



"In all affairs it's a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things you have long taken for granted."

Bertrand Russell

Dear colleagues,

This is the first issue of the Look after the summer break, so we hope that you had productive and yet restful summer and have already hit the ground running with your new courses and research projects.

We are proud to note that the HSE experienced marked increase in new students' applications to both undergraduate and graduate programmes this year. In case of undergraduate programmes, the applications' number increased by 20%.

We also extend a warm and heartfelt welcome to our new internationally recruited postdoctoral fellows and tenure-track faculty. While the academic research administration does not differ much from university to university, the way the teaching process is organized at the HSE has its definite particularities. Not all of our new colleagues have had the experience of teaching in Russian universities, that's why we have decided to devote this issue to this topic.

We have tried to base the main article on the opinion of people who have some understanding of what is like to be in the newcomers' shoes. Having been there they are ready to share their experience and give some practical advice. As the space is limited we are doomed to make it short and concise, and we have tried our best to make it pragmatic. We'll dwell upon the things which are unique for the HSE such as academic year structure, assessment schemes and procedures and add reference to the resources containing more detailed information on the issues addressed. The most important one is the assessment procedure, as it determines not only what content is studied, but also how it studied as the students' perception of assessment requirements sets the path for their study thought the whole subject course.

The interview with our colleague Dr John Round, will continue our series. Having had 2 year experience of working at the HSE, John has kindly shared his research and teaching experience he has had so far.

We are also proud and pleased to congratulate the Faculty of Mathematics with a very favourable report of the International Advisory Board, which visit took place in winter 2013. The official report has been recently issued.

The beginning of the academic year is always an exciting and reinvigorating time and the HSE Day celebrated at Gorky Park was an excellent start to it. It's been celebrated on such a scale for the second time already, so looks like we are witnessing a new tradition being born.

Welcome back to a new academic year!

Yulia Grinkevich

Director for International Academic Integration

Teaching Process at the HSE

The HSE faculty members share their experience with new colleagues who are just about to start teaching at the University

Valentina Kuskova, Deputy Dean for International Relations, Assistant Professor

Learn the procedures. Sit down with your department chair or a PhD faculty coordinator, and go through every step. Course requirements (including mandatory attendance, which we actually quite often can't impose!), grade calculations, and exam retake procedures are very different. You will save yourself a lot of headache if you learn all the procedures before you design your first course, not in the process.

Alexander Sidorkin, Dean of Graduate School

As an experienced academic nomad (five states in the US and two cities in Russia), I advise everyone to just stay cool. Focus on good things – the incredible city of Moscow, the most exciting research ideas. The every-day problems with dogs and apartments, and bureaucratic glitches will work out with time – they always do.

TOP-10 Features of Teaching at the HSE

Academic Year Structure

Unlike in Europe or even in other universities of Russia, the academic year at the HSE is divided into modules. The dates of modules for the year of 2013-2014 are as follows:

MODULES	NUMBER OF WEEKS	DATES
MODULE 1	9 WEEKS	1st of September– 3d of November
MODULE 2	8 WEEKS	4th of November – 30th of December
WINTER BREAK	2 WEEKS	31st of December – 12th of January
MODULE 3	11 WEEKS	13th of January – 30th of March
MODULE 4	12 WEEKS	31st of March – 30th of June
MAY HOLIDAYS	1 WEEK	1st of May – 9th of May
SUMMER BREAK	9 WEEKS	1st of July – 31st of August

It's very important from the very beginning to get information about a teaching schedule, an exact number of teaching hours and the length of courses in order to avoid misunderstanding. All this information can be found from the coordinator or the contact person at the Faculty who'll be glad to tell all the details of one's schedule.

Instructors' Instruments and Services

Before the beginning of the course it is rather important to make a syllabus accessible to students. This can be done via LMS (Learning Management System). LMS is a centrally supported web-based virtual learning environment where users can learn from each other by exchanging online learning ideas, sharing tips and accessing some general resources. It's accessible by all the HSE faculty and students. Logging in the LMS system automatically leads to a self-teaching guide in English.

