



Academic environment

Academic development of universities

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ICEF fifteenth anniversary

This year is fifteen years from the date when the International College of Economics and Finance was opened at the Higher School of Economics (HSE), with the participation of the London School of Economics (LSE).

All these years, ICEF has been developing rapidly and purposefully. From a college started as an international double degree Bachelor's programme, successfully implemented by part-time teachers, it has become a powerful educational and research centre. Nowadays, the kernel of ICEF consists of international teachers and researchers. Through their efforts, in addition to the international Bachelor's double degree programme, a Master's programme in Financial Economics has been launched. Moreover, the International Laboratory of Financial Economics was established at ICEF. After 15 years it is helpful to look back, recalling the story with its drawbacks and achievements, and glance into the future.

Sergey Yakovlev, ICEF director, comments on ICEF creation and development.

Why and How was ICEF Started?

It is simpler to answer the question 'Why' than 'How'. As can be remembered, the mid-90's in our country was a time of rapid development of the market economy. The extremely urgent question of how to go about the preparing of modern specialists in economics was raised. Unfortunately, economics was an area in which Russian education and science had no experience, nor any internationally recognized achievements (due to a long time isolation from the international community). In response to this question, new schools in Russia like the Higher School of Economics and the New Economic School appeared. The founding of ICEF was also an attempt to provide an education in economics in modern Russia. The aim of ICEF creation was to achieve not only a high academic quality of education, but also the recognition of its results worldwide.

The history of the formation of the college, including the formative period of ideas, of the search for strategic partners for its implementation, of the subsequent preliminary steps to a joint project between two universities (which had no precedent in either of them before), began in the mid-90's.

The idea of ICEF was born during the collective work of teachers and administrators of Moscow State University within a joint European project "Strengthening Economics Education at Moscow State University", under the "Tempus" programme. Apart from the economic faculty of Moscow State University, Tilburg University, the Sorbonne and the LSE participated in this project. At that time I was working as deputy dean for External Relations at the Economics Faculty and was the coordinator of the project.

During round table conference with European members of the project, we developed and discussed possible strategies for modernization of economics education at Moscow State University. The goal was to achieve wide international recognition. As a result of these discussions, our LSE colleagues, together with Russian participants of the project, prepared a summary of suggestions, and the LSE professors Richard Jackman and Amos Witztum drew up a document known as a White paper, which was the first comprehensive plan for our future actions.

It was not only about the creation of new courses and updating the existing ones, but about deep structural changes in education.

Firstly, the plans were to build a new curriculum (consisting of a reduced number of required courses and contact hours and an increased portion of self-study student work), to improve teaching methods and assessment of the knowledge of students (including the preparation of a package of teaching materials for self-study), to increase the role of research (including the establishment of a data analysis center, a joint scientific journal, research programmes and laboratories), and to reform the management structure (avoiding the system of departments, which caused the greatest stress for some readers of the document from Moscow State University).

Initially, the intention was to modernize the entire faculty, but gradually it became clear that it was more realistic to build a parallel autonomous structure, in which the ideas of the White paper could be realized with a lower risk of corporate resistance and distortion by the academic environment. Thus, the idea of an "International College of Economics and Finance» was born. Originally, it was supposed to be called a "center of academic excellence", a subdivision of Moscow State University. It is worth saying that at the beginning our British colleagues considered a Master's level programme as the preferred one for the future college. However, as experience showed, the decision to start with a Bachelor's programme was the right one.

The need for an undergraduate programme was due to the fact that the project objectives - building the college to implement educational programmes with internationally recognized degrees, - fitted the examination system of the University of London International Programmes, which would then provide a clear confirmation of this international level, and Bachelor graduates would receive two diplomas: HSE and University of London. The two-diploma format was not the aim itself ; first of all, it was important to create an economics education programme in Russia that would be competitive on a global level. The idea of creating the International College of Economics and Finance as an independent structure with the participation of LSE was supported by Richard Layard (of that time the Director of the Centre of Economic Performance at LSE) and Sergey Dubinin (of that time the Chairman of the Russian Central Bank) in 1996. However, it did not get a "green light" at the Economics Faculty of Moscow State University.

Moreover, at the final stage of discussions of the project, the leadership of the faculty unexpectedly offered to start ICEF as a part of the "School of Finance" (which it was planned to build, although in the end it was not even created). This would have necessarily limited the autonomy of the conceived programme, and would have impeded its creation and operation.

Discussion of the concept of the White paper on improving the education system, planned by the Academic Council of the Economics Faculty (Moscow State University) at the end of 1996, was not held because of the negative attitude to the concept of the project by some key members of the Council. It became clear that in such circumstances the likelihood of success was minimal – the only way was either to give up the idea or change university.

Why did you choose the HSE?

