UDC 001.73:37(045)

[1]**Olexandra Akmaldinova,** Prof.
[2]**Olga Pysmenna**, Prof. of the NAU

EDUCATION ABROAD AND ITS PROBLEMS

National Aviation University
[1]E-mail: Semnat25@yandex.ru
[2]E-mail: FLDSP@ukr.net

Abstract. *The article deals with some pressing issues faced by high and higher schools in Great Britain, the USA, France, Germany, Italy, Finland, Canada, Greece and some other countries. Reviewed are a number of new trends in education. Analysed are the latest publications in the press and some statistics are given.*

Keywords: A*degree for identifying the very best students, charter (independent, government-funded) schools, education abroad, foreign campuses, implementing educational reforms, insufficient financing, international branches, international education league tables, international quality standards, labour market offers, "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) Act, public schools, recruiting the right kind of teachers, teachers-trainees, the high-school graduation rate, the programme "Teach First", the purpose of higher education.

Introduction

The purpose of the article is to give some information about the problems in education in a number of countries of the world and the analysis of the ways of settling them.

Analysis

In Britain, the interest for higher education is such that almost half of young people now enroll. Universities have become very popular. A similar enthusiasm is observed in many other countries – many more youngsters are extending their education in other rich countries and emerging economies. Expanding abroad is considered as a fair chance for survival. British universities are opening foreign campuses – since 2000 they have set up about 17 international branches. American universities have 76 campuses overseas, including four in Britain. Australian universities also have a strong presence abroad.

There is a massive debate in Britain about the purpose of higher education. To improve its quality, new A* grades were introduced in 2010 as a way of identifying the very best students among the increasing numbers achieving three or more A grades on their A levels. A*s are awarded to those who were in line for an A anyway and then score 90% or higher on the A2 modules in their final year of secondary school.

Cambridge's standard offer now requires at least one A* and two As, but, so far, it is the only institution to make extensive use of the grade. The problem is that there is a widespread perception that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are being unfairly barred from Britain's most famous universities, and thus must struggle harder for the opportunity to enter a college and, therefore, for them it will be more difficult to escape a choice of mediocre job prospects.

The government, which has put pressure on universities to take more students from deprived backgrounds, is worried that the A* grade will disproportionately affect state-school applicants and will improve the position of private, fee-paying schools on elite universities. There is one more cause for trouble: conditional offers are made before A levels are taken, on the basis of predicted grades. Yet predictions can be wildly inaccurate. According to the Universities and Colleges Admission Service, 55% of applicants do not get the grades predicted by their teachers. Some college admissions tutors support a more radical solution: offering places only after A-level results are published. But A-level exams must be taken earlier and marked faster, or university terms must start later [1: 30].

In describing the problems in education sphere, many authors stress the fact that Britain is ever more divided by age. Half the population are under 40 years old but they hold only about 15% of all financial assets. People under 44 own, again, just 15% of owner-occupied housing. Comparing the financial and housing wealth of different age groups in 1995 and 2005 the Bank of England found that

those aged 25 to 34 had seen their wealth fall, whereas those aged 55 to 64 had seen theirs triple. Young people have little chance of building up similar wealth. They are struggling to get on the housing ladder, though close to a fifth of people between 50 and 59 years old won a second home. Jobs for the young were getting scarcer even before the crash. Yet more and more older people are working and earning more, relative to young workers, than before [2: 87].

Those statistics cannot but have a strong effect on the education system functioning and implementing educational reforms.

The problems in education are naturally discussed in connection with labour market offers. England's fastest growing jobs between the second quarter of 2001 and the same period in 2009 include conservation officers (up 124%), town planners (94%), psychologists (67%), and hairdressers and the like (63%). Further investigation shows a big increase in semi-professional jobs (paramedics, legal associates, teachers' assistants) rather than professional ones. The good news is that the incoming occupations are by and large more skilled than the outgoing ones. Of the top 20 fast-growing jobs, 11 mainly attract people who hold a level-four qualification – roughly, a university degree or equivalent.

