

EDUCATIONAL POLICY OF UKRAINE REGARDING OPTIMIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AT THE EXPENSE OF CREATION OF INNOVATIVE CENTRES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Summary

The article defines public-private-civil partnership as a principle of involving all interested parties in the process of management and reform of higher education at the local level; the reasons for optimization of higher educational institutions due to demographic and economic crises that worsened in 2022 as a result of the armed aggression on the territory of Ukraine, have been clarified; the options for optimizing higher educational institutions are proposed (a standard one – reorganization with the joining of a number of small branch institutions to a large university; collegial – creation of new institutions of higher education on contractual collegial conditions following the example of universities in Great Britain) as well as possible organizational and legal forms of their further functioning; the need to use quality performance indicators during decision-making related to the reorganization of the university is outlined; the criteria for the optimization of higher educational institutions, which are characterized by quantitative indicators (the contingent of the recipients of higher education and the number of residents of the territorial community where the educational institution is located) are theoretically analysed.

Key words: academic centre, economics of education, European integration, innovation centre of higher education, modernization, university, management of higher educational institution, management of higher education, educational management.

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1. Introduction

The relevance of the research lies in the fact that in the conditions of active reformation and gradual entry of the Ukrainian educational space into the European one, natural processes are taking place related to the improvement of various directions of management of the sector of higher education and its institutions. In general, the reformation of any industry is particularly painful, as it mostly does not find much support in the industry itself. The educational industry is no exception. However, we must state the need for organizational transformations in order to update the systems of public management of the industry and institutional administration of higher educational institutions. Currently, reforming the field of higher education, its management system and subjects of educational activity in Ukraine is a need aimed at solving the issued of personnel hunger and strengthening human potential, modernization of infrastructure, optimization of management processes, strengthening of internal institutional audit, search for the optimal financing model, bringing domestic standards in accordance with European ones, expanding the spectrum of educational services, reducing expenses related to the maintenance of educational institutions, improving the research base, etc.

The main task of the conducted research is a theoretical analysis of the reasons and criteria for the optimization of higher educational institutions in Ukraine for the purpose of creating innovative centres of education in large cities.

The object of the research is management of higher education.

The subject of the research is the optimization of higher educational institutions through the creation of academic centres.

Research methods. To achieve the set goal, general scientific and special scientific methods were used, in particular: abstraction, modelling, forecasting – to formulate and justify one's own author's position regarding the optimization of higher educational institutions and provide proposals regarding possible organizational and legal forms of functioning of subjects of educational activity after reorganization; expert assessment; logical-systemic analysis and synthesis – for description, analysis and generalization of reasons and criteria for optimization of higher educational institutions; methods of independent characteristics.

Research source base is represented by legislative acts, scientific articles, monographs, publications of state authorities, methodological recommendations and other publications of practitioners and leading scientists on the issue of management of education (V. Bobrytska, M. Vynnytskyi, L. Vorona, O. Zakharova, G. Krasilnikova, V. Kremin, N. Ladogubets, I. Lysokon, V. Lugovyi, O. Mozolev, L. Nevara, O. Orzhel, O. Sharov).

2. Reasons for optimizing higher education institutions

The main reason for the reduction in the number of higher educational institutions in Ukraine should be considered to be the reduction in the number of applicants for higher education. Since 2009, there has been a downward trend in the number of students in universities, so over the past 15 years, the number of applicants per higher educational institution has almost halved (*Ivnytskyi, 2024*). It is worth noting that the reduction in the number of the graduates of higher education is related to the emigration of Ukrainian youth, which is caused by a number of socio-political processes:

- the accession of Ukraine to the Bologna Process since 2005 (*Bologna Process, 2020: 3*);
- internationalization of education, reflected in the Lowen Communiqué of 2009 (*Nevara, 2016: 142*);
- the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the beginning of the military conflict on the territory of Donetsk and Lugansk regions since 2014 (*Zakharova, 2020*);
- European integration of Ukraine since 2014 (*Resolution 874-VII, 2014*);
- creation of the National Agency for Quality Assurance of Higher Education, one of the key goals of which is "Promoting the integration of the system of higher education of Ukraine into the global educational and scientific space" (*NAQA, 2016*);
- Russia's military aggression on the territory of Ukraine from 2022 (*Mozolev, 2022*).