The URL for LMS is <http://lms.hse.ru/>

Personal Pages

The only source of information about a new faculty staff member for students and new colleagues is a personal page on the university's website. That's why it is of crucial importance to submit information for a personal account correctly. All full-time faculty staff members at the HSE should have their own personal accounts. To get the right to edit a personal page, write a letter to the Directorate for portals portal@hse.ru. Please ask the department site responsible editor for help in posting information on the portal.

Knowledge Assessment System

An assessment system at the HSE is another significant thing to be aware of. It is very important to make students familiar with different types of assessment that will be held throughout the academic year at the very first class. Three different types of assessment are being used at the University: current evaluation, final evaluation and intermediate evaluation.

Current Evaluation is designed for regular and systematic testing of students' knowledge in the classroom and on the basis of students' independent work. These are organized by the instructor and may be carried out during classroom hours or given as homework. It is important for this monitoring to be reflected in the syllabus and to take at least 2 hours. The results are to be checked by the instructor (or the teaching assistant) and must become known to the students within 10 working days after the event. Final and intermediate evaluations are usually referred to as Exams.

Exams

Final Evaluation is used to assess knowledge of the discipline on its completion. Each course must include a form of final evaluation. The instructor can choose the type of assessment without administering an Exam. A final assessment is held primarily in written form as a pass-fail exam or test. Intermediate Evaluation is designed to determine the results of studying the discipline for a certain period of time. Such assessment is organized at the end of the training period (semester or module). The Exams' schedule is always announced at least a week before its beginning to instructors and students. Info on that can be found on the website and on the information boards on the University premises.

Cumulative Grades

It has to be kept in mind that an unsatisfactory mark during a current evaluation may not serve as a justification for denial of access to the

Exams, but the instructor does have the right to give a mark for an Exam factoring in the cumulative grade and students' achievements throughout the period being assessed. The summative grade is calculated as a weighted sum of cumulative grade and a grade received on an exam. The sum of these grades amounts to 100%. The weight of the Exam is usually 20% so the students who work hard before the final check have an advantage.

Grading System

There is a difference between the grades that are given at the HSE and in other Russian educational institutions. The common convention is a five-mark grading system where 5 is excellent and 1 is poor, but at the HSE students are graded on a ten-point scale in order to make assessment more nuanced. Use this simple scheme to facilitate the grading process:

PASS-FAIL EXAM

GRADES	POINTS
PASS	4-10 POINTS
FAIL	0-3 POINTS

NUMERICALLY GRADED EXAM

GRADES	POINTS	MARKS
EXCELLENT	8-10 POINTS	5
GOOD	6-7 POINTS	4
SATISFACTORY	4-5 POINTS	3
POOR	0-3 POINTS	2

After the Exam

The grades are to be recorded on paper in several places: the Exam grade and the cumulative grade are put in the exam record (in a numerical form on a ten-point scale), the summative grade is also recorded there (in a numerical form on a ten-point scale). The exam record is signed by all teachers carrying out the exam and must be handed in to the registrar's office within 1 working day. The students who are not present at the Exam, shall be registered as "absent" in the examination record sheet.

Repeated Exams

In case of a failed exam the student has the right to repeat the examination but not more than two times within one course. The first attempt is administered by the instructor who led the initial examination and the second attempt has to be administered in the presence of a committee composed of at least three instructors, one of which is appointed Chairman of the committee. The examination committee may involve instructors from other departments.

For Further Details

The web-page (www.hse.ru/studyspravka) contains different useful information and is a key to solve all the problems for both the HSE instructors and students.

At the HSE there is much more time to think, do research and to write.

John P. Round is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Sociology and a Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies. We'd like to thank John who kindly shared his experience with the HSE Look.

Have you been interested in Russian culture before your invitation to the HSE?

I did my PhD in Magadan. I'm a geographer and Magadan was really interesting because geographically it's isolated from the rest of the country. Flights to Magadan are very rare and expensive. It's normal for the majority of people to leave their cities and move where there are more jobs, where it's cheaper. But you can't actually move from Magadan even if you want. So academically it was very interesting. Besides, the Russian North is a quite new and poorly known area of research in the West. Since my travelling there a famous British actor went around the world on his motorcycle and he was passing through Magadan. So quite few people in Britain have been in Magadan and even heard about this city.

Why did you choose the HSE?

