

TRANSPARENCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION AS A FACTOR THAT AFFECTS THE POSITION OF A UNIVERSITY IN INTERNATIONAL RANKINGS





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Some participants of the research team are students of a university under study. Even though this university was evaluated by a student of another off-research university, we believe it is important to warn the reader about a possible conflict of interest.

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What is Project 5-100

2020 brings an expansion to Project 5-100, a large-scale program aimed at improving the competitiveness of leading Russian universities among the world's leading scientific and educational centers. The Project participants have done significant work to improve the quality of education. Nevertheless, a very important element for full compliance with international standards¹ is missing: transparency in both financial and non-financial reporting of universities. Transparency of university activities becomes especially salient in situations when a university starts to receive increased financial support from the government. In 2019 alone, more than 470 million rubles on average were allocated to higher education institutions participating in the program.²

What can universities do to become even better? The TI-R research team decided to investigate the matter and established its own rankings of university transparency and a list of recommendations. The results proved to be unexpected and revealed common problems, apparent even in the most successful universities in the country.

For several years now, 21 higher education institutions in Russia have been participating in the federal Project 5-100 designed to improve the quality of education in these universities. Currently, more than 360,000 students are studying at these universities across Russia.³ In seven years, the project participants have received over 70 billion rubles from the federal budget.⁴ One of the parameters for a university's competitiveness is the transparency of its activities, including the anti-corruption management. However, do these universities truly adhere to this criterion? The research analysed the websites of universities participating in the Project 5-100 and assessed the transparency of these education institutions. Two universities did not even score half of the points; the majority (16) scored between 50% and 75%, and none of them scored more than 80%. The leaders of the rating were the First Moscow State Medical University (20.5/26), National Research University Higher School of Economics (19.5/26), and Novosibirsk State University (19.5/26). Less than half of the points were scored by Siberian Federal University (12.7/26) and Information Technologies, Mechanics and Optics University (11.7/26).

What is Project 5-100

The goal of the Project is to ensure that at least five Russian universities participating enter the top 100 world universities based on the leading world rankings: Academic Ranking of World Universities, The Times Higher Education World University Rankings, QS World University Rankings.⁵ The program includes a list of activities aimed at creating long-term competitive advantages of the universities at the international level. The project was launched by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2012, and the summary of its first round is scheduled for 2020.⁶ The program involves universities from different regions and of different specialties – from social to natural sciences, as well as humanities to

physico-mathematical sciences.

The selection of universities for participation in the program is based on criteria⁷ that include; restrictions on the position of a university in the above world rankings at the time of joining the program, the number of students funded by federal budget allocations, the share of graduate students and interns, the magnitude of internal expenditure on research and development per researcher, the number of publications in works of established scientific publishers, as well as the share of foreign students.

¹ Cited by Saraitė-Sariene, L., Rodríguez, M., & De Rosario, A. (2018). Exploring determining factors of web transparency in the world's top universities. *Revista De Contabilidad*, 21(1), 63-72, p. 65:

- (...) if they [universities] already have a "good image" as a result of their outcomes in terms of the quality of research, quality of education and academic performance, their stakeholders also could expect excellence in other aspects, including transparency. (...)
- (...) Universities should be more transparent in aspects such as information related to budget in terms of evolution of expenses intended for research, scholarships and grants; variation of non-current assets, links to annual accounts or costs of suppliers. (...)
- (...) society needs information about the principal actors that manage the university and, specifically, information regarding the Chancellor and Vice Chancellors. (...)
- (...) governance information related to the university's policies and regulations such as minutes of agreement and statutes should also be reported. (...)

² The Project 5-100 Board meeting has been summed up in Moscow [Russian] (URL: <https://www.5top100.ru/news/112180/>, access date: 03.04.2020)

³ Project 5-100 (URL: <https://www.5top100.ru/en/>, access date: 03.04.2020)

⁴ Dmitry Medvedev held a meeting with Project 5-100 Board members [Russian] (URL: <https://www.5top100.ru/news/112163/>, access date: 03.04.2020)

⁵ Project 5-100 – Events (URL: <https://5top100.ru/en/events/>, access date: 03.04.2020)

⁶ Project 5-100 was launched in accordance with the "May decree" of the President of the Russian Federation No. 599 of 07.05.2012 "On measures aimed at state policy implementation in the field of education and science." The plan consisting of 24 activities aimed at developing leading universities, as well as deadlines and responsible executives were regulated by Government Executive Order No. 2006-p. of 29.10.2012.

⁷ Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 211 of 16.03.2013 "On measures of state support of leading universities of the Russian Federation for the purposes of improving their competitiveness among world's leading research and educational centres."

The project is financed by state subsidies distributed based on a competition formalised by a resolution from the Russian Government.⁸ Universities are required to submit biannual reports on subsidy spending directly to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.⁹

Conclusion-drawing for the current stage project is scheduled for 2020.¹⁰ The participating 21 universities will have to report on the work done and

the performance targets achieved. Based on these reports, a new action plan for the development of higher education institutions will be devised and the most effective report findings will be incorporated. In 2021, a new selection of 30 universities (at least one from each federal district) is planned for the new program – the successor of Project 5-100. The approximate amount of planned subsidies will make 15 billion rubles per year.¹¹

“Transparency is the reliable, accurate, up-to-date information on all aspects of university activity, from the academic content to the qualifications of faculty staff.”

– Zoya Zaytseva, Regional Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia at QS Ltd, establisher of one of the three leading world university rankings.

The importance of transparency for higher education institutions

⁸ The government drafted Resolution No. 211 of 16.03.2013 “On measures of state support of leading universities of the Russian Federation for the purposes of improving their competitiveness among world’s leading research and educational centres.” It ordained the Ministry of Education and Science to allocate subsidies to leading universities to enhance their competitiveness, determined the procedure of funds allocation and an advisory body (Council) that should prepare recommendations for the Ministry of Education and Science on distribution of subsidies.