That is why the emigration of Ukrainian youth as the social and scientific potential of the state and the decrease in the number of students created conditions for the central bodies of executive power, in particular from the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, to balance the number of educational institutions with the number of applicants. Unfortunately, the need to optimize the number of higher educational institutions is inextricably linked to the increase in the deficit in the state budget and the need to find ways to reduce expenses. In our opinion, the balancing of the network of universities across the country will allow to regulate the aspects of financing of the industry of higher education, the social order for certain professions and to correlate the market of educational services.

If we conduct a historical and pedagogical analysis of the creation of the existing network of higher educational institutions on the territory of Ukraine, then the vast majority were created in the 30s of the 20th century in order to solve the acute shortage of personnel in certain fields. For example, the Institute of Social Education (now Uman State Pedagogical University named after Pavel Tychna), Kyiv Polytechnic Institute of Leather Industry (now Kyiv National University of Technology and Design), Kryvyi Rih Institute of Professional Education (now Kryvyi Rih State Pedagogical University), Odesa Institute of Water Transport Engineers (now Odesa National Maritime University), Kharkiv Engineering and Economic Institute (now Kharkiv National Economic University named after Semen Kuznets), etc.

According to M. Vynnytskyi, the Soviet planned economy provided for the training of specialists according to the sectoral principle, since all state departments had a vertical management structure, and the activities of higher educational institutions were directed by various specialized ministries (*Vynnytskyi, 2024*). Therefore, at that time there was a process of preparing a student to work in a certain field and in any corner of the Soviet Union, which would satisfy the planned economy.

As of the end of 2021, 996 institutions were registered in the category "Institutions of higher education" of the Register of subjects of educational activity, which is a part of the Unified State Electronic Database on Education in Ukraine, of which 831 institutions mainly conducted educational activities and had a status of a university, and 165 institutions had a status of a scientific (educational and scientific) institute (*Annual report NAZYAVO, 2022: 10*). The share of higher educational institutions owned by the state is 59.6%, 6.6% is owned by communal property of territorial communities, and 33.8% is owned by the private sector of the economy (*Annual report NAZYAVO, 2022: 11*). It is Ukraine that has the largest number of higher educational institutions in Europe, since no country in the European Union has close to 1,000 higher educational institutions on its territory.

That is why there is a tendency in Ukraine that branch institutions of higher education mostly turn into classical ones, which provide training of broad-based specialists from various fields of knowledge. In the practice of large cities, we see that the functioning of two or more identical universities with similar educational services and resources is a problem. On the one hand, the problem is finding the right model for distribution of state appropriations related to the maintenance of the university, and on the other – competition, which very often leads to decrease in the quality of higher education and a struggle for the number of students. That is why, by reducing the number of higher educational institutions, there is an attempt to solve the issue of financing, the quality of higher education and to implement the ideas of creating academic centres.

In our opinion, in the theory and practice of management of education, the optimization of higher educational institutions, in particular through their unification, will make it possible to effectively use the educational infrastructure, optimize educational products and educational programs for the training of specialists, obtain new international connections and partner organizations abroad, expand range of scientific opportunities and create academic centres in large cities to support the intellectual potential of the regions and the country as a whole.

An equally important reason for the optimization of higher educational institutions in Ukraine is the imperfection of personnel policy. The situation with personnel potential in higher education is tense, as on the one hand Ukraine has more than 150,000 protected dissertations according to indicators, and on the other hand – emigration and imperfect legislation.

According to statistics, within the period from 1993 till 2018, more than 19,000 doctoral dissertations and more than 125,000 doctoral theses were defended in Ukraine (*NAZYAVO*

Annual Report, 2020: 53). Such a number of defended dissertations should reflect the full provision of higher education among professional personnel engaged in educational and scientific activities, and in fact there is a shortage of teaching personnel in the field of higher education. This shortage can be explained by economic instability, low wages, low prestige of work and social problems.

Very often, young scientists after defending their thesis emigrate abroad to continue scientific activities, leave the industry altogether in search of high salaries, or try to move to big cities to work in leading universities. The latter, as a desire to realize the scientific and teaching potential of the leading universities of large cities, only strengthens the position regarding the optimization of the number of higher educational institutions.

