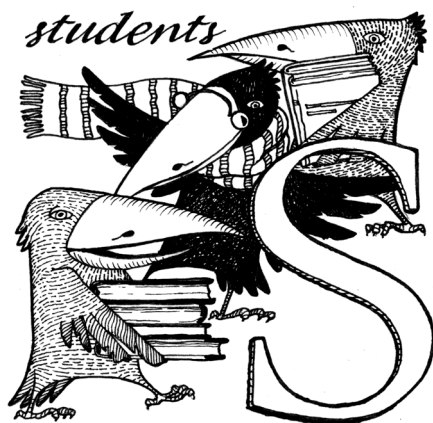


“Keep the bicycle moving, because if you stop pedalling, you will fall off”

— Paolo Coelho, *The Witch of Portobello*



Summer is a very special time at HSE University: June – a busy time for exams; July – graduation; August – getting ready for autumn studies. And the coronavirus crisis couldn't break this cycle, though it has reshaped significantly how universities operate. Vyshka is believed to be the most innovative and daring university in Russian for this reason. Facing such unprecedented challenges and demands, it has managed to redesign routines to continue developing and planning for the future. In this regard, The HSE Look talked to tenured professors from three different faculties: Prof. Olga Baysha, Faculty of Communication Media and Design, Prof. Udara Peiris, International College of Economics and Finance, and Prof. Anton Suvorov, Faculty of Economic Sciences speak about their research and share advice to tenure-track academic staff. In addition, of course, we could not but tell our readers about the XXI April Conference. Our most important international academic event was held online this year, relying on a distributed format: Ivan Prostakov, Vice Rector for International Affairs, shared his comments on how this decision was made and whether it proved to be successful.

Yulia Grinkevich
Director for Internationalisation

A Ticket to the Rocky Mountains and Media Research

Dr. Olga Baysha is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Communications, Media and Design. She holds a PhD from the University of Colorado at Boulder. She achieved tenure in 2019.

After you did your Master's in the US, you worked in Kiev for six years and then came back to the academia as a PhD student. Why?

Before my Master's, I had been working as a TV journalist in Kharkov, Ukraine. In 2000, I received a scholarship for Edward Muskie's Master's programme, which is administered by the US Department of State. According

to the programme's rules, its finalists did not have a right to choose a place of study. So, I was enrolled in Colorado State University at Fort Collins. As it turned out later, I won a lucky lottery ticket. I fell in love with the Rocky Mountains, the beautiful creeks, canyons and trails, and superior ski resorts where I learned how to snowboard. I also liked my professors and classmates at the School of Journalism – we are still good friends.

After graduating in 2002, I returned to Ukraine to work as an editor-in-chief at a Kiev television studio, which produced historical documentaries. These films were broadcast by one of Ukraine's leading national channels. While working on these documentaries, many of which related to most controversial periods of our history – the Bolshevik revolution, the civil war, the Cold War, and so forth – I got interested in what I am currently researching. I started wondering how this or that idea comes to be normalised in public opinion, how alternative narrative challenge its hegemonic status, and how discursive (or, in other words, social) changes happen.

Determined to clarify these issues for myself, I decided to return to graduate school and pursue doctoral studies. In 2008, I was admitted to the University of Colorado at Boulder. The Department of Media and Communication, where I applied, offered a programme in Critical Communication Studies, which ultimately provided me with almost all the answers to my questions, and I am very thankful to all Boulder professors who shared their knowledge with me.

In 2018, two of your conference papers were recognised as Top Papers by the National and International Communication Associations. To what do you attribute this success?

These are the two leading academic associations for communication researchers: the NCA is a US-based association, while the ICA has more of a global scope. Generally speaking, academic papers are recognised as “top” for the originality of their theoretical propositions and their potential to contribute to knowledge in this or that academic field. These are the parameters that blind reviewers usually evaluate. Each of the papers considered the discourses of the Ukrainian Maidan. I discuss how antagonistic discourses bring about civic conflicts, and how important it is to recognise: before killing “enemies” (symbolically or physically), we usually first construct ideas of the enemy and the necessity for its annihilation through discursive means.