⁹ Project 5-100 – Documents (URL: <https://5top100.ru/en/documents/>, access date: 03.04.2020) Universities must provide reports every six months by January 15 and July 15 (certain data is provided only once a year, by January 15). The report is printed and submitted to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. It includes reports on the funds spending, achievement of performance indicators, and reports on the implementation of relevant activities. The documents contain no requirements for these reports to be published. However, some universities publish the reports (Higher School of Economics, Kazan Federal University, Novosibirsk State University, Samara State University, National University of Science and Technology MISiS, South Ural State University, First Moscow State Medical University, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Ural Federal University (for 2013), Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University), or report presentations (Saint Petersburg Electrotechnical University, Moscow Engineering Physics Institute, Siberian Federal University), while others do not publish anything (Tomsk State University, Tomsk Polytechnic University, Nizhny Novgorod State University, RUDN University). Sometimes, the published reports are outdated (dated before 2018), the presentation does not include information on the grant spending.

¹⁰ By the end of 2019, the number of Russian universities represented in the QS University Rankings: Emerging Europe and Central Asia had reached 15. 19 universities participating in the Project (growth by one university in comparison with last year) are now represented in THE rankings by subject, and the number of disciplinary areas in which they are represented has increased from 10 to 11. In the ARWU rankings by subject, Russian universities – actually, 15, 11 of which participate in Project 5-100 – can now be spotted in 21 subject areas as compared to 17 in 2018. In ARWU institutional rankings, Russian universities hold 11 out of 1,000 positions, of which 9 are attributed to the program participants.

¹¹ The Project 5-100 Board meeting has been summed up in Moscow [Russian] (URL: <https://www.5top100.ru/news/112180/>, access date: 03.04.2020)

Obtaining a higher education is a serious stage in a person's life, to a large extent determining their future fate. The university is one of the first institutions where young people take full responsibility for their actions, exercising their rights and duties. In the process of education, we find it important to not only be aware of the post-graduation employment prospects. Getting information about our opportunities inside the university, the support of student initiatives, the approaches to conflict resolution is also crucial.

The best channel for transmitting such information is the Internet, and above all—the university websites. Providing complete information following the requirements of the law and parties involved in the decision-making process (stakeholders) can improve the reputation of the university. The volume and quality of the website content allows its visitors to make appropriate assumptions and conclusions about the competence of the university itself.¹² In total, about 554.2 billion rubles were allocated to higher education in Russia in 2018, with a total education budget of 3,668.6 billion rubles.¹³ By evaluating an accountable, transparent ex-Rankings

Manager at QS World University Rankings (interview was conducted on the 14th of February 2020) higher education institution and knowing what goals and activities the state funds are used for, we can speak about the efficiency of public funding use with much greater confidence. Even if you do not pay for your education or the education of your relatives, you still finance universities. The money for operation of higher education institutions is allocated from the government budget, and therefore from our taxes. That is why it is necessary to create systems of control over the activities of universities and facilitate their effective performance, i.e. reasonable distribution and spending of funds.

Indubitably, subsidies are not the only source of income for leading Russian universities. The university can also receive special-purpose funds from the state, earn on fee-paying education (tuition fees), commercial scientific research, and other activities. But as long as the money received from the Russian state remains one of the income sources of higher education institutions, control over the execution of tasks should be as rigorous as possible.

How does transparency policy lead to high placement on rankings?

¹² Saraite-Sariene, L., Rodríguez, M., & De Rosario, A. (2018). Exploring determining factors of web transparency in the world's top universities. *Revista De Contabilidad*, 21(1), 63-72.

¹³ Integrated portal of the budget system of the Russian Federation, consolidated budget of the Russian Federation on education (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/vshrd9y>, access date: 03.04.2020) [Russian]

Explicitly:

The main reason for the growing attention to transparency of higher education institutions are the international rankings which help to shape the organization's reputation and stimulate competition.¹⁴ In the Times Higher Education World University Rankings,¹⁵ 33% of the evaluation of a higher education institution is accounted for by the so-called "reputation survey." It consists of a number of questions aimed at assessing the academic reputation of higher education institutions. Respondents are asked to choose the universities that are – in their opinion – best in education and research in the world and their country. Similarly, the QS¹⁶ ranking includes "academic reputation" and "employer reputation" in the overall university

ranking, which account for 40% and 10% of the evaluation respectively.

Thus, the reputation of universities plays a huge role in their ranking positions. An adequate transparency policy also has a positive impact on the reputation of educational institutions. Besides, it helps to reduce the number of conflict situations between students and faculty members (/professors) by creating a quick and effective resolution mechanism, as well as promoting a culture of righteous and more honest behaviour within the university walls. This, in turn, increases the number of respondents who will attribute such an institution to be among the best.

Implicitly:

In both rankings, the number of citations and publications in scientific journals which assess the quality of research at a university plays a major role. In QS World University Rankings, citations and publications comprise 20% of the evaluative grading, while in THE World University Rankings it is 30%. The second ranking body also evaluates the share of foreign students and staff and international cooperation (7.5% in total). QS assesses the ratio of professors to students, the share of international students and instructors (25% in total).

All these indicators are influenced by the university's reputation: the quantity and quality of students and professors who choose in favour of a certain university depends on it directly. In the long run, the transparency policy helps to increase the influx of the best foreign and domestic professors, as the reputation is shaped over a long period.¹⁷ Therefore, the sooner a university undertakes improvements in regulation of employee-instructor relations, the sooner citation rates and the number of high scores in reputation surveys start to grow.

Besides aspiration for the highest positions in rankings and compliance with laws, transparency also promotes legitimisation of the higher education institution in society. Thereby, solidifying a university as an institution which plays a special role in formation of human resources and transfer of scientific knowledge.¹⁸ From an economic point of view, access to information, in part, solves the problem of information asymmetry. It reduces the space for uncertainty and potential risks, as any stakeholder prefers to make decisions in conditions of complete information about the product, its price and/quality.¹⁹ The more open the access to information about the university's activity is, the easier it is for a student and their parents to make a balanced decision regarding enrollment. Moreover, a university website often presents the only opportunity for applicants from other cities and countries to get a holistic view of the university as an organisation.

It is important to take into account that transparency of higher education institutions often becomes a target of research²⁰ abroad and an increasingly

important criterion for performance evaluation of a higher education institution.²¹ In this context, transparency is understood as proof of high quality behind a higher education institution and a guarantee of efficient education provision.²² Moreover, transparency serves as a variable for determining the quality of management. Conjointly, it is a means of transmitting information about the activities, mission and accountability of the university towards the government for the completion of prescribed tasks.²³ For society as a key stakeholder and monitor/watchdog of higher education institutions, it is especially important to

have reliable and accessible information about the activities of the university.²⁴ As Hallak & Poisson (2007) argue, both the decision-making processes of the university and the use of the funds received by the university should be transparent, so that the flow of resources in the organisation is evident, predictable, and easy to understand. In this way, transparency increases accountability to the sources of funding for higher education institutions, helps counter corruption by supporting the proper allocation of resources, and enhances economic growth prospects and the effective use of public funds.