Over one in five employers (a bit more than in a different 2008 survey) struggle with staff who have trouble communicating, working in teams and dealing with customers. Perhaps 7% of those in work – or 1.7m people – are not equipped for the jobs they do, with a corresponding loss of output and productivity. Britain's recent record on skilled-job creation is one of the worst in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Looking forward, the people who seem likely to be in especially short supply begin with corporate managers, computing and IT specialists, and healthcare professionals [3:35]. In future Britons will need to be better qualified to get work. Plenty of new jobs have been created during the past decade, but many have gone to better-educated workers from abroad.

The situation with the so-called "NEETS" – young people not in education, employment or training – is another powerful reason to reform education [4: 42].

The observers in education state that registered statistics reveal a number of problems schools have to resolve. One child in four leaves primary school without having reached the expected standard in maths and British teenagers do poorly on international comparisons. The real barrier may be teachers' lack of numeracy – a third of primary teachers do not have two A-levels, and among those who did, few had studied maths or science past General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE).

Nevertheless, work on improvement has started: teenagers need to do better at maths to avoid bleak financial future, so financial education has become a must in many secondary schools. A new secondary-school subject "Economic well-being and financial capability" is now taught there, and its topics include personal finances, dealing with risk and becoming a critical consumer of goods and services. And from 2010, to get a GCSE in mathematics, 16-year-olds have to study "functional mathematics", likely to include sums involving budgets, interest rates and inflation [5: 36].

Private schools will point to other changes: league tables, which show their broadly better exam results; the decline of modern languages and sciences in state schools; the private sector's shift away from devalued GCSEs and A-levels to other exams that many universities find more useful [6: 34].

Insufficient financing effects schools in different ways: some schools even expect their cashflow to improve, as some parents could afford much higher fees, and some parents would like to pay for their children's education in advance. Small schools are likely to join forces – some of them may merge, others sell themselves to a chain, either private or charitable. Preparatory schools may seek to merge with secondary schools. Nevertheless, nearly all capital projects will be delayed.

Recruiting the right kind of teachers has been difficult in England for some time and remains far from being settled. Now many teachers are near retirement. Teachers-trainees can resit basic literacy and numeracy tests as often as they like – and 13% need at least three goes at the latter (around 1,200 each year graduated with the lowest class of degree, a third).

The result, as one of the observers writes, is a "general sense that the country's teachers have been scraped from the bottom of the barrel" [7: 23, 24].

That makes it unlikely that ambitious graduates will consider joining the profession. But education reforms will never work unless teaching attracts more ambitious, aspiring young people.

The programme "Teach First", founded in 1989 that now trains 4.000 teachers a year, is aimed at creating a route into teaching for high-fliers. Applicants are screened for leadership and communication skills, and the successful ones promise to teach for two years in "challenging" schools: those where few pupils get good exam results or where more than 30% are poor enough to receive free school meals. Such schools tend to have the least qualified teachers and to suffer from high turnover. Since 2003, when it received 1,300 applicants for just 300 places, "Teach First" has grown fast. It expects to take on 850 recruits in 2012. "Teach First" becomes better known, teaching will start to be seen as a job for ambitious go-getters, it will help with the shortage of school heads, too [ibid.].

The American government has always stressed its readiness to pursue a policy promoting education and strengthening national standards in this sphere that prepare students to compete in a global economy.

In 1959 – President Eisenhower spoke of the need for "national goals" for education.

In 1990s – George Bush senior supported national standards.

Bill Clinton proposed a voluntary national test but Congress scrapped the idea.

An encouraging step came in 2001 when "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) Act, a federal law that revised and upgraded standards for public elementary education, determined that schools should be held accountable for how they performed. But in 2006, in a ranking of 15-year-olds in 30 industrialised countries, American teenagers came a dismal 21st in science and 25th in maths. NCLB's reforms were plainly insufficient and are widely considered to have failed.

Enacted in 2002, NCLB transformed education policy giving the federal government a crucial role in education, forcing states to set standards and hold their schools accountable for meeting them. Schools that failed to make progress would face financial sanctions. All students were to be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014. G. Bush junior championed the law; Congress supported it wholeheartedly. The critics say that the deadline for proficiency now looks comical. Parents and teachers complain that the law encourages "teaching to the test". Many states have alarmingly low standards. The emphasis on maths and reading has crowded out other subjects. Now, after years of failure, the push for common standards has new life. The first task is to provide standards for what high-school graduates should know to succeed in college or the workforce. The second task is to create standards for each grade. New standards demand new tests. The stimulus provides $350m to develop common assessments, but these may not be ready for years [8: 56].