First I knew some people who worked here in the HSE in sociology and management - I was working at a summer school with them. It was a great opportunity to come and to work in Moscow and do some research afterwards. Plus my proper professional interest lies in Russia and Russian culture, and I wanted to do my research here, to develop in this work, to make contacts. I first came to Russia in 1999. By the way, another reason for coming to the HSE was spending more time in Moscow. Looking how Moscow changes over a period of time - it's one of my academic interests. I remember when I first came to Moscow I was really worried about security. Moscow is totally different city now. I've done a lot of travelling before. I've lived in India, Australia, the USA. But anyway coming to Russia was a cultural shock. I was impressed by the size of Moscow, the number of people. The way of life, working - everything is different here.

What do you consider to be your major achievements during your period of working in the HSE? What are you proud of?

I've published a book since I've been here on informal economies in Russia and Ukraine which is called 'The role of informal economies in the post-Soviet world: the end of transition?'. I've started two new areas of research, for example, on opposition, ways of protest in Russia, ideas of rejecting the state. It's one area of research I've developed. This I couldn't have done if I was in Birmingham. Because if I'm in Birmingham, it becomes very expensive, I can come here just only for a few weeks. It becomes quite difficult. Here I can live where I'm living, where I'm working. It really facilitates the research - just being here. The second area which we've got a grant for is the every-day life of migrants.

Besides the research work there is some teaching activity in the HSE. How can you describe your teaching experience in the HSE?

The teaching is really interesting. But there's still a problem of getting students to take English language courses: both of the courses I teach have a relatively small number of listeners. One of these courses is very popular among American students because it's oriented a bit more on general education. But the thing I'm most proud of is that I teach

in Russia, in Moscow. If you have students from Moscow and they are interested in what you're telling them, they just get to know you. When someone says by the end of the course: «You make me think in some different way» - it is a great experience. I really love to teach "in a field". We go to Strelka Red October factory with one of my courses and we do teaching actually there. I don't think any other course does, I like it, it's also a great experience. But I have to say that Russian education system has lots of problems with the timing of lectures.

Two blocks of forty minutes - that is quite alright, but with four academic hours it's really hard to hold students' attention.

I also don't think the system of lectures and seminars is needed at master's level. I think there should be much more reading, a large set of questions you discuss in a group, some presentations. I'm trying to do it with my students.

Furthermore, there's too much teaching here in Russia, too many modules, which is not necessary, not proper. From September till June - it's a very long academic year. It's a problem for active academics, my Russian colleagues here in the HSE, who want to make their research work as well as teaching. If you're teaching for that long period, summer comes and you think - I need holidays. What do you want from academics to be - you want them to be teachers or researchers? In a current system there's no way you can be both.

You've been here for 2 years, what are the main advantages and drawbacks of working at the HSE?

For me the main advantage of working here is time. There's much more time to do researches here than in Britain. Less administrative work, much more time to think, do research and to write.

In Britain you have long-lasting expectations of getting grants, a lot of checking, monitoring. Every seven years every department gets assessed. These processes are quite stressful. The disadvantage is the bureaucracy system itself, which is really needed to be thought through. It's not the criticism to the HSE itself, but to all Russian educational system. For example, I don't know what's my teaching next year. It's quite difficult to plan. These things should be sorted earlier but all the teaching processes are quite slow. Despite asking many times, I still don't know what is happening. That's quite frustrating. The HSE is the most Western-looking universities in Russia. The system doesn't have to be so bureaucratic, so difficult to manage things. Imagine, if I want to go on a business trip - it's got to be signed by a lot of people, it's got to be approved by them. You come back - they need all your boarding passes, your tickets, everything. If any signature is wrong - everything should be done again.

In Britain you have much more freedom. If you need a business trip - you just have your credit card and you can do everything online. Many of my colleagues here feel that it's very frustrating. Another problem is the grants system - you've got a half of the budget at the beginning of your working process and another half of it at the end. But what can you do with these halves?

We don't have an access to Russian Federal Government fund. The HSE should push this question. The lack of access to research funding is a big disadvantage.

Is there something you would like to change in the HSE, given the chance?

I would like to rise up the research culture: making reading groups, kind of spaces for students to gather and to work. For example, a library. Libraries are not about books, they should be about spaces for students to work, to communicate. It doesn't really exist in Russia yet.