"The academic field - this is a very specific field where we are talking about the transmission of knowledge, about the production of new knowledge and about the accumulation of the societal intellectual capital. Corrupted practices in this domain lead to lower innovative potential in the future, and as a result to long-term negative impacts on society."

– Muriel Poisson, Project Manager at the Institute of Ethics and Corruption in Education

Therefore, Russian universities wishing to compete on equal footing with universities that consistently hold high positions in international rankings should strive towards: improvements in the quality of education, ensuring the greatest possible transparency in the formation and allocation of their

budgets and developing the most understandable and effective anti-corruption policy. That is why it is especially important to consider the Project 5-100 universities, as they receive increased subsidies from the state.²⁵

14 Jarocka, M. (2015). Transparency Of University Rankings In The Effective Management Of University. *Business, Management and Education*, 13(1), 64-75

15 THE World University Rankings 2020: methodology (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/yx7hcz9u>, access date: 03.04.2020)

16 The QS World University Rankings – Methodology (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/yxrgtopo>, access date: 03.04.2020)

17 Why Reputation is Critically Important for Universities (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/wk62xt5>, access date: 03.04.2020) BBC – What makes a global top 10 university? (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/w4qhoup>, access date: 03.04.2020)

18 Hazelkorn, E., Curaj, A., Scott, P., Vlasceanu, L., & Wilson, L. (2012). European "Transparency Instruments": Driving the Modernisation of European Higher Education.

19 Hladchenko, M. (2015). TRANSPARENCY OF THE MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS. *Euromentor Journal*, 6(4), 30-40.

20 Saraite-Sariene, L., Rodríguez, M., & De Rosario, A. (2018). Exploring determining factors of web transparency in the world's top universities. *Revista De Contabilidad*, 21(1), 63-72.

21 van Vught F. & Westerheijden, Don F. (2010). *Multidimensional ranking: A new transparency tool for higher education and research*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

22 Hladchenko, M. (2015). Transparency Of The Management Of Higher Education Institutions In The Netherlands. *Euromentor Journal*, 6(4), 30-40.

23 Anandkrishnan M. (2010). Accountability and Transparency in University Governance. *University News Journal*, Association of Indian Universities.

24 Hallak, J., Poisson, M. (2007). International Institute for Educational Planning, Unesco, & United Nations Preparatory Educational, Scientific, Cultural Commission. *Corrupt schools, corrupt universities: What can be done?* Paris: International Institute for Education Planning, 33-37.

25 In 2019, universities received grants amounting to 860 million rubles, 430 million rubles, or 122 million rubles depending on their performance. In total, 10 billion rubles were allocated for subsidies in 2019 alone (URL: <https://www.5top100.ru/news/97331/>, access date: 03.04.2020) [Russian]. Despite positive changes in the participating universities, we believe that the transparency of funds distribution and the availability of measures to ensure transparency and accountability are necessary to meet the world standards.

Methodology²⁶

²⁶ See the parameters listed in the form of infographics: <https://infogram.com/1p0lxwk1kg3xkysexkjq2qgj0rtnmg7vxer?live>

Study Criteria

The factor of criterion-presence was evaluated for all criteria, for some the information relevance and formatting was also evaluated.

01

Main information

- The university's codex/charter
- Information regarding executive's revenue
- Information on university guidelines
- Information regarding executive figures
- Identification of faculties or employed bodies responsible for anticorruption measures.
- Formal university correspondence.

The higher education institution can score up to a maximum of 6 points for this stage.

02

Anticorruption Policy

- Listing of anticorruption procedures and the order of their execution for the period of 2018
- Ethics Code, Ethics commission
- Implementation of Ethics Code
- Records of sittings for staff ethics commission
- Policy on conflict of interest
- Regulation regarding relations between students and staff
- Policy on gift receiving/utilization
- Response form for reporting misconduct

The higher education institution can score up to a maximum of 10 points

03

Studentship

- Policy regarding allocation of scholarship and additional payments;
- Formalised condition regarding a student's union
- Formalised order of the university providing charged services

The higher education institution can score up to a maximum of 3 points for this stage.

04

Financial activity

- The university's budget for 2018
- Information regarding the sources of university funding

The higher education institution can score up to a maximum of 2 points for this stage.

05

Policy towards employees

- Employment regulations for PPS and other employees
- Formalised system of salary payment to employees
- Formalised system of additional payments
- Formalised order of providing university employees charged services

The higher education institution can score up to a maximum of 5 points for this stage.

How were benchmarks assessed?

1. Availability of documents was assessed for all research benchmarks.

0 points, if there is no information on the website, 1 – if it is available. 0.5 points if the information is presented in concise form. 0.5 points were assigned in case the university:

- has introduced a partial prohibition on personal faculty-student relationships without regulating all possible forms of such relationships (e.g., a ban on kinship or relationship by marriage);
- has enabled a non-anonymous feedback form on the website;

- has published the files assessed in the research only on a branch campus's website;
- has not published information about members of each executive body: the academic council and other bodies stipulated in the university charter;
- has not published a conflict of interest statement (or a corresponding section inside the anti-corruption policy), but included its definition in the charter, code of ethics, and other internal documents.

2. Pertinence

1 point, if information related to the current and previous years is available, in this case – years 2018-2019, 0 points, if it is unavailable. Information sought:

- the list of anti-corruption measures and the order

- for the implementation (application) thereof;
- information on income of the university executives (for 2016-2018);
- university budget.

3. Format

1 point, if a .doc or .pdf document is available with a file navigation (search) feature, otherwise 0 points. Information sought:

- charter;
- code of ethics;
- records of the ethics committee meetings;
- executives' income;
- student self-governance policy;
- university budget;
- scholarship awarding procedure;
- regulations on the recruitment of faculty members;
- regulations on the recruitment of staff (other than faculty members);
- regulations on the payment of earnings to employees;
- regulations on formalised charge of fringe benefits (bonuses, allowances);

- procedure for providing charged services to students.
- The total criterion score represents the average score for these three (two or one, depending on the criterion) aspects.