This year, my paper was also recognised as one of the top manuscripts submitted to the annual convention of the International Communication Association, but this time, I analysed academic West-centrism. As I argue in my paper, West-centric assumptions about the universality of paths of historic developmental and cultural homogenisation associated with it permeate even

critical discourse studies, which are actually supposed to problematise and deconstruct hegemonic assumptions that sustain unequal power relations on a global scale. Many scholars, for example, use the concept of “democracy” as a normative yardstick to measure all kinds of injustices in any type of society, without problematising the inherent interconnections between the discourse of democratisation and neo-imperialism. The problem is that “democracy” is not a universal concept; it is a product of the West's historical development and its political culture. Its uncritical application to other societies reproduces West-centrism, which is built in any neo-imperial project.

What should a researcher be more proud of: an article or a book? Which one of your two books took you the most time to work on?

There is no simple answer to this question. Both articles and books may become crucial for advancing academic knowledge or they may go unnoticed. Lack of recognition does not make your work less important, though sometimes, it takes years before revolutionary ideas get traction. The more original are these ideas, the more difficult it may be for them to be recognised. In terms of my books, I put a lot of energy in each of them, but the second one (*Miscommunicating Social Change: Lessons from Russia and Ukraine*) was more difficult to publish as it deals with anti-democratic tendencies within contemporary social movements of Russia and Ukraine. My basic argument is that very often these movements undermine democracy in its own name. Many “progressive” social activists, whose discourses I analyse, consider their political opponents as “underdeveloped barbarians” – “sovki” and “vatniki” in Russia and Ukraine, or “deplorables” in the US. They exclude the voices of these “barbarians” from their “progressive” public spheres, where discussions of the most problematic societal issues take place. By doing so, “progressives” erode the quality of the democratic condition by their own hands. For many social activists, including some socially active academics, this argument can be difficult to accept. For my external British reviewer, for example, it was difficult to accept the criticism of the Maidan – he demanded a lot of changes in the manuscript to mitigate my claim. I had to defend my position before the editors and argue against the unsubstantiated demands of the reviewers who viewed my manuscript not academically but politically. The book was published, it was highly appreciated by established scholars, but it took much time and energy.

Most of your articles are not co-authored. Do you prefer to work alone?

In my research, I employ discourse-analytical methods. In the field of discourse-analytical studies, it is quite normal not to have co-authors, as we do not deal with Big Data, which often requires the involvement of research teams. More often than not, a discourse analyst concentrates on rather limited samples of texts, digging deep into their internal structure and logic. For example, in a recent paper, I analyse only one document - an Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union. I deconstruct its internal discursive structure and show how “democracy” displaces “market”; then, I discuss the ideological implications of this replacement. Usually, this kind of work does not require any assistants or partners.

You collaborate with several journals as a referee. What do you get out of such engagements?

I never say “no” if editors contact me with an offer to review articles because I am an expert in political discourses within post-Soviet social domains. Such reviews are very important, as they help editors, who may not possess the sufficient knowledge on this or that aspect of complex social realities, in order to decide on whether a particular submission is of high academic quality or not. They also help scholars to improve their papers prior to publication. My papers are also reviewed, and I am always very thankful to meticulous reviewers who point out even the most miniscule problems. I have learned a lot from these reviews. Moreover, I hope that the authors whom I review also learn from my comments and suggestions.

What has changed for you since receiving tenure?

I do not think any significant changes have happened. I still mentor students, I still teach, and I still do research, attending conferences and engage in publishing. Maybe, I feel a little more relaxed as there is no pressure of a forthcoming review, but the word “a little” is key here. Whether tenured or not, scholars still need to work: publishing, presenting, reviewing, teaching, mentoring, and doing research, of course. Currently, I am working on a research project on populism in the age of integral reality. I analyse how, during his presidential campaign, Ukrainian

President Vladimir Zelensky played on the fringes of the real and the virtual, and how this helped him to mobilise a populist front of supporters.

As for teaching, this past year I had my first experience of teaching MagoLego (electives open for any Master’s student), and I definitely love it. The majority of students are very smart, goal-oriented, and hungry for unconventional knowledge. They are also interested in interdisciplinary perspectives on global communication. I am happy to share these perspectives with them. International students are the gems of the course – they can bring insight from diverse cultural backgrounds, and their contributions are invaluable. The only sad aspect of this new experience is that we have to communicate online, while I prefer face-to-face communication.

This year, we are launching an English-speaking Master’s programme in Critical Media Studies – I am pretty sure we will have outstanding students there as well, this will be the first step in the creation of academic schools of thought.

What advice can you offer to current tenure-track faculty members?

Take any “defeat” as an opportunity. Never give up, and enjoy struggle. As I understand it now, this is what academia is about .