By 2015, the states would be required to adopt stringent new standards and tests for English and maths, with a goal of being "college- and career-ready" by 2020.

Criticism also touches the promotion of charter (independent, government-funded) schools. One study found that 83% deliver results that are either the same as, or worse than, those of the public schools [9: 60].

When speaking about charter schools that are fast multiplying across America, an observer mentions as an example one of them, Excellence. It is an independently run public school that, though it cannot select its pupils, after three years of its work, showed positive results: 92% of its third-grade scholars were highly assessed. The project aiming to charterise the entire city school system stipulates creating incentives: schools that do well will get a boost to their budget and the principal will get a bonus. Principals whose schools are still faltering will be fired. A new "leadership academy" was created to train principals. Many of innovations were paid for by wealthy philanthropists and other charitable funds and foundations. Also, an $80m computer system designed by IBM will give teachers access to information about student performance and progress as well as contact information for parents [10: 57, 58].

Some observers find that in many states, school reform is slow and difficult, but the pressure for change is coming from parents. In big cities the control over education system is easier to exercise. Outside such centres as New York, for example, west of the Mississippi, none has succeeded in seizing control of a school system. New Orleans's public schools have long been in a total disorder. In south-central Los Angeles 13- and 14-year-olds, almost all of them black or Hispanic, outline their plans to go to Yale and Stanford. They work long hours – from 7.30am to 5pm five days a week, plus four hours every other Saturday, and this pays off. By the time they leave, they far outperform their peers. In California, with its diverse group of children from immigrant families, charter schools represent the only hope for a decent education.

They try to introduce a universal voucher system. This system would have helped parents pay for their children to go to private schools. Yet voucher scheme has been defeated in every state where they have been on the ballot [11: 58-60].

Not in all cases sufficient financing in central states can resolve all problems. Teachers, officials and observers admit that, though spending per pupil in Washington, DC, is 50% higher than the national average, yet the city's public schools are in a disastrous state. They acknowledge that the system needs a fundamental reform. The city employs an army of educational bureaucrats and has twice as many schools as it needs. Teachers are virtually unsackable and paid by seniority. Such incentives attract the lazy and mediocre and repel the talented or diligent. The current system is inefficient. Overall, the high-school graduation rate is slipping. And the generation now entering the workforce is less well educated, on average, than the generation about to retire – a fact that affects the nation's prosperity. Any idea that might stop this slide is welcome, so a new initiative is going to be implemented – the wages for the best performers would double, teachers would lose tenure and be paid according to merit, measured in part by their students' results. Current teachers would have a choice: they could join the new system or stay in the old one. New hires would have to join the new system [12: 58, 59]. This policy, as the promoters of the idea think, should, over time, make the quality and morale of teachers in Washington soar.

The problem remains with the Arabic-language teaching. The school which will teach Arabic as well as Middle Eastern history and culture and will inevitably discuss Islam, has been under scrutiny [13: 52]. The opposition from the students' parents said, it will be a training ground for terrorists. The education department has repeatedly stated that if the school becomes a vehicle for religious indoctrination it will be closed.

Putting the task of radical changes in the previous policy in education system, Obama's plan for reforming the nation's education system includes such items: ending the achievement gap between white and nonwhite students, evaluating teachers, awarding performance bonuses to principals and teachers who've earned them. Obama would define school success by how much improvement students make from grade to grade, no matter where they started, as opposed to the current system, in which schools are judged on students' absolute performance, nor their progress. President has shown an unprecedented willingness to challenge the powerful teachers' unions in a way that they offer teachers lifetime job protection according to seniority rules, and not for achievements and excellence. The schools that fail to show good result can be closed or replaced. When the situation demands laying off teachers the first to go under the existing system will be thousands of energetic new teachers – simply because they were the last people hired. Here considered must be not only experience, but skills and energy [14: 40].