All benchmarks are rated by one (availability) or several parameters (availability, completeness, quality, format). Some benchmarks are assessed on the scale of 1, 0.5, 0 points depending on the completeness/quality of the information provided. We also introduced such parameters as the format of the document and the possibility to browse through its contents.

The browsing feature boosts the number of university staff and students that read the document. This increases the likelihood of compliance with the standards it articulates. Moreover, an additional criterion – pertinence, i.e. availability of these documents for 2016-2019 – was taken into account for the parameters implying annual updating (the university budget, executives' income, anti-corruption action plan). The overall score for the benchmark is the average of score for these parameters.

Justification for the selection of parameters

The mandatory availability of some documents we were looking for on the university website is regulated by the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation.” These include the charter of the educational institution, information on the executive and governing bodies of the university, as well as information on the university budget and the sources of its financing, the scholarship awarding policy, and the procedure for providing charged services by the educational institution. These documents are present in all universities. However, one third of the universities do not have complete information on all the executive bodies set out in the charter on their website. Most often, there is no information about the board of regents.

Information about income, expenses, property and property obligations of the university executives (anti-corruption declarations) is a separate aspect. This data is provided in accordance with the Federal Law “On Countering Corruption.” According to the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science No. 1070 dated 13.09.2013, the declarations must be published by the principal/director, first vice-principal/director, chief accountant, and director of the university branch. This list was expanded by redrafted policies in 2018 and 2019. Besides, according to the Order of the Ministry of Labour No. 51n,²⁷ information on income and property is not subject to removal and should remain in the public domain throughout one's full tenure as head of the federal state institution. They must be published in a format enabling text search and copy features.

Format is one of the key research parameters. Information about the executives' income is available to the public at all higher education institutions participating in the Project 5-100. Thus, universities generally comply with the legislation norms, publishing what they are obliged to. If we evaluated the availability of required documents only, most universities would get the highest score.

According to the Order of Federal Education and Science Supervision Agency No. 785,²⁸ all information placed on the website of an educational institution must be of a certain structure and format. All document files must be published in .pdf, .doc, .docx, .xls, .xlsx, .odt, .ods formats and be available for online reading. The information regulated by

the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation” should be machine-readable, i.e. equipped with search and copy features.

However, transparency is defined not only in accordance with the requirements of the legislation of the Russian Federation. For a university to become competitive on a global scale, it needs to follow the best international practices which are much broader than those set out in Russian law. These include, firstly, the definition of “rules of the game” for students and all university staff. These rules should be set out in the code of ethics, internal regulations, collective agreement (for employees), and policy on student self-governance (for students).

Not only ethical norms, but also regulations on recruitment and payment of earnings (as well as fringe benefits) should be spelled out for all university employees. The transparency of the procedure for screening professors seems to be more important, since it is them who perform one of the most important functions of the university in modern Russia – the function of educating. But no less important is the administrative staff that ensures the proper operation of the university, as it is specifically competent management that can improve organizational efficiency. The same logic applies here as in any other organisations (especially state-run ones) committed to the most efficient recruitment: the recruitment procedure and the operating procedures should be clear and transparent, while the rules should be established in advance in order to avoid conflict of interest, abuse of power for personal gain or other forms of corruption.

Universities need transparency with regard to contractors as much as private companies. Higher education institutions fulfill government orders for educational services, so it is worth placing the same demands on them and focusing on the best practices of companies.

One of such practices is to regulate the activities not only of the university community members, but also of “affiliated persons” – contractors of the university (individual entrepreneurs and organisations) providing certain services.²⁹ Higher education

²⁷ The Order of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Russian Federation No. 51n of January 30, 2015 [Russian] (URL: <https://rosmintrud.ru/docs/mintrud/orders/377>, access date: 03.04.2020)

²⁸ The Order of the Federal Education and Science Supervision Agency No. 785 of 29.05.2014 “On approval of the requirements for the structure of the official website of an educational organisation in the information and telecommunication network Internet and the format of information published on the website” [Russian] (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/tvb4ode>, access date: 03.04.2020)

²⁹ Transparency International — R research “Transparency of Corporate Reporting,” p. 14, para. 6 [Russian] (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/vvd3hal>, access date: 03.04.2020)

institutions need to not only screen their contractors before entering into contracts with them, but also to control their actions during the entire period of the relations. This minimizes the risks of corruption offenses in providing services. Good practice is to extend the university anti-corruption policy on the contractors or to develop a specialised contractor's code of conduct containing anti-corruption provisions.³⁰

To successfully counter conflict of interest, universities should specify a detailed definition of all types of relationships that may arise between employees and students. The parameters to be assessed include, for example, romantic

relationships between faculty and students, the provision of charged services by faculty to students,³¹ and the receipt, usage, and the disposal of gifts by staff members. As for romantic relationship policies, there are several approaches in the US:³² an absolute prohibition (such as at Stanford University)³³, a partial prohibition (provided that the parties do not have a potential conflict of interest, such as at Columbia State University)³⁴, and permission (such as at the University of Virginia, despite the university impeding such relationships in every way)³⁵. The most common practice on the European continent is the second option (for example, at the University of Cambridge, University College London)³⁶.

“(…) I mean, if we get into PhD level, I know a lot of people who married their phd supervisors or other professors in the departments, (…) but you need to have some guidelines there (…) a compromise exists in different dimensions of freedom.”

– Dr Robert Gillanders, Professor at Dublin City University

To formalise relationships in detail, it is optimal to establish a conflict of interest statement. If such a conflict is likely, the parties involved should report and declare it. The report should then be reviewed by an ethics committee, whose rules of procedure should be published on the website, together with the record of the committee meeting on the report. Only then can the conflict of interest be resolved in a transparent and therefore accountable manner, open to constructive criticism.