Behavioural Traps in Economics

Dr Anton Suvorov is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Academic Supervisor of the Joint Programme in Economics delivered by HSE University and the New Economic School. He holds a PhD from Toulouse 1 University Capitole. He achieved tenure in 2012.

Could you talk about your research interests and what you do at HSE University?

Broadly speaking, my research is mainly focused on studying human behaviour and, in particular, on how incentives interact with intrinsic motivation. As for methodology, I usually do not investigate pre-existing data, but I consider theoretical models or run lab experiments, or, sometimes, a combination of both.

My research often touches topics that are known to us from everyday experiences. For instance, in psychology, there has been a big concern about using incentives to modify people's behaviour and the risk that 'hidden costs of rewards' may emerge. The original theory says that sometimes people are intrinsically motivated to do certain things and when someone tries to influence them by designing more or less sophisticated incentive schemes, people might get frustrated and lose their intrinsic motivation. Therefore, as long as incentives are there, people will probably behave in a way that is desired by their principals (managers, parents, teachers), but once such incentives are removed, they will stop doing things they agreed to do previously. There was also a theory devised by my research advisor Jean Tirole and his co-author Roland Benabou, which considers the type of hidden costs that may emerge when the principals are better informed than the agents (e.g. an experienced manager vs a young employee), and, therefore, the agents try to read through the principals' motivation. In other words, when someone promises you a high bonus to do something, you ask yourself whether this happens because this person doesn't trust you and thinks that without the bonus you will not do the given task.

This is a very general theory, as you can see such concerns in the workplace, in a kindergarten or in a family. But the question remains - what can we learn from this model? Recently, I was reading a popular book by two famous behavioural economists, Uri Gneezy and John List, called *The Why Axis* about their field experiments in Chicago high schools with kids who did not do very well academically and the different

ways of potentially reducing the dropout rate and boosting college enrolment. I found several illustrations, whereby incentives, even monetary ones, created by the researchers, helped these kids improve their performance and, importantly for my research, that when these incentives were removed, the positive boost nevertheless persisted. Moreover, that is something that goes against the predictions of the original model. I did not publish one of my papers on this issue 15 years ago partly because it was an abstract story for me. But now, when I can connect it to interesting empirical research, I am motivated to finish this work.

It seems that research in this area touches on a lot of issues. How exactly can it impact policy and practice?

Right now, I am working on a paper, which grew out of a Bachelor's thesis by one of my former students, Yana Myachenkova, who is now pursuing a Master's in Chicago. It is a paper about praise and criticism, which is also something that speaks to everyone's experience: whether we should praise or criticise our friends, colleagues and relatives, and how to react to praise and criticism. Daniel Kahneman, probably the main guru in behavioural economics, wrote a famous book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, where he described how people perceive the effectiveness of praise and criticism. He shares an anecdote from his older experiences, when he was working with Israeli flight instructors. They told him that whenever they praised a pilot, they observed that he does not perform as well the next time.

In contrast, when they criticise the pilot for doing a bad maneuverer, he would probably do better the next time. Kahneman asks if there are objective reasons why exceptionally good performances are very likely to be followed by a worse performance, or this happens just because the circumstances change so that even if you try as hard, it's unlikely that you do again exceptionally well. Vice versa, if you are doing really poorly, it could be because you didn't exert much effort, but it

could also happen because you were unlucky. The next time, even if you do not work hard, it is quite likely the things will get a bit better.

If people fail to understand this causal mechanism, they may misattribute changes in behaviour to the praise and criticism they give. Therefore, a flight instructor thinks that when he praises a pilot, he spoils the pilot, and when he criticises him, he rescues him. Of course, this is a misattribution and a behavioural bias. At the same, we discovered that there was almost no empirical research that would confirm this hypothesis. So, we created a simple model and ran a lab experiment to test whether principals indeed get disappointed by praising agents if they observe that praise lead to a deterioration of performance and vice versa. It also took some time, but I hope it will end up in a high quality journal. This paper does not give policy recommendations per se, but it outlines some lessons that may be useful for almost any person.

What are your teaching interests?

I teach Microeconomics as part of a joint undergraduate programme with the New Economic School. I have done it for many years, starting from my first year at HSE. It was also the first time this course was ever taught. I also teach Behavioural Economics for Master's and PhD students and, sometimes, Contract Theory.

