

Faculty Contracts in Post-Soviet Countries: Common Features, Different Futures

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For decades, universities in Soviet countries were governed, evaluated, and financed according to the same principles. The current system is not like this former one. However, faculty contracts—a core element in any university—still participate much in common. While this article is based on detailed data on the academic profession in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, and Russia, the described trends are, to some extent, common for all post-Soviet countries.

WHAT FACULTY ARE SUPPOSED TO PROVIDE

Faculty contracts in post-Soviet countries reflect the fact that many universities form primarily educational entities, built around teaching and learning processes. So, faculty contracts more or less explicitly describe teaching loads and obligations, and most monitoring and reporting activities are concentrated around contractual arrangements. At the same time, the professoriate in general has little incentives and opportunities to be actively involved in research:

research is poorly rewarded and teaching loads are heavy. Teaching is far more relevant as a source of income for faculty, compared to other countries. At the same time, faculty in many of these countries (e.g., Russia and Armenia) do not participate in consulting but rather engage in nonacademic jobs.

HOW ARE FACULTY PAID?

Compared to professionals outside universities, university teachers are relatively poorly paid. That concerns both top rank (such as associate professor or full professor) and entry rank (assistants or lecturer). Actually, it is a common pattern in all developed countries that academic people obtain less money and enjoy nonmonetary benefits. However, even taking that into account, faculty's salaries in former Soviet countries are significantly lower than those in other countries. At least in part, these conditions are based on the fact that, in general, these countries are relatively poor, compared to western European countries, the United States, Canada, or Australia. This explanation, however, does not reveal why these salaries are two times lower, even in relation to gross domestic product per capita. By the way, in Nigeria, Ethiopia, or India where GDP per capita is also low, relative earnings of university professors are quite huge, comparing to the rest of the population.

SOURCES OF INCOME

Since salaries are low and insufficient for normal standards of life, moonlighting is quite common. Many teachers are engaged in teaching at several universities (including for-profit programs), offering private lessons or take teaching loads based on the main contract within the same university. Many teachers use a

university reputation of their main employer (a position that does not pay too much money, as a salary) to gain a good per hour contract at a less-reputable, for-profit university, which provided good money.

Many post-Soviet countries gave up university-specific entry exams and substituted that with government-unified examination systems, which have not continued in a widespread form. However, private tutors are still in great demand, since they now help to prepare for these unified tests; and many applicants from all income groups prefer to use preparatory lessons, to increase chances for better enrollment.

FRINGE BENEFITS: REMUNERATION BEYOND SALARY

While in many aspects academic contracts in post-Soviet countries differ from those in developed countries, fringe benefits in the university sector of these countries are more or less the same as in the rest of the world. Faculty enjoy longer vacations—the only time to engage in research for those who are overloaded with teaching but do not give up research ambitions—and retirement funds. All other potential benefits, such as housing or loads, are in general not available. In the Soviet period, university teachers had access to many nonmonetary benefits, which were not feasible for people in industries, and also had a higher social status than those who worked in enterprises. So, the academic profession at those times attracted the brightest graduates and was able to provide them with rather good remuneration, high social status, and fringe benefits—as well as, clear career perspectives. Today, the current conditions offered to university professionals, especially young ones, cause a huge adverse selection effect: when the best potential researchers choose

nonacademic work or leave country to work in universities around the world. Whether proper incentives could be restored and which factors should be undertaken for that policy are the key questions for building world-class universities in Russia.

Many post-Soviet countries experience a large demographic shock: the size of the 16-to-19-year age cohort—babies of earlier 1990s—is critically low, when not many people felt brave enough to have children and the birth rate was extremely low. This specific population creates a huge competition at the university sector, for good or even not-so-good students. While university administrators face this source of pain, they would obtain the chance to reform the university sector by removing weak institutions and cheap diploma mills. The reforms of academic contracts that would create a better incentive for teachers and would attract new young people into the higher education sector are the key ingredient of success.