In Russian universities interactive relations between students and teachers is quite a weak point. In Britain, for example, during your first year you have your own tutorial group. Six or seven people have their own tutor and they see him every week. That gives a chance to improve scientific research component of studies. But I have to say things are changing and they will continue to be changing when new people come. The more of them come the more the system changes.

Text by Ruslan Sleptsov

WE'RE PROUD TO INFORM OF THE FAVOURABLE REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS

In winter 2013 the HSE Department of Mathematics was visited by the International Advisory Board. The purpose it pursued was to give an expert opinion and recommendations on the development and current state of the Department. In September, 2013 the Advisory Board published a report summarizing the Board's overall impressions from the visits.

The general assessment given to the Department was extremely high. The Board was very satisfied with the Department's undergraduate program which is, in their opinion, among the best ones in the world: it currently attracts the strongest pool of mathematics students in Russia, offering them a challenging and thoughtfully designed curriculum.

The scientific quality and quantity of the researches produced by the members of the Department's faculty were evaluated to be excellent, at the level of some of the best mathematics departments in Europe. The Department seemed to the Board members to be strong in algebraic geometry, representation theory and mathematical physics. Thereupon a strong sense of pride among the students to be part of this enterprise was remarked. The student body has gone up over the years.

After speaking to students it became obvious that they are content with the infrastructure qualities and current location of the Department as well and the Board members confirmed that these factors - while somewhat outdated by Western standards - mostly appear to be adequate, and are beyond criticism indeed.

The Board members underlined, that some financial, administrative and governmental features still have room for improvement. Graduate programs (Master's and Ph.D.) are yet to achieve a comparable level of success. They are underpopulated, the goals of the programs are not articulated clearly and the overall curricular setup appears to be in flux. Given the exceptionally high level of the Department, it is surprising that it has not been able to attract significant private sponsorship for its research and educational pursuits. This may be

partly explained by the tendency among mathematicians to shy away from any appearance of self-promotion. The distribution of faculty members in the Department by area (subfield) is also rather uneven.

Research areas underrepresented in the Department include applied mathematics, number theory, probability and more generally analysis.

It's important to notice that within every found problem the members of the Board proposed a variety of solutions and concrete improvement schemes. Generally the Board was very much impressed by the current state of academic affairs at the Department: within 5 years of its creation, the HSE has become the leading Russian institution of higher learning in pure mathematics. The Board also came to a conclusion that in terms of research strength, the Department (including faculty members at satellite branches at Steklov and Kharkevich Institutes) may well belong to the top-100 mathematics departments at research universities worldwide.

THE HSE DAY

The second HSE Day took place at Gorky Park on 10th September, 2013.

The idea of uniting all traditional HSE activities under one big event met all expectations and even surpassed them.

This day became a real opportunity for all comers to get acquainted with the HSE after visiting Faculties' Open Days and Parent meeting or just to have a good time while listening to the music, participating in competitions in the recreation zone or communicating with each other.

The intellectual part of the event which took place in lecture halls also turned out to be very popular both for students and for faculty staff members. The poetic corner was one of the HSE Day high spots. The organization was at top level, which is admitted by international faculty staff members.

Olga Baisha:

"First of all, the choice of the locale: I guess all the professors from abroad who had a chance to be in the park admired the wharf, the view of the Moscow River, and the terrific panorama of the city. Regarding the HSE Day events, I was absolutely impressed by the young poets who recited their poems at the poetic corner. They were fantastic. I had an impression I came to be somewhere in the Silver Age of Russian poetry. Another thing that I admired a lot was a lecture by Professor Charles King "The Social Sciences of Ethnicity and Nationalism." Since the professor gave a lecture within a paradigm of social constructivism - one of the dominant paradigms of social sciences in the U.S. nowadays - I was interested in students' reactions."

Stefan Hessbruggen:

"It was great to see how much work and energy the HSE students invested into this day - and how much fun they seemed to have. It is in my eyes no small achievement that the HSE can preserve a vibrant culture and offer many opportunities for engagement to students without having a central campus. Besides that, as a new teacher at the HSE I was glad to meet some of my new colleagues, so as a social event the day was a success for me, too."