First of all, a lot of my friends from my previous school and from my years at Moscow State University were now at HSE. But more important was the fact that in HSE, a young university founded by graduates of the Economics Faculty of Moscow State University, a favorable innovation environment had been established, with the help of institutional support from some European universities. Joint Master's programmes with the Sorbonne and Rotterdam were already launched there. Moreover, the creation of a new institution together with a leading foreign university coincided with strategic goals of HSE development. (No wonder, that the project of ICEF in HSE was actively supported by the entire leadership of the University.) The academic staff also looked quite competitive, and this was confirmed later on. This was very important, as most of the teachers came to ICEF, especially in the early years, from different faculties of HSE.

The turning point in the history of ICEF was January 1997. First, a meeting with Sergey Dubinin was arranged. It was also attended by Richard Layard. Finally, the official participation of LSE in the project of ICEF within the HSE was agreed. The LSE agreement was confirmed by an official letter on 13 February 1997. After that the meeting was held with Yaroslav Kuzminov on the discussion of key issues of the organization of ICEF as an autonomous unit of HSE. Afterwards, the project of ICEF started to be rapidly realized and became a reality.

In March of that year another meeting in HSE was held. It was attended by the director of the LSE Centre of Economic Performance, the director of the Central Bank of Russia, by the HSE top management and the top twenty banks in the country. The main topic of discussion was the support of ICEF creation by domestic business companies. In April, LSE management met with Sergey Dubinin and Alexander Shokhin in London. They agreed on the objectives and key principles of the joint international ICEF project, on the structure of its management, including the International Academic Committee and the Board of Trustees. The final decision about ICEF was completed in May, by the Academic Council of the HSE.

On July 2, HSE Rector Yaroslav Kuzminov and the director of LSE Anthony Giddens signed an agreement on joint action to create a «world class college in economics and finance» in HSE. This was the beginning of the history of the development of ICEF.

What in your opinion are the key events in the development of ICEF?

There were no simple years in the history of the College, especially during the early period.

Together with colleagues from the LSE and HSE, and with business partners, we constantly suffered from new problems: academic, managerial, financial. However, the College was constantly developing, despite all of the problems. In development of ICEF there were several major steps, each of which solved certain features of the problem. Each of these stages deserves a special comment, and here I would like to give the word to my colleagues. (See publication "Steps of the big way" in this issue).

What is today's ICEF like?

ICEF is a College:

- with teachers who do research, whose results receive international recognition, and also implement the Bachelor's double degree programme in Economics (Five specialisations) and the Master's programme in Financial Economics;
- which develops HSE as a research university of international level;
- which has produced more than 700 graduates with the two leading universities degrees in Russia and the UK, during the last 15 years.
- with approximately 650 current students, with more than 120 teachers, sixteen of which have PhDs and seven employed together with the Faculty of Economics of HSE.

Which plans were not realized in the 90-s?

We had more ambitious plans in the area of research, for example, establishing an international scientific journal, starting a center of empirical data. However, we are going to implement them in the future.

What are the plans of the College for the Future?

A few years ago the development programme of ICEF was written together with colleagues from the LSE. Now we are implementing it and working on its updates. Among the strategic objectives there are: further development of ICEF as a "center of academic excellence," consolidation of its research capacity for expansion of the spectrum and quality of educational programmes, promotion of the HSE internationally with the aim of improving its recognition at the world level. .

What is the reason for the success of ICEF?

First of all, it is people. The idea of ICEF has gathered professional people, both teachers and administrators, in Russia and on the English side. Not all of them are permanently based in ICEF, for various reasons. However, I would like to name those who have worked with ICEF from the first day. Among those are my colleagues - O.Zamkov, A.Kostina, S.Nikiforova, V.Hreshkova, and those who joined us later A.Belyanin, M.Nikitin, A.Telitsyna, teachers - G.Kantorovich, R.Entov, V.Chernyak, J. Lokshin, E.Velikaya, N. Kogutovskaya, R. Nureyev P.Katyshev, A.Peresetsky, A.Fridman, K.Bukin, O.Kuzina. And, of course, Richard Jackman and his colleagues from LSE: Amos Witztum, Rosemary Gosling, Christian Julliard, Janet Hartley, Margaret Bray, Dimitrios Tsomocos and many others on the British side. An important role was also played by the Board of Trustees support of ICEF. I would like to thank them all, as well as all teachers and administrators of HSE, who have contributed to the development of ICEF.

Stages of a Long Journey

The first stage (1997-2001)

Creation of the double degree Bachelor's programme.

A contract between the HSE and the LSE for launching ICEF was signed. The first 38 students were admitted to the double degree programme. The International Academic Committee started to work (its main functions were establishing the curriculum, the selection and appointment of professors and teachers of the faculty) .The ICEF Board of Trustees was also established and included some of the largest banks.