An active decrease in the number of young scientists in some institutions of higher education can only testify to the problem of personnel management, which does not support young scientists, but established scientific traditions and schools. We believe it is personnel issues at the local level that lead to the decrease in the number of young scientists in universities, which breaks the relationship between the educational institution and potential entrants. As a result, during the university entrance campaign, young people very often choose universities where many young teachers work as a place of study. We should note that in such conditions, the imperfection of personnel policy at the local level is an additional reason for the optimization of the educational institution.

At the same time, it cannot be overlooked that the main reason for the indignation of higher educational institutions is the fear of losing long-standing history, traditions and identity as an integral structural unit of the field of higher education. However, such concerns are faced by educational institutions that join larger and leading ones in the region, and scientific institutions feel such a problem less acutely. At this moment, the government of Ukraine has taken a number of decisions on the reorganization of educational institutions, for example, the Ukrainian Engineering and Pedagogical Academy was reorganized by joining Kharkiv National University named after V. N. Karazin (*Government Decree No. 113, 2024*), the Institute of Physical Optics named after O.G. Vlokh was affiliated to Lviv National University named after Ivan Franko (*Government Decree No. 114, 2024*), etc.

In our opinion, the main principles of the state educational policy and the principles of educational activity, which are guided by the authorities to make a decision on the reorganization of higher educational institutions, are inclusion in the international educational and scientific space, state and public administration, ensuring universal design, integration with the labour market, and the scientific nature of education, promoting the development of the quality of education and the quality of educational activities (*About education, 2017*). All outlined principles generally implement the approaches of liberalism as a socio-philosophical idea and educational practice. We agree with the statement that the peculiarity of liberalism in educational practice lies in the innovation and anticipatory nature of education, and therefore the role of horizontal connections of various educational institutions participating in the organization of the educational process and its implementation is growing (*Lysokon, 2022: 126*).

Taking into account the objective reasons and principles of functioning of the Ukrainian educational system, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, in the context of making unpopular but necessary decisions regarding the optimization of the number of higher educational institutions, proposed certain criteria, which we will consider further.

3. Optimization criteria of higher educational institutions

At the final meeting of the Union of Rectors of Ukrainian Higher Educational Institutions, held on February 12th, 2024, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine presented indicative criteria that help to make a decision on reducing the number of higher educational institutions, namely quantitative indicators of territorial communities where universities and student contingents of a specific institution of higher education are located (*Meeting of the Association of Rectors, 2024*).

Table 1

We will conduct a theoretical analysis of the proposed indicative criteria:

Approximate criterion	Description	Author's view
Quantitative indicators of territorial communities where universities are located	In cities with a population of less than 100,000 people, where there is one university, it will be preserved as a city-forming university, if two or more institutions of higher education operate in the city, they will be united. In territorial communities with the population of 100,000–350,000 people, two institutions of higher education will operate in order to support competition and maximize coverage of the local population. In large cities, where more than 350 thousand people live, optimization of institutions is proposed according to the principle of three types: educational institutes, research universities and worldview academies.	It is quite natural to focus the number of higher educational institutions on the statistical and demographic indicators of the community where they are located. However, there are cities in which, due to objective reasons, the population has now sharply decreased, and the application of this criterion may lead to the decline of higher education in a single city, or the functioning of a city-forming institution of higher education in small cities will lead to its competition with private universals, which very often have a stronger material base and resource support.
Contingent of students of a specific institution of higher education	It is stipulated that state-owned institutions of higher education must have a contingent of students of at least 5,000 people, and the average number must be 10,000 students.	An important condition for the existence of a higher educational institution is its students and their number. However, there are universities that have high quality indicators and a slightly lower indicator than the one proposed. This problem is widespread in large cities of Ukraine. In addition to Dnipro, Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa and Kharkiv, since these cities are leading economic centres and have a population of more than 1 million people, the universities have high contingent indicators.