I am also the academic supervisor for this joint programme. This is a relatively recent experience for me. In September of 2019, I replaced Kseniya Panidi, who had been a supervisor for many years. It's not a huge burden, as we have an efficient teaching office with very qualified people, but we do make quite a number of decisions, such as allowing students to take certain courses or approving individual curricula when they go abroad. In addition, there's strategic planning, when we discuss what courses we want to have for the next year and how we want to develop the programme.

So, I am more into the academic content but there are technical and administrative things as well, especially because this is a joint programme and sometimes the schools have somewhat different views on certain issues, and we have to rectify it. The programme is co-supervised by my colleague Andrey Markevich from the New Economic School. Moreover, I think we have a good mutual understanding and interaction.

And this new supervision is not the only admin duty that you had after you got tenure, right?

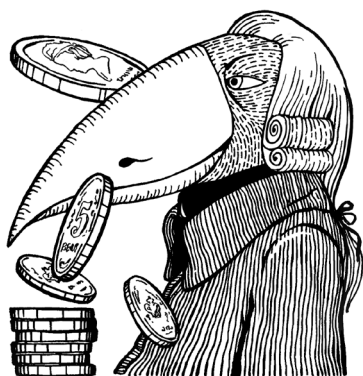
Yes, but I have always had admin duties. For several years, I have been an academic supervisor of the Master's research programme.

Another admin duty I have now, shared jointly with Svetlana Adasheva, is co-chairing one of the recently created PhD Dissertation Councils, the one in economics. This is a new institution: HSE is one of the first Russian universities that obtained the right to grant its own scientific degrees. So far, this experience has been quite rewarding. I think we managed to organise PhD defence in a meaningful way and, given that these new procedures are very different from the ones that existed before, it was not a trivial exercise. Now, the dissertations are discussed in small committees, that consist of five professors, as is the standard in the West, and all of them are highly qualified specialists in the topics related to the thesis they consider. I see this as a big advantage because it helps to protect PhD candidates from random opinions of people who may not fully understand the meaning of their dissertation and give critique that is not always relevant. However, the flipside of the coin is that the experts in the committees themselves may be quite demanding, but this is fair.

Conversely, one of the things that is not satisfactory is that we lose a big proportion of PhD students. We take more than 50 PhD students every year at the Faculty of Economic Sciences, which is a huge number for a PhD programme in a research university, but the number of defences is much smaller. For some, the initial motivation might not be strong enough. For others, full-time work on a dissertation can turn out to be infeasible. We have an academic PhD programme where we support students in different ways, including a substantial scholarship. Nevertheless, this is a tiny fraction – 3-5 students per year. Another thing is that, in the West, when you write a PhD thesis, you have to do quality research and that's it, whereas here you have to publish it in refereed journals to get the right to defend the thesis. This is an additional challenge. We are definitely looking forward to having more students defend their theses successfully, but I think it will take some time for them to adapt to the new system.

What helps someone get tenure?

Although I teach Behavioural Economics, sometimes I feel myself like a subject of an experiment who wants to avoid the behavioural traps, some of which I mentioned earlier. It is not easy to find a good compromise and the optimal trade-off between ambitions and possibilities. On the one hand, you want to write great papers and publish them in the very best journals, but on the other hand, there is time pressure and strong competition from other people from all over the world who want to do the same. To find a path that allows you to be ambitious enough, but on the other hand, to be realistic, that is the main challenge.



Bridging Central Banks and Academia

Dr. Udara Peiris is an Associate Professor at the International College of Economics and Finance. He holds a PhD from the University of Oxford. He was awarded tenure in 2015.

Six years ago, in an interview for The HSE Look, you named two strands of your research interests: monetary policy and financial stability. Has this changed and, if so, why?

In terms of the core subject material, it's more or less the same: the interaction of macroeconomics and finance. However, when I first came, I was mostly doing theoretical work, and now I am doing much more quantitative work, working on the models which central banks and policymakers would find useful in guiding their policy-decisions. Moreover, when it comes to students, I like them to work on a broader range of topics because that helps me to keep my mind fresh: from students' presentations, I learn a lot, which I don't have time to learn myself.

You have worked and interned at a hedge fund, commercial bank, and a national central bank, but chose to be a researcher. Why?