The universities' life in the USA is not free from big problems. A big concern is the growing divide between research and teaching – especially undergraduate teaching – as research grows ever more complex. The critics say that, if the synergy between teaching and research is lost, the whole basis of America's research universities is undermined. That, they think, is the greatest threat of all to these institutions [15: 77, 78].

Increasing dependence on research funds distorts internal priorities. Certain areas of study, such as climate change, stem-cell research and works on the Middle East, are particularly vulnerable to political pressure. Humanities receive almost no external federal funding, and social sciences very little.

The criticism of the system of education in France touches all levels. In his 30-page "letter to teachers" (2007), President Nicolas Sarcozy stated that the system needed rebuilding as there were too many school drop-outs; not enough respect or authority in the classroom; too little value placed on the teaching profession; too little art and sport in the curriculum; too much "theory and abstraction", too little "civic education", comparative religion, "general culture", trips to the theatre, walks in the forest, visits to businesses. A government-commissioned report reveals that two in five pupils leave primary school with "serious learning gaps" in basic reading, writing and arithmetic. One in five finish secondary school with no qualification at all. Even the baccalaureate is under attack: "The *bac* is worth absolutely nothing," asserts the president of the Sorbonne-University of Paris IV [16: 40].

France's rigorous system suits able pupils: half of all 15-year-olds match the standards in writing, maths, and science of the very best performers in the rich-country OECD. But schools fail the weakest. The bottom 15% of French 15-year-olds rank among the OECD's worst. The main cure for struggling pupils is *redoublement*, the repeat of a school year.

By the age of 15, 38% of French pupils have repeated a year, more than in any other OECD country. Yet an official report suggests that *redoublement* has no noticeable effect on a child's progress. The minister "believed very little in the efficiency of *redoublement*". He plans to trim teacher numbers [ibid.].

German universities are underfunded by international standards. Professors train scores of students; at top American universities they nurture a handful. In switching to the bachelors-masters degrees prescribed by Europe's standardising "Bologna process", many universities tried to cram bachelors degrees into just six terms. Only six German universities are among the top 100 in the Shanghai rankings (Munich is highest, at 55th). In the past, universities were interchangeable, and most students chose one close to home. But since the early 1990s budget cuts have encouraged them to compete and specialise. A high-wage country with few natural resources cannot afford sub-par universities, as Chancellor Angela Merkel often says.

In 2009 the federal and state governments approved an €18 billion plan to create more university places, boost funding for research and cultivate a small group of elite institutions. The government's new "excellence initiative" allocates €1.9 billion on research programmes and nine top universities with promising future concepts. But universities do not get extra money for the Bologna process. Thousands of students recently staged protests across Germany against their conditions. "Back education, not banks", demanded protesters fed up with overcrowded lecture halls, crumbling campuses, tuition fees and a chaotic conversion from the traditional diploma to a European two-tier degree system. Students who obtain bachelor's degrees in some disciplines, such as information technology, do not learn enough to get good jobs. But there is a shortage of places in masters programmes. Students' mobility among institutions, one of Bologna's goals, has fallen because study programmes are more intense. Still, these pressures push German universities in the right direction. World rankings tend to underrate them, partly because non-English-speaking laboratories are penalised. They would do better if research at non-university institutes like the Max Planck Society were brought into academies, adding teaching to research [17: 51, 52].

In Italy, the fact that so many young Italians study abroad, and so few young foreigners (2% of all foreign students do in Italy, points to equally low standards at university level. The teachers' unions like to stress Italy's relatively low public spending on education as a share of GDP. Thus, spending on core tertiary (higher) education is 30% below the OECD average. But it is rising per student, as a low birth rate reduces the number of matriculations. As for schools, spending per primary- and secondary-school pupil is actually above the OECD average [18: 48].

Also, there are too many old teachers in Italian education. The incorporation of tens of thousands of youthful casual teachers will be a step in the right direction. But matters are worse in universities, where patronage, cronyism and secure tenure are the rule. A study by *Corriere della Sera* in 2007 showed that a full 30% of top academics and 10% of lecturers were over 65 [ibid.].