The theoretical analysis of the indicative criteria for the optimization of higher educational institutions showed, first of all, the consideration of quantitative indicators in the modernization of the network, which require an individual approach to determining the causes and

specifics of such indicators for each individual subject of educational activity. Unfortunately, there are no clear criteria and their rationale for the optimization of higher education institutions. Moreover, in addition to quantitative indicators, in our opinion, the indicative criteria for modernization of higher educational institutions in Ukraine should also include qualitative performance indicators, such as: feedback from employers on the quality of training of graduates, the implementation of scientific and social grants, the results of scientific activity, the development of material technical support, quality indicators of accreditation of educational programs, involvement of internal and external stakeholders in the educational and management process.

Stakeholders related to the educational process and management of a higher educational institution can include: parents, teachers, university graduates, entrants, mass media, investors, heads of educational institutions, local residents, scientists, non-governmental organizations, authorities of various levels, employers and students (*Bobrytska and etc, 2023: 109*).

The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine plans to optimize higher educational institutions in several stages. The first stage should take place in 2024 and involves the unification of branch pedagogical and humanities universities with classical, agrarian and food universities with technological profile universities, technical and construction universities with polytechnic branch educational institutions. The second stage envisages the creation of innovation centres on the basis of the united universities. According to the results of the optimization of state-owned higher educational institutions, it is planned to reduce their number to 100 institutions throughout Ukraine.

In future, in the context of the reform of Ukrainian universities, in particular optimization, an urgent issue of management of higher education is the implementation of European standards of higher education and their adaptation to realities, taking into account legislative support, scientific articles and didactic materials regarding standardization as a scientific and pedagogical issue (*Lysokon 2023: 161*). An important condition for the successful integration of Ukrainian higher education into the European educational space is the readiness to adapt to modern quality standards of education and educational management.

4. Conclusions

Complex geopolitical, social and economic conditions created the basis for accelerated optimization of higher educational institutions in Ukraine. The issue of reducing the number of Ukrainian universities and scientific institutions actively appears in public and scientific opinion from time to time. New challenges very often require the search for new management solutions that do not meet with support. Long-term organizational transformations and the desire of Ukrainian higher education to integrate into the European educational space only strengthen the position regarding the need to reform the higher education. However, such reforming should take place openly with the participation of stakeholders and in the interests of higher education.

It is indisputable that the sector of higher education needs systematic and transparent reform in the future, including a reduction in the number of higher educational institutions. In our opinion, the state educational policy regarding the optimization of higher educational institutions in Ukraine should take into account not only quantitative, but also qualitative indicators of activity and promote the development of the creation of innovative centres of higher education in large Ukrainian cities in order to accelerate European integration processes.

We consider public-private-civil partnership to be the optimal solution during the consolidation of higher educational institutions, as a principle of involving all interested parties

in the process of management and reform of higher education. During the unification of institutions of higher education, to offer them to higher collegial management bodies and external stakeholders, taking into account the specifics of Ukrainian legislation, to independently choose the further organizational and legal form. Therefore, we see 2 (two) possible scenarios for the development of higher educational institutions in terms of their optimization:

– in case of unification of higher educational institutions on partnership terms, it is possible to agree on the creation of an association, a state public joint-stock company, a collegial enterprise, a corporate enterprise, a corporation or an association. Bright examples of this form of collegial management are the universities of Great Britain – the University of Cambridge, the University of London, the University of Oxford and the University of Durham, which occupy leading positions in the world ranking of the best universities;

– consolidation of higher educational institutions by joining small ones to a large university, which, after reorganization, will be able to function in the structure of large institutions as a separate structural unit (branch), subsidiary, institute, educational and scientific institute, faculty.

The idea of optimizing higher educational institutions is interesting in terms of creating innovative centres of higher education in large cities. In our opinion, due to the unification of universities in large cities, it is possible to expand the range of educational programs for training of specialists at various levels of higher education, to create powerful industrial research centres and scientific schools, to strengthen the personnel potential of the region by reducing migration processes among young scientists. However, the optimization of state-owned institutions of higher education should increase attention to the activities of private institutions of higher education and in future carry out a comprehensive review of their functioning. Under such conditions, any subject of educational activity in the field of higher education of Ukraine will undergo a mandatory organizational transformation and will be ready to integrate into the European educational space.

Further research will be aimed at researching models of support for scientific activity in universities in foreign educational practice, finding optimal criteria and forms of optimization of higher educational institutions, substantiating the creation of innovative centres of higher education in order to strengthen the intellectual potential in Ukraine.

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