For me, this type of structured environment, the idea of waking up and coming home at a certain time of a day, was not something I could really do. Furthermore, I prefer to feel ownership over my projects and work on longer projects than smaller tasks. Therefore, I looked for a career where I could be managing something on my own, something that I would enjoy, but for most things I was exposed to, that was not the case. Ultimately, since I was very young, I was genuinely curious about how the world works, and that has driven me. Therefore, it was not a difficult decision to make, because I felt whatever career I took I would have had this opportunity to understand the world and make it better.

When a student comes to you and asks advice on joining the academia what do you usually say?

It's useful to be direct and honest. First, I try to understand whether they know what they are talking about. There's a bad idea among some students that a PhD programme should be

an easy way to get a free Master's degree: 'if you enrol and if you fail the exams, you still get a Master's and can apply for a job'. Moreover, I have to explain that this is extremely bad for the reputation of ICEF and the people that wrote reference letters for them. I also have to explain that the point of most, if not all, top PhD programmes is to produce professors. If they want to do a PhD, they should have in mind that they want to be a professor. Of course, they may not at the end, but the true motivation should be as such. Second, I try to tell them all the bad things about being an academic as it is not a very structured and transparent path. In many jobs, if you do certain tasks well, you can be rewarded and promoted; but in research, you can do something great, but it may not produce results. Therefore, there has to be internal toughness to be able to deal with disappointments and setbacks. Finally, there should be curiosity and intrinsic motivation for doing in-depth research.

Your students are indeed actively choosing academia, but there was a remarkable year – 2017 – when all four ended up in pursuing a PhD: at Wisconsin-Madison, Boston, Rochester, and Cornell. What made that year, or that cohort, so special?

It was more than just a coincidence, as we have talented students every year. However, it is rare to find many who are interested in macrofinance, and the fact that I had them was a luck. Nevertheless, that group of students from 2017 (Katya Kazakova, Elias Ilin, Natalia Gimpelson, and Katya Potemkina) were, and are, exceptionally gifted. When I decide to write a reference letter for a student applying to a PhD programme, I think about two things. One is whether they will pass the first year of PhD exams and, secondly, once they go through it, how successful they will be in producing research, which will be used for academic job market. Those are difficult things to evaluate in somebody who is 20-21 and has never done research. I had known the students you mentioned for

at least two years as they came to me in Year 3 and worked intensively. I realised they were good enough and challenged them with even more difficult topics to work on. They also observed each other, and a little sense of healthy competition helped them to understand the level they can reach. I am very proud about how they progressed through PhD exams and now they are doing very well. They are still in touch. I am very proud and happy when they contact or meet me when they come back to Moscow and tell me about their progress and success, but most of all, when they tell me of their happiness in their chosen path and life.

You have co-authored several articles with your PhD supervisor Dr. Dimitrios Tsomocos, with the most recent one being published last year. Was it difficult to find such a match, or was it a lucky coincidence?

So far, our collaboration has been an evolution of our paper in the Journal of Mathematical Economics, which is the core material from my PhD dissertation and develops the models about financial stability he has been famous for. His advising style is very different from the British style, where the student is more or less left on their own. He has completed his own studies in the US, more of an American style of advising, which is more structured. I think the most important thing is that he is very well trained, especially, in formal, rigorous modelling. I felt that, for an academic career that could last for 50-60 years, I needed strong foundational training and I believed I could receive that from him. Plus, the topics he was working on - banks and financial stability policy – were the ones I wanted to understand and learn. He is also a caring person and invested in helping and developing of his students. I am forever grateful for the time and effort he spent in developing me as a researcher and as a person. Much of my approach to advising my own students comes from my experiences with him.

If we can compare this sustainable relationship with those one has with new co-authors, why and how do these new names appear?

Co-authoring is like a marriage. It could be people from different places in the same field that you see at conferences. It can be a friend of a friend. You can have a conversation that may last for several years, and then at some point, you converge on something to do. I am generally very open-minded and I like different projects and ideas. I have started a lot of different projects with different people. Many of them have not been worked out yet, but it is not something that can't happen in the future, it's an ongoing process.

On the other side of the research realm, you collaborate with nine journals as a referee and evaluate the work of others. Can you tell us more about this experience?

The refereeing process is an important part of this profession. It ensures standards and often referees are the only ones who read papers carefully. When you write a paper, you may present it in many places and send it to a lot of people. However, one rarely reads it line by line except the referees. As a referee, you have to work out whether a paper is making a meaningful contribution and if yes, you must make sure that it is formulated very well. This can be quite a long process.