The reforms in Finland started in early 1970s. Finland's education reforms may have taken ten years from conception to full implementation, but they have proved durable: little has needed changing in more than 30 years since. It is a contrast with the permanent revolution that reigns in England's schools. The world is beating a path to Finland to find out what made this unostentatious Nordic country top of international education league tables. The teachers supported the reform. The need of staff teachers' support is very important: as an example Canada is pointed out, where Alberta and Ontario both introduced major reforms in the 1990s. Alberta's provincial government won general support for its ideas, and the reforms are now uncontentious. In Ontario, by contrast, politicians' rhetoric was confrontational and the teachers' unions bitterly opposed. The current government is working hard to improve the situation [19: 79, 80].

Greece is among the countries which badly need the restructuring of their systems of education. Despite the importance that Greeks attach to education, Greece has some of the worst universities in Europe. The government's recent talks of ending the state's monopoly on higher education and introducing private, not-for-profit universities cause the protests of students. Such universities would certainly charge for tuition [20: 39-42].

Education systems in developing countries face still bigger problems. Brazil, for example, came last in maths and fourth from the bottom in reading in tests administered in 40 countries by the OECD. Half of ten-year olds are functionally illiterate.

Working-age Brazilians have an average of 4.1 years of schooling compared with six in China. To diminish that gap, the federal government started distributing money to states and municipalities on the basis of enrolment in primary school. High schools tripled their output of graduates during the 1990s, though. Quantity expanded, but quality deteriorated.

Global competition is obliging enterprises to adopt international quality standards such as ISO 9000, which in turn demand a workforce educated to high-school level. Brazil aims to match the OECD's average performance by 2022.

Formed is "Everyone for Education", a movement to push for better results. A new "education development package" is to set performance targets and to reward those that achieve them [21: 13, 14].

Conclusions

The analysis given above touches upon many problems which are of peculiar interest for restructuring the Ukrainian education system. Thorough attention to the described facts can be handy for reformation process theory.

References

1. *Shoot* for the stars. University-entrance requirements. – The Economist. January 9th 2010. P. 30.

2. *Clash* of generations. Social change. – The Economist. February 13th 2010. P. 87.

3. *The plot* so far. Skills for the future. – The Economist. March 20th 2010. P. 35.

4. *Must* try harder. Education reform. – The Economist. November 10th 2007. P. 42.

5. *Poor* young things. Financial education. – The Economist. July 14th 2007. P. 36.

6. *Private* education. Rock or hard place? – The Economist. January 24th 2009. P. 34.

7. *Those* who can: the quality of teachers. – The Economist. August 1th 2009. P. 23, 24.

8. *Improving* education: What to teach? (The long, slow effort to set standards). – The Economist. November 21th 2009. P. 56.

9. *School* reform: The Next test. Barack Obama's plan to overhaul No Child Left Behind. – The Economist. March 20th 2010. P. 60.

10. *The great* experiment and competition to New York City's struggling schools. – The Economist. November 10th 2007. P. 57, 58.

11. *The untidy* revolution. – The Economist. November 10th 2007. P. 58–60.

12. *Better* marks, more money: Teachers' pay. – The Economist. July 12th 2008. P. 58, 59.

13. *Arabic* in schools: Words of the prophet. – The Economist. September 8th 2007. P. 52.

14. *Bloomberg, M.; Klein, J.* 2010. Making the Grade. – Time. March 29. P. 40.

15. *Research* universities: powerhouses. – The Economist. January 9th 2010. P. 77, 78.

16. *Back* to school. – The Economist. September 8th 2007. P. 40.

17. *On shaky* foundations. The effort to improve German universities still has a long way to go. – The Economist. June 27th 2009. P. 51, 52.

18. *Italian* education. – The Economist. April 28th 2007. P. 48.

19. *Top* of the Class. Education reform. – The Economist. June 28th 2008. P. 79, 80.

20. *A Socratic* non-dialogue. – The Economist. July 8th 2006. P. 39–42.

21. *Low* marks. Education is still letting the country down. – The Economist. April 14th 2007. P. 13–14.

Received 16 January 2012.