For the provisions enshrined in the documents to be actually valid, the university needs to conduct anti-corruption activities on a regular basis. According to Article 13.3 of Federal Law No. 273-FZ,³⁷ universities must forward information on corruption prevention measures to the Ministry of Science, but are not obligated to publish them on the website. Thus,

according to our research, nine universities have not published a list of anti-corruption activities and the procedure for carrying out thereof on their websites. While other universities, acting in the paradigm of proactive transparency, have done so. In this way it is possible to ensure that students and staff have the opportunity to make themselves aware of the ethical norms and are able to actually follow them. Effective change requires an understandable and transparent management system describing the rights and duties of academic staff; establishment of executive capacity through training of all stakeholders – students, teachers, NGOs, trade unions and student councils; cooperation with foreign partners and application of anti-corruption laws aimed at changing the public perception of corruption.³⁸

³⁰ This parameter is established in accordance with the Business Principles for Countering Bribery developed by the Transparency International movement, which, in turn, summarise the general standards of countering corruption in the private sector elaborated by the World Economic Forum's Partnering Against Corruption Initiative (PACI), International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), and also include the provisions of Reporting Guidance on the 10th Principle Against Corruption of the UN Global Compact.

³¹ U4 Issue 4:2006 Corruption in the education sector. 4, 44, pp. 9-11, Chapter 6. SALARIES (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/ry67sj6>, access date: 03.04.2020)

³² Faculty-Student Consensual Relationship Policies (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/t88dohr>, access date: 03.04.2020)

³³ Guidelines on Consensual Relationships | Stanford University (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/zlp45qx>, access date: 03.04.2020)

³⁴ Consensual Romantic and Sexual Relationship Policy Between Faculty and Students | Columbia University (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/r4no2we>, access date: 03.04.2020)

³⁵ Sexual Misconduct Policy | University of Virginia (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/sp5mhwat>, access date: 03.04.2020)

³⁶ Personal relationships between staff and students policy | University of Cambridge (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/wry2nx9>, access date: 03.04.2020)

³⁷ Article 13.3. The obligation of organisations to take measures to prevent corruption (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/smsl7b9>, access date: 03.04.2020)

³⁸ McCornac, D. (2012). The challenge of corruption in higher education: The case of Vietnam. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 1(3), 262-275.

“If you want to change the system, one way of doing it is to provide access to information to outsiders. Once people are better informed, about the budget, rules and regulations related to staff management, when they know exactly what they are supposed or not supposed to do during exams and so on, there won't be instantaneous change, but at least the rules of the games become much clearer and then it becomes much easier to exert some sort of social control.”

– Muriel Poisson, Project Manager at the Institute of Ethics and Corruption in Education

Russian Universities Transparency Rating

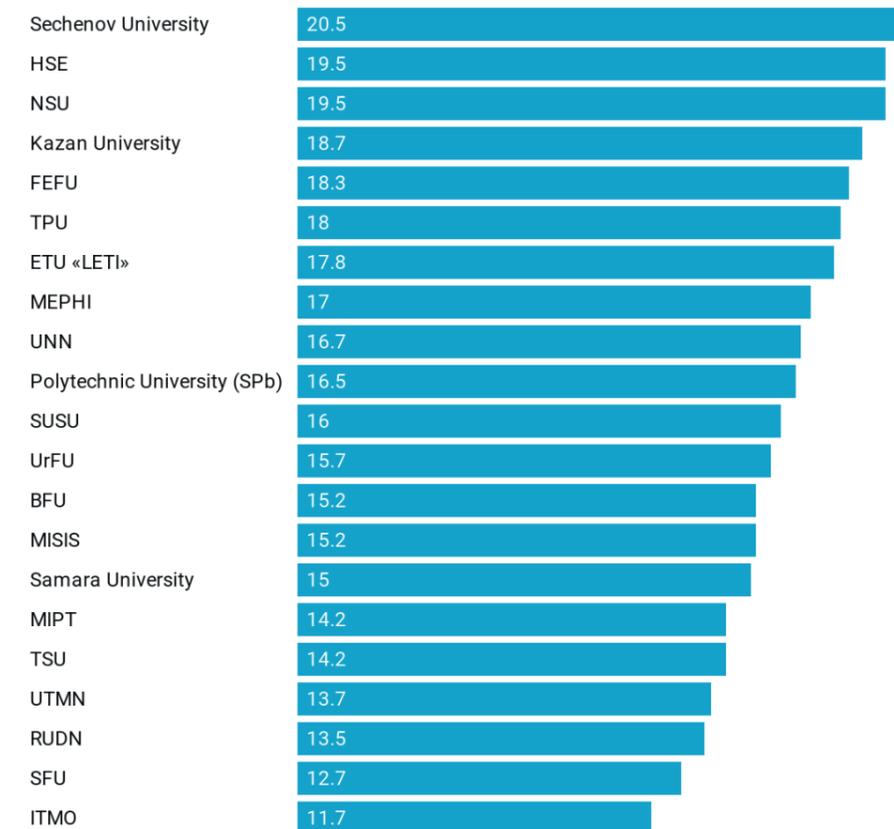


Chart: Transparency International-Russia • Source: Transparency in Higher Education as a factor that affects the position of a university in International Rankings • Created with Datawrapper

Research results

So, each higher education institution could score from 0 to 26 points, albeit not a single institution received the maximum number of points. The following universities scored the highest: the First Moscow State Medical University (20.5 points), the Higher School of Economics (19.5 points), and Novosibirsk State University (19.5 points).

The lowest scores were received by The Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (13.5 points), Siberian Federal University (12.7 points) and Information Technologies, Mechanics and Optics University (11.7 points). The average score for all universities is 16.1 and the median score is 16.

Feedback

A request for documents that could not be found manually was sent to all universities analysed. Out of 21 universities, only nine replied to us at the time of publication. Several higher education institutions (Tomsk Polytechnic University, Novosibirsk State University) managed to raise their score by several points as a result of publishing the/these documents on the official website and providing links to the publications in the follow-up letter.

Due to the small number of responses, we decided to put forth a separate parameter assessing the

availability and quality of university responses. Thus, the universities that did not respond to our request for information received 0 points. Universities whose representatives claimed that all the information was available on the website but did not specify its exact location and only referred to the website itself – 0.5 points. Universities that provided information on request – received 1 point in addition to an increase in points for the relevant benchmarks regarding the information that was missing.

Key transparency problems at universities

Drawing on the result of the audit of 21 universities, we note the following key problems in their transparency:

1. Absence of a formalised procedure for providing charged services by the university staff (only one university – Kazan Federal University – has the relevant documents in place).

Rules for providing charged services by professors/teaching faculty members should be established in order to restrict (private) tutoring that may grant a student formally studying under the same professor an uneven playing field³⁹ in relation to other students. Such a situation serves as potential ground for a conflict of interest when studying at the university.