2000

This was the first time ICEF students received awards from the University of London for the best academic results; there were four such awards, and three students – received Letters of Commendation from the University of London. Later on, such success was to become common and repeated, but in those days it was new and therefore, especially valuable.

2001

The first graduation ceremony was held for the award of undergraduate degrees from ICEF. Thirteen students (in the presence of the Minister of Education of Russia V.M. Filippov and the British Ambassador) saw the result of their hard work receiving two degrees – a Bachelor HSE diploma and a diploma of the University of London.

Lev Lyubimov, HSE Deputy Academic Supervisor

For me ICEF was one of the most important examples of creating university of the world level. From these

examples we can learn valuable lessons on the educational process, formation of the university ethos, creating good material conditions for the educational process, understanding the necessary requirements for Academia. From these lessons several conclusions were made: in 1998 HSE started to implement new features into the learning process, among them were: the credit system, modules, ratings, etc. These methods of teaching formed the HSE culture and created competitive advantages: quality of education at the University and values and ethics of the teacher community. The ICEF example also led HSE management to make constant modernization of the University, to develop all its components (research, societal, national pattern of values, etc.)

(Comment specially for the HSE Newsletter Okna Rosta dedicated to ICEF)

Richard Jackman, ICEF Project Director at the LSE

Fifteen years ago, the Russian economy experienced a period of deep transformation, while the situation in Russian universities was exactly the opposite - nothing was changing.

This meant that whole generations of Russians are educated in a way not corresponding to the society in which they will work. That's why we decided to bring something completely new to the Russian educational system. That's why ICEF was started. This project was a huge success -we were able to build a completely new structure for economics education.

(Interview during ICEF alumni reunion in London, January 2012)

Sergei Dubinin, Chairman of VTB Bank Supervisory Council, Chairman of the ICEF Board of Trustees

This initiative is very modern, it provides exactly what is required for businessmen and intelligent people in our country.

(Interview for the film dedicated to the ICEF 10th anniversary , 2007)

Yaroslav Kuzminov, HSE Rector

For us ICEF is more than a project. It is a symbol of our success.

(Interview for the film dedicated to the ICEF 10th anniversary, 2007)

Sergei Guriev, Rector of the New Economic School

I really like the HSE initiative related to the international undergraduate programme - the International College of Economics and Finance, which focuses on international standards. The ICEF Bachelor's programme is one of the outstanding achievements in Russian education.

(Interview during the celebration of the fifteenth birthday of HSE, 2007)

The second stage (2001-2005)

ICEF double degree Bachelor's programme became one of the most competitive undergraduate programmes in Russia. ICEF achieved the stability of academic standards, and expanded the range of specializations, carried out the successful promotion of the programme in the international market.

2002

The HSE Academic Council approved the report on ICEF's work, making recommendations to the deans of HSE faculties on how to use the positive experience of ICEF. For the first time six graduates received first class honors degree diplomas of the University of London.

2002-2004

The first group of ICEF graduates were enrolled on master's programmes of the leading foreign universities (*LSE, Oxford, Warwick*).

2003

For the first time, an ICEF graduate Svetlana Kovalskaya is admitted to a PhD programme in Finance at the London Business School (LBS) with the provision of the full scholarship.

2004

ICEF completed implementation of the project on National Training Foundation: unique training materials in all subjects in both languages were prepared, teachers of ICEF completed the programme at the LSE, and ICEF information system (LMS) was created.

Amos Witztum, Professor of Economics at the London Metropolitan University

For me ICEF is the story of great achievements and the struggle for creation of a college that provides high quality education.

It's one thing to be popular, to make money and respond to market needs, and quite another - to do what you think is right, necessary and significant.

(Interview during ICEF alumni reunion in London, January 2012)

Oleg Zamkov, Deputy Director of ICEF

ICEF has gathered a team of like-minded persons, for which the main idea, even the most important task, is that of a college that gives students necessary and modern knowledge – knowledge that will allow them to work successfully and to develop in Russian and international professional environments.

Talented, motivated, resolute students soon came. However, there was a high risk that such an ambitious goal – to meet the requirements of both programmes at the same time (very high, and each in its own way!) - would be beyond our strength. Afterwards, the same task failed in a number of other countries and universities which were trying to repeat the experience of ICEF. However, despite all the difficulties, we finally succeeded to do it!

(Comment specially for the HSE Newsletter Okna Rosta dedicated to ICEF)

Vadim Radaev, HSE First Vice-Rector

The Higher School of Economics consists of many departments, schools and autonomous units, but ICEF is very special. This college is the one we have largely tried to take an example from, to adopt its most useful features.

