
<i>Literature (max. 20)</i>	15
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20)</i>	12
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100)	56
The proposed grade (1-2-3-4)	3

You can even use a decimal point (e.g. giving the grade of 2.5 for 60 points).

Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the 5 numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).

1) Theoretical background:

The thesis gives some relevant theoretical concepts in some of its parts (quality, corruption). Despite their conceptual relevance, there are two associated problems. First, no attempt is made to particular concepts into a conceptual framework that would guide the enquiry as a whole. Second, the concepts seem to bear a very little connection to the actual findings the thesis presents.

2) Contribution:

Despite the relevance and pertinence of the theme researched into, the thesis displays some shortcomings here. At the descriptive level, despite the inclusion of sometimes a fairly detailed description of the workings of systemic issues within Ukrainian higher education (e.g. ECTS), it is not clear how particularly one of the areas chosen, i.e. quality assurance, works (beyond a rather brief statement of four quality levels related to the modified diploma structure). In this respect, it is not specified what the accreditation criteria for each level are, how the accreditation process works (for public as well as for private HEIs), what the composition of the state accreditation commission is, what its rulings are over the time period in question etc. More descriptive information on these aspects would certainly augment the analysis even with the likely limitations given by data availability. Also, with respect to systemic quality assurance, the rankings referred to by the author can be taken as quality proxies at best, given the methodological problems besetting their construction. The second area in focus, i.e. internationalization of Ukrainian higher education is more clearly described with the most important statistics given.

The major difficulty, however, lies at the analytical level. The thesis seems to present the view that the situation in both internationalization and quality assurance is changing for the better due to the effects of the Bologna Process in Ukraine. True as this finding may be especially with regard to structural reforms (degree structure, ECTS), *it is very arguable what changes were directly induced by the Bologna Process requirements and what is the result of incremental, bottom-up modifications that would have taken place anyway without the country's involvement in the Bologna Process.* On this important issue, the thesis presents little relevant empirical evidence

(especially with respect to quality matters). Here, the thesis fails to utilise crucial reports on Bologna Process implementation in Ukrainian higher education, freely available internationally on the relevant website¹. Finally, despite somewhat positive effects of opening up Ukrainian higher education to foreign students following the relevant Bologna Process rationale, the positives of internationalisation (more incoming students paying tuition fees in economic sense) is likely to be offset by shameful practices of intermediary agencies, often presenting deliberately misleading information to attract foreign students, and the destructive effects this widespread approach has on quality of tuition itself (along with the widespread corruption). Again, here, it is not clear what the relevant Bologna Process activities can possibly achieve to change the situation (possibly naming and shaming of fraudulent Ukrainian HE providers internationally?).

3) Methods:

The thesis makes use of qualitative methodology especially based on secondary data analysis; the utilization of primary data from semi-structured questionnaires is, however, quite limited, not least due to unwillingness of the respondents to participate in the enquiry. As regards data availability, the thesis unfortunately misses out on using vital evidence from the Ukrainian Bologna stocktaking reports (see also contribution). The goals and especially the hypotheses could have been outlined more clearly.

4) Literature:

This is the main strength of the thesis. The author should be commended for using a wide range of secondary sources, including specialized research journals.

5) Manuscript form:

The thesis is, in general, logically structured. It starts with a contextual overview, research goal delineation and descriptive parts followed by more analytical insights into how and in what aspects internationalisation and quality-related issues got changed in Ukrainian higher education after 2005. However, none of the initial chapter parts gives the specification of the major research question(s). Furthermore, the two chapters on corruption in higher education prior to the concluding part are not sufficiently integrated into the thesis structure; nor is it made clear what their relation to the Bologna process is.

DATE OF EVALUATION: 2nd June 2013


Referee Signature

¹ <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=86>