Kazan Federal University is the only university

whose conflict of interest statement incorporates the provision of charged services by the university staff (faculty). Besides the foundational concept, eight types of possible conflict situations are defined. This includes tutoring students who study under the professor, receiving gifts and other services from students (and their parents) by an employee, as well as participation in the process of providing paid educational services to students whose education is funded by the federal budget.

2. Lack of formal regulation of personal relationships between faculty and students (only Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University has banned kinship and relationship by marriage)

When developing personal relationships with a student in non-professional capacity, the instructor partially or completely loses the ability to objectively assess the student's knowledge and provide them with opportunities equal to those of other students. A power asymmetry emerges, too. Of all Project 5-100 universities, the best practice is observed at Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic

University: "Co-working of persons who are near related to each other or related by marriage in direct or immediate subordination of one to the other, is restricted due to a conflict of interest." However, even this practice does not take into account most of potential personal relationships (friendship, romantic relations) that are not legally declared.

3. Absence of published records of ethics committee meetings (available only at the First Moscow State Medical University and Far Eastern Federal University)

Ethics committees exist in many universities, whilst records of meetings are only published on the websites of the First Moscow State Medical University and Far Eastern Federal University. What matters here is the transparency of decision-making and the openness of this process to all stakeholders. These records help to avoid conflict situations in the future, as actors better understand ethical boundaries. The publication of the records of ethics committee meetings becomes particularly important when formalised practices are applied in decision-making. For example, at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, "in addressing academic ethics issues, the committee will not be able to rely on existing legislation and regulations."⁴⁰ In such a situation, records are the only way to provide an opportunity to review and evaluate the decision-making process.

The First Moscow State Medical University records are single-page documents containing information on the date, committee members, speakers, the daily agenda, as well as resolutions and voting results. In many records, one of the agenda points is put down as "miscellaneous". This allows to circumvent disclosing information on certain issues and therefore reduces the anti-corruption potential of the document. Moreover, in effect, a vote result might be a unanimous "in favour" vote (or no vote at all).

Far Eastern Federal University records do not mention any names – neither of those present, nor the speakers and parties involved. However, they often disclose more information about the ethics committee activities. If the committee did not achieve a unanimous decision, the results of the vote are not disclosed. This challenges the transparency of the ethics committee work.

4. Application of the code of ethics to affiliated persons

Not a single university's code of ethics applies to "affiliated persons" – those who are not employees or students of the university but are engaged in some form of joint activity with them.

The importance of extending the code of ethics to cover "affiliated persons" is underestimated by many universities. Such regulation of relations with university contractors is vital for two reasons. Firstly, it contributes to the prevention of corruption in all areas of activity of higher education institutions

and related fields. Secondly, it is important to prevent reputational risks. Inappropriate behaviour of contractors that contradicts the university ethics may also affect the trustworthiness of the university itself.

In addition to staff and students, the code of ethics should be extended to cover visiting experts and professors, service personnel, people working with the university under civil law contracts, contractors, and volunteers.

5. Lack of information about the composition of the board of regents

7 out of 21 universities have no information about members of the board of regents, although it exists and is a governing body according to the university charter. This is a violation of the Federal Law "On Education..."⁴¹ according to which information about the executive bodies of the university should be published on the website.

The board of regents is a collegiate management body;⁴² if it exists, information about it should be posted on the university website.⁴³ Failure to do so presents itself as an act of non-transparency by the university. It contradicts the openness of the executive structure and the principles of good governance, which are necessary for understanding who exactly makes decisions about the spending of

budget money.⁴⁴

The Higher School of Economics website contains the most detailed information about the board of regents. This includes the functions and objectives of the board, the status of its current work, a list of members and their portfolios, as well as principles of interaction between the regents and the university.

The website of Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University contains a detailed work plan of the board of regents for 2019, which also significantly increases the transparency of the board's activities.⁴⁵

39 U4 Issue 4:2006 Corruption in the education sector. 4, 44, p. 11 (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/ry67sj6>, access date: 03.04.2020)

40 On the Principles of Operation of the Academic Ethics Commission of the Academic Council of the National Research University Higher School of Economics [Russian] (URL: https://www.hse.ru/us/academic_ethics, access date: 03.04.2020)

41 Federal Law No. 273-FZ of 29.12.2012, Article 29. Informational openness of an educational organisation. Paragraph 2.2. Educational organisations provide openness and accessibility of information: 1b) on the structure and on the executive bodies of the educational institution [Russian] (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/umye47g>, access date: 03.04.2020)

42 Federal Law No. 273-FZ of 29.12.2012, Article 26. Educational organisation management [Russian] (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/yxylkt9d>, access date: 03.04.2020).

43 Federal Law No. 273-FZ of 29.12.2012, Article 29. Informational openness of an educational organisation [Russian] (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/umye47g>, access date: 03.04.2020).

44 van Vught F. & Westerheijden, Don F. (2010). Multidimensional ranking: A new transparency tool for higher education and research. Paris: OECD Publishing.

45 Infographics project, p. 6. total score / 5-100 subsidies <https://infogram.com/1pwx2je79m6gdesv0kvm300zrvs9e6l027v?live>. Data on subsidies taken from the Project 5-100 website: <https://www.5top100.ru/news/97331/> [Russian].

Overall research findings

Lack of transparency policy incentives from the state

The Ministry of Science and Higher Education does not take into account the transparency policy of universities when considering grant applications. There is no correlation between the amount of subsidies and compliance with recommended international standards. Both universities which placed first and last in our ranking respectively

receive the largest subsidies. As a result, the improvement of their position in the world ratings may be constrained by the lack of incentives from the government which finances universities regardless of whether they follow the recommended standards that can ensure long-term development.

Vague wording/ineffective documents

Even though most universities publish codes of ethics on their websites, their effectiveness remains in question. In Russia, a code of ethics fulfills a decorative rather than an anti-corruption function. In most higher education institutions, this document is not a tool for resolving conflicts of interest, but rather a brief, generalised description of the moral rules of university-community life, which may be interpreted by everyone in different ways. Thus, a code of ethics in its current form may even hinder transparency.

believe that the documents should be completed in accordance with international standards.