(Interview during ICEF alumni reunion in London, January 2012)

The third stage (2005-2009)

This was the time of preparing and opening of the Master's programme "Financial Economics" in academic cooperation with the LSE. A particularly important role in the development of the Master's programme was played by the leading Russian banks, VTB24 and Sberbank. There was also a start of recruiting full-time teachers who are PhD graduates from leading foreign universities with internationally recognized qualifications. . Worldwide promotion of the ICEF double degree Bachelor's programme continued.

2005

With the support of the LSE and participation of NES, recruiting of teachers from the world labour market began. It happened at the state university for the first time in Russia. HSE hired professor Maxim Nikitin, who had received PhD at the University of Pittsburgh (USA).

2006

For the first time, ICEF BSc graduates were enrolled on PhD programmes at top U.S. universities (Stanford University, Columbia University).

2007

The Master's programme in Financial Economics with the participation of the LSE is opened and a scholarship programme for the best students is set up with the help of VTB24 bank.

2008

The share of BSc graduates to receive first class honors degree diplomas from the University of London has reached 31%.

The LSE Academic Council in analysis of results of "the development programme" identified ICEF project as one of the most successful in academic cooperation with foreign universities.

2009

The first sixteen graduates of the ICEF Master's programme in "Financial Economics" received diplomas from the HSE and official letters of validation signed by the LSE Director.

Revold Entov, Professor, Head of the Department of Theoretical Economics | Subdepartment of the Theory of Money and Credit of the HSE

ICEF has always been a watchman on the HSE main deck. Success has been due to a strong policy of seeking to attract talented young teachers, who got their degrees in the West, and the friendly policy of the London School of Economics, and the policy of driving to the most attractive routes of master's education. I am convinced that in today's Russia there are not many centers of education, which would possess such distinct excellence.

(Comment specially for the HSE Newsletter Okna Rosta dedicated to ICEF)

Maxim Nikitin, Professor, Head of ICEF Master's programme,

Opening of the international Master's programme was a serious challenge for ICEF. Firstly, it needed new teachers - those who have studied and worked in the West, and got a PhD there. In the mid-2000s, the experience of hiring teachers from the international labour market in Russia had been only done at the New Economic School (NES). But ICEF also coped with this difficulty. By 2007, ICEF already had six teachers with western experience and PhDs. Secondly, ICEF was the first foreign partner of the LSE whose MSc graduates got letters of validation signed by the LSE Director. It was also hard to meet the demands of our British partners. The most important is an external examination control made by experts from London.

(Comment specially for the HSE Newsletter Okna Rosta dedicated to ICEF)

The fourth stage (2009-2013)

This consisted of active steps to transform ICEF into a research centre. Among the main tasks of this period were: strengthening the research capacity of ICEF, enhancing quality of basic scientific studies in Economics and Finance, expanding the range and quality of educational programmes.

2010

In partnership with the LSE the International Laboratory of Financial Economics was opened, which involved researchers from LSE, NES and other faculties of HSE. In 2011, the First International Moscow Finance Conference organized by the Laboratory was held at ICEF.

2011

ICEF students received thirty awards from the University of London for the top scores at the University of London International Programme exams

2012

An International Academic Advisory of ICEF and LSE was created with the participation of academics from Cambridge, Oxford, University of Vienna.

Dimitrios Tsomokos, Professor of Finance at Oxford University

It is very nice to see how ICEF, from a college oriented to Bachelor's programme, is becoming a modern international college, where the quality of teaching and the level of ongoing research are improving every year.

In such a short span of time the college has done such a significant achievement.

(Interview during ICEF alumni reunion in London, January 2012)

Christian Julliard, Academic Director of ICEF International Laboratory of Financial Economics at the LSE

One idea that was behind the organization of our laboratories is the creation of an international team consisting of world-class and young researchers, who began their academic career at ICEF. The famous economists take the functions of mentors for the young scientists. Another focus of our work is to organise the International Moscow Finance Conference at ICEF, which would be dedicated to financial economics and gather leading economists from around the world. At the Conference the young researchers have an opportunity to present their research works and discuss them with eminent colleagues. All this contribute to the integration of ICEF researchers into the world academic community.

(Interview during ICEF alumni reunion in London, January 2012)

Alexis Belyanin, Deputy Director for Research, ICEF

Experience has shown that ICEF has made the right choice: teachers publish regularly in leading international journals, review articles of foreign colleagues, participate in international conferences and organize conferences themselves. We look to the future with optimism, the reason for which is the accumulated experience of today, our available resources, and of course our students, many of whom end up on PhD programmes at leading universities and plan to return to Russia in a new capacity.

(Comment specially for the HSE Newsletter Okna Rosta dedicated to ICEF)

The article was prepared by Pavel Leshchenko