What has changed for you since attaining tenure?

For me personally, not a lot has changed. The tenure track system makes you focus more on quantity of publications, as you need a certain number for a certain date. Nevertheless, after tenure, you can focus more on quality and impact within and outside of academia. It is also the original intention: tenure is not a reward for publishing effectively. A tenure designation is a decision on whether this person is able to produce something bigger and greater after they are awarded tenure. Unfortunately, it has become something of a prize. However, most people I know view tenure as an opportunity to work on something with a bigger impact.

So, since getting tenure, I was able to start a new project, which took two years to develop. Research can be more fun if you do not have to worry about deadlines. It has never been something I worried about too much, but I always had it in mind and tried to be systematic in getting the publications out. The main thing is now I can focus on riskier projects and longer-term projects with a focus on developing my own skills and knowledge – that's the main benefit that tenure gives.

As for admin duties, they have never overloaded me, though I do a little more now. For example, I have chaired a search committee for recruitment of new faculty members. There are periods where I have put my time in for administration, but it's not really a big burden for me. ICEF and HSE have tried to minimise the administrative duties of senior faculty so that we can focus on research. I know the system in the UK, how many meetings and reviews they have, and what administration really means. So, it's great here.

What advice can you offer to current tenure-track faculty?

I would tell them to be practical because, unless they are very sure their one or two papers are going to appear in a top journal, it is better sometimes to go a little bit lower and get more papers

in if you know chances are much higher. There is always a risk that you keep hoping for a big fish, but it never comes out that way. At the end of a day, at least at ICEF, when the tenure package and all the papers are read, it matters not only where it's published, but also how good the paper is. If the paper is good, the tenure panel will take this in account. So, be practical,

be aware of the time constraints, and plan your publications in a strategic way, so that within five/six years, or whatever your tenure clock is, you can have the number of publications that you need. You should speak to senior people early and get a sense of the timeline and a likely journal in which your research can be published.



The April Conference Must Go On

HSE University's XXI April International Academic Conference on Economic and Social Development started up on April 7, as previously planned, and lasted until May 29. The current situation with Covid-19 forced this important annual event to change from its usual approach to a distributed format. This means that all participants had the possibility to present the results of their research and events were held online. The programme included 71 academic sessions, 16 reports from Honourary and Invited Speakers, and seven associated events with several of them being streamed. The conference attracted more than 4,500 attendees, with many more who watched the recordings later on the Conference's video channel, - the new home of the April Conference.

Ivan Prostavkov, *Vice Rector of HSE University, who was Deputy Head of the Programme Committee and Head of the Conference Organising Committee, shares his comments with The HSE Look:*

In March, we faced the difficult issue of what to do with the April Conference, which is not only the largest academic event at our university, but also a flagship event, which almost symbolizes the entire history of HSE University. The most obvious option was to postpone it to a later date – this was what almost all universities, research organisations, and associations, not only in Russia but throughout the world, were doing at that moment. But on March 11, the Academic Council decided otherwise. We would hold it remotely in a distributed format so as not to break with tradition and show that our institution is ready for even the most unexpected challenges. Furthermore, a lot of preparatory work had already been done: the programme had been drawn up, and more than 700 Russian and international researchers were prepared to present their work. It would have been unfair to simply cancel the event. Nonetheless, we only had three weeks to organise it.

In the distributed format, some sessions, special round tables, and associated events were held online, and in all other cases, participants had the opportunity to expand upon their previously uploaded abstracts and presentations by posting detailed descriptions and video presentations of their papers. Today, we can say that holding the event in a new format was

not easy, but that it was the only right decision. Not everything may have gone the way we wanted, and now the Programme Committee and the Academic Council will analyse the results and draw conclusions for the future. However, it is obvious that we have found new opportunities for the April Conference.

In particular, this concerns how the programme was compiled, scheduling, the use of digital tools, internal and external communications, and much more. We have reached two key conclusions. The first, and the most important, is that the distributed format has not negatively affected in any way the relevance and originality of the presentations and follow-up discussions.

The second conclusion is that we were able to test a variety of online conference tools, and we will be able to use them in the future. A more aligned combination of online and offline formats will expand the audience for the Conference and attract new participants from Russia's regions and around the world. Most definitely, the April Conference will not be moving to an entirely online format, unless external circumstances again force us. In fact, I heard directly from participants that they missed the informal networking and emotional connections usually made during discussions, which are an integral part of academic life!