Only four higher education institutions participating in the Project 5-100 are missing a code of ethics; at Information Technologies, Mechanics and Optics University, ethical standards are not prescribed in any document. The Higher School of Economics and Siberian Federal University have some norms laid down in their internal regulations,⁴⁶ while Tyumen State University has it approved as part of the code of good practice (corporate culture). However, this is not enough to clearly determine a university's stance on the procedure for countering corruption. On the other hand, some universities publish codes of ethics that contain vague wording and insufficient information. For example, Saint Petersburg Electrotechnical University "LETI" code contains only one anti-corruption norm. We

Vague wording and lack of information can create serious problems in communication. Following this logic is the case in 2017 when Moscow Institute's of Physics and Technology (MIPT) staff openly opposed the adoption of the Code of Ethics. According to the trade union, the adoption of the code with vague wording would allow the director to dismiss unwanted employees under paragraph 8 of Article 81 of the Labour Code of the Russian Federation "committing an amoral offense by an employee." The trade union is not satisfied with the fact that the topic of corruption is mentioned only once in the document – in the section "Principles of University Ethics," which lists, among other things, "active intolerance to corrupt practices, national, racial, and religious hatred, to the distribution and use of prohibited psychotropic and narcotic drugs, and other abuses." "The issues that are really important for the modern university are not spelled out in the document," says Professor Maksim Balashov, chairman of the MIPT trade union branch. "Nothing is said about the conflict of interests, about the relationship between the supervisor and subordinates, about measures to protect the know-how."⁴⁷

Assessment of the format of published documents⁴⁸

The format was assessed on twelve benchmarks. The highest number of points was scored by the Higher School of Economics and Novosibirsk State University (11/12), the lowest – by the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Siberian Federal University, and Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology (2/12). The median value was 5, i.e. more than half of the universities (14/21) scored less than half of the points. On average, the

situation with format ratings is worse than with general ratings. In particular, only 7 out of 21 higher education institutions have their charter in a search-friendly format. 9 institutions have codes of ethics in formats supporting quick search; 9 more universities have regulations for hiring faculty staff in place.

⁴⁶ We see that in March 2020, Higher School of Economics continued the work on the Code of Ethics for students, staff and faculty. As early as in 2018, the Student Council of the University prepared a draft code, but back then it caused a mixed reaction of students, and the process stopped (URL: <https://thevyska.ru/17914-ethics-again/>, access date: 03.04.2020) [Russian]

⁴⁷ Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology trade union opposes the adoption of Code of Ethics, Kommersant [Russian] (URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3241326>, access date: 03.04.2020)

⁴⁸ (Infographics: total score and format: <https://infogram.com/1pj9g3exklzw1xf6d5wxgdvlgqimv7d553k?live>)

Translation of documents into English

We also observed a lack of information for the English-speaking audience on university websites. For universities aiming to join the international educational community, in particular, for universities participating in the Project 5-100, it is important to have well formulated English content on their websites. One of the Project 5-100 objectives is to “internationalise all areas of activity, develop infrastructure to attract the best scientists, faculty, executives, and students.”⁴⁹

Universities should create comfortable conditions for the study and work of international students and professors. This is achieved, among other things, through the translation of websites and published documents. Even visual comparison of Russian and English versions of a university website shows that there is obviously a difference in the amount of content (not even based on language, but by the number of sections, illustrations, and banners). This created the impression that a visitor who does not speak Russian, receives incomplete or even irrelevant information.

There are also problems in attracting foreign colleagues. Minimum reasons are provided for why a student/faculty member should apply to and endorse this particular university. This is apparent at the most basic levels. For example, on the websites one can find information about the cost of education for foreign students (quite high, as a rule), but a sample contract for paid education services in English is available only on the websites of Novosibirsk State University and Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University out of all Project

5-100 universities. Often it is not possible to find translations of the university’s charter, which usually spells out the mission, obligations, management structure, and other key regulations of its work. Most higher education institutions do not have translated recruitment regulations.

While the norm for foreign universities⁵⁰ is the availability of a code of ethics (in the form of a selection of individual policies or as a single document), ethics committees, policies on conflict of interest, on the prohibition (or substantial restriction) of personal relationships between students and faculty, and the prohibition or regulation of receiving gifts. At Project 5-100 universities, not all of these documents are available in Russian, let alone foreign languages. In addition to the fact that the absence of these documents entails reputational and material risks, it also creates the impression that such a university does not keep pace with modern trends and does not strive to create a fairer and safer learning environment.

As for the format, it is more typical for the websites of foreign universities to publish all the texts to simplify the keyword search instead of uploading single documents that have to be downloaded separately. However, even in the rare cases when a document is published on the English website of a Russian university, it is often uploaded in .pdf format without the ability to browse through the text, thus preventing the possibility of translating it with online translation tools.

Recommendations for Russian Universities

⁴⁹ Read more about Project 5-100
(URL: <https://5top100.ru/en/about/more-about/>, access date: 03.04.2020)

⁵⁰ Faculty-Student Consensual Relationship Policies (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/t88dohr>, access date: 03.04.2020)
University of Oxford – Gifts and hospitality
(URL: <https://tinyurl.com/w28qv8j>, access date: 03.04.2020)
University of Cambridge – Policy against bribery and corruption
(URL: <https://tinyurl.com/rbarwc7>, access date: 03.04.2020)

“I believe that it is more effective to combat certain manifestations of non-transparency, rather than the phenomenon in general. For example, specific measures against cheating, plagiarism, bribes work better. It is necessary to understand whether we are fighting the problem itself or one of its symptoms.”

– Elena Denisova, Research Fellow at the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, USA

1. Format, completeness, and quality of documents

The administration of the higher education institution should pay more attention not only to the number of documents that are posted on the website, but also to their quality, completeness, and format. To ensure that, they should:

- upload documents in a format that supports text search;

- upload the required by law declarations of the university executives in one document/on one page to facilitate the search;
- check that the format of documents is easy to read and understand.

2. Website structure and design

Website design of a number of universities requires improvement: they are too difficult for a user to find the necessary information. Some documents are published in irrelevant sections or hidden too deep on the website. It is worth optimising the system of publishing and storing documents on the website,

adding a website search feature and a website map for greater usability. Dr Robert Gillanders, Professor at Dublin City University, notes that “you can have best designed procedures in the world, but if people don’t know about them, they can’t use them and you might as well don’t have them.”

3. Translation of documents and website into English

The university administration should pay more attention to the translation of key documents into English. One of the goals of the higher education institutions participating in the Project 5-100 is to increase the number of international students and broaden international integration. An important condition for this is the language accessibility of fundamental documents of the University and the

rules governing certain relationships that may be entered into by students, staff, and other concerned parties who do not speak Russian. This applies both to professor/faculty recruitment or scholarship awarding policies, as well as to the code of ethics and notification procedure for a potential conflict of interest.

4. Proactive transparency

“I think that the ideal situation would be (...) the university’s work being so transparent that there are no boundaries for acquiring [unclassified] information existing within it. That every individual who you refer to for data would be interested in cooperating with you.”

– Selina Griffin, ex-Rankings Manager at QS World University Rankings (interview was conducted on the 14th of February 2020)

The university administration may publish documents related to the prevention of corruption and conflict of interest, even if there is no official requirement to do so. In this way, the university provides its staff, students, and other concerned parties with answers and optimal solutions to ambiguous issues and reduces the risk of conflict of interest as well as reputational risks. In addition,

universities can strive for progressive development without regulatory compulsion from the state. Restrictions on various types of harassment, sexual extortion, moral pressure, etc., can greatly contribute to the development of the university environment and academic freedom, which is one of the most important factors for the quality of future research.

5. Effective feedback channel design

1. Provide a convenient feedback channel both for reporting corruption and for offering advice on transparency and conflict of interest issues. Higher education institutions should introduce their own system for handling appeals, ensure confidentiality for applicants and organise an online format for work.
2. Students should be made aware of the problem of corruption and transparency and informed about possible ways to communicate and solve

problems in this area.

- a. One such measure could be the creation and distribution of educational brochures. Written in simple and accessible language, not overburdened with formalism or abundance of definitions, but providing a general understanding of the topic. The effectiveness of such a measure has been tested⁵¹ in one of the existing higher education institutions in Russia.

6. Involvement of all stakeholders in the process of increasing transparency

“I think that [the level of transparency should be influenced] by all the parties involved plus some unaffiliated individuals and civil society, because, you know, if corrupt practices exist, they cannot be cured solely from the inside, a combination of efforts both inside and outside is needed.”

– Alena Ledeneva, Professor at the School of Slavic and Eastern European Studies, University College London

Transparency is a common necessity, the maintenance of which helps to prevent significant problems for everyone: students, instructors, executives, support staff, applicants, and ordinary citizens who finance the work of the university through their taxes. We believe that it is important that all stakeholders contribute to solving the

problem of transparency in higher education institutions. To achieve this goal, it is necessary:

1. To support students and ensure an open dialogue between students and the university administration.

“Students should certainly be able to influence the rise of transparency levels of the university. There are many different methods around the world, from organising discussions to rallies, but my advice is to structure your approach and use the fact that you are also a stakeholder in the educational process.”

– Muriel Poisson, Project Manager at the Institute of Ethics and Corruption in Education

2. To establish transparent boundaries between students and professors through open pedagogical communication, in which the pedagogue acts as a participant in collaborative learning activities. Building a relationship so

that the experience of the professor and their status do not put pressure on the student, and the professor is not affected by the fact that the student is younger and less experienced.

“Educators themselves should act as a good example for students.”

– Elena Denisova, Research Fellow at the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, USA

7. Efficient external control of higher education institution activities

The government is an important tool for control and audit of university activities. We propose a range of possible measures that the government could take

to increase the transparency of higher education institutions:

⁵¹ Denisova-Schmidt, E., Huber, M., Leontyeva, E. et al. (2020) Combining experimental evidence with machine learning to assess anti-corruption educational campaigns among Russian university students, *Empirical Economics*.

1. Publication of the Project 5-100 ‘road maps’ (technical tasks). By focusing on the transparency principles regarding the website content and formal regulation of higher education institution activities (both in Russian and other languages), governing bodies create an incentive to increase transparency and develop anti-corruption policies within higher education institutions, as well as improve control by NGOs.
2. Government audits and setting more precise goals for universities that can be easily measured. This enables to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of subsidies. Publication of the stated goals and deadlines for their achievement on the official websites of universities.
3. Involvement of students, external NGOs, and civil society into the audit of higher education institutions.

“Students and parents who pay for their studies have a right to know what their money is spent on.”

– Dr Robert Gillanders, Professor at Dublin City University

Aspects to be considered in the following studies

As part of our research, we examined only 21 Russian universities and assessed their transparency against the parameters for the availability of certain regulatory acts. The problem of transparency at higher education institutions is not limited to our research. In the future, it would be useful to pay attention to such aspects as:

- a. Expanding the research scope
 1. We have examined the leading universities of our country, but the situation in regional educational institutions which receive less funding and are more isolated may be fraught with many problems not reflected in our current study.
 2. Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University are missing among the higher education institutions that we analysed — according to Federal Law No. 259-FZ,⁵² they are distinct scientific and educational complexes in the Russian Federation. In our research, only universities that have participated in the Project 5-100 were examined. Subsequently, for the moment, we were unable to assess the transparency of Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University. Therefore, we hope that in the upcoming studies, we will be able to assess their competitiveness according to transparency benchmarks.
- b. Expanding benchmarks, e.g. university procurement contracts, data on admissions (quotas), case-analysis of corruption, harassment, plagiarism, etc.
- c. Perception of corruption by students and faculty (empirical analysis in the form of a survey).
 1. Following the transparency ethics requires not only formalism, but also real change in the behaviour of students and staff. Intolerance to corruption, avoidance of plagiarism and artificial citations in academic papers and other aspects by students and university staff may be key in improving transparency.
- d. Qualitative research of documents. We evaluated only the availability of certain documents (e.g. anti-corruption policy) or the important components thereof (e.g. regulation of conflicts of interest). Nevertheless, everything we analysed differed significantly in quality: in some universities these are extensive documents with a lot of particularities, in others they are lacking and are virtually useless. Henceforth, it will be necessary to evaluate the content of these documents with a possible expansion of the list under study.
- e. A survey of national traits of corruption in education.
 1. The international experience of research on transparency makes it possible to apply existing conclusions and proposed practical measures. However, such application without accounting for specific national traits may be unreasonable or even harmful.

⁵² The Federal Law No. 259-FZ of 10.11.2009 “On Lomonosov Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University” (with the latest amends) [Russian] (URL: <https://tinyurl.com/vw8bd9m>, access date: 03.04.2020)

