

**THE POLICY OF GRANTING SCIENTIFIC GRANTS IN RUSSIA AND ITS PROSPECTS****Natalia A. Bobrova***Togliatti State University, Togliatti, Russia***Article info**

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Modern criteria for assessing scientific activity, established in 2013, are considered. The shortcomings of these criteria, which the author of this article, together with another professor, tried to recognize as invalid and not subject to application due to their contradiction with Russian legislation and national interests, are emphasized. The requirements for applicants for grants of the Russian Science Foundation are considered (RSF), which, after merging with the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR), became the only federal scientific foundation. The first results of the merger of the two funds are analyzed. It is shown that this had a negative impact on the humanities, including legal sciences. The Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation dated March 19, 2022 No. 414 "On some issues of applying the requirements and target values of indicators related to publication activity" is analyzed. The resolution was adopted in response to the sanctions of unfriendly states, as well as a reaction to open letters from the public about the immediate exclusion from all regulations of the requirement to publish in journals from commercial indices. The resolution has the character of a moratorium on the application of requirements for the availability of publications in scientific journals indexed in international databases. Proposals are being made on the development of domestic criteria for publication activity.

**1. Introduction**

On December 10, 2013, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation adopted the Order No. 1324, in the Annex to which new criteria for evaluating the scientific activities of universities were defined. Legal, humanitarian and all Russian scientometrics, Russian universities and journals have been "under the gun" of the standards set by this Order for many years.

According to these criteria, priority in comparison with domestic journals, including journals included in the Higher Attestation Commission's (hereinafter – HAC) list, was given to publications related to international citation databases, as well as foreign teachers who are listed (and often not working!) part-time students in the staff of Russian universities, for which the latter relied on high scores and increased funding. There is also a point, according to which the university receives additional points if foreign specialists are included in its leadership.

Two Russian professorial forums, held in Moscow on February 8, 2018 and February 6-7,

2019, testified to the highest severity of scientists' disagreement with these criteria for evaluating the scientific activities of universities, the processes of commercialization of education and science, when teaching staff are forced to conclude commercial contracts or bring profit to the university in grants. According to the regulations on RFBR and RSF competitions, up to 20% of the grant amount of the teaching staff is deducted to the university, later – 15%. The professor must bring at least 100 thousand rubles per year, other teachers – at least 50 thousand rubles to the university. These criteria are also laid down in the Annex to Order No. 1324. Universities are forced to meet these criteria, taxing teaching staff with the appropriate "poll tribute": for the absence of an economic contract or a grant for a set amount, the teacher is deprived of a bonus for the whole year, they may not conclude a contract with him for the next term, etc. .

The topic of scientometry is conflictogenic in its nature. The discussion of this problem was constantly confronted with the opposition of interested parties lobbying for the idea of transferring Russian education and science to

Western models. For example, in 2016, Doctor of Philosophy, Ph.D., Professor of the Department of Philosophy and Methodology of Science of Saratov State University named after N.G. Chernyshevsky, the laureate of literary prizes

V.V. Afanasyeva, who became famous after the publication of the article "Five reasons why you should not become a professor" on the Internet, addressed an Open letter to the Minister of Education of the Russian Federation Olga Vasilyeva "Five reasons for the serious illness of Russian education" and called for changing the "Federal Program for the development of Russian Education for 2016-2020." As a result, V.V. Afanasyeva "did not pass the competition" at her university and was not registered as a candidate for deputy of the Saratov Regional Duma due to a change in the candidate's status during the signature collection period, i.e. she lost the status of a university professor.

But such is the psychology that after a period of disagreement with any next ministerial innovation, a period of adaptation to the new system of requirements begins.

Thus, in some universities, for example, in Togliatti State University, in order to encourage teaching staff to publish articles in journals indexed in international databases, they began to pay 125,000 rubles. for an article (20 times less - for a monograph or an article in a journal from the list of the Higher Attestation Commission). Some scientists quickly got their bearings and managed to take advantage of such prices.

Many scholars have wrote about the shortcomings of the current system of scientific publications. And yet, little by little, the list of domestic journals increased every year, which, having overcome a lot of obstacles and ordeals in the form of requirements imposed by firms that created international citation bases, little by little entered this happy list, receiving well-deserved congratulations from scientists all over Russia and, as a result, an increased flow of manuscripts of articles coming to the editorial offices of these journals.

## **2. What are the consequences of combining RFBR and RSF for the scientific community?**

The paradoxes accumulated over the past three decades in Russian education and science are crowned with a fresh paradox: at the end of 2020, the country's leadership announced two decisions. On December 31, 2020, the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 3710-r (with appendices on 43 pages) was signed on the accession of the RFBR – the only Russian state fund for grant support of fundamental scientific research – to the Russian Scientific Foundation (RSF). On the same day, the President of the Russian Federation declared the coming year 2021 the Year of Science and Technology.

The scientific community assessed this measure ambiguously. Scientists, having analyzed the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation on the unification of funds, concluded that it was not the unification that was prepared, but the actual liquidation of the RFBR under the banner of "modernization" (there are no guarantees for ensuring the continuity of its programs, etc.).

According to Federal Law No. 291-FZ of November 2, 2013, the state is not liable for the obligations of the RSF, and the latter is not liable for the obligations of the state, unless it voluntarily accepted them. The legal status of the RSF is a fund with the right to conduct business. The RSF Board of Trustees may or may not assume state obligations. Every year, 18 thousand teams of scientists received grants from the RFBR, and 5 thousand from the RSF.

At the beginning of 2021, the RSF announced several grant competitions, mainly joint with non-CIS countries. The application was subject to very strict requirements both in terms of content and design, as well as to the team of scientists: there should be no more than four participants with at least 5 publications on the grant topic over the past 5 years, mainly in international citation databases. Moreover, at least half of the participants must be under forty years of age. The tendency to "rejuvenate" the winners of grant competitions was also noticeable in the RFBR, although there were separate competitions for graduate students and other young scientists. In

any case, it was only with the appearance of this openly discriminatory requirement of the Russian Scientific Foundation for the age of scientists that the reason became clear why the RFBR had previously refused grants to venerable scientists, even if the application was flawless (the author of these lines was an expert of the RFBR herself and knows what she is talking about), and on the topic of the application, young scientists simply there are no publications (for example, on scientometry). For example, a grant on the topic of scientometry was refused to a team that included Doctors of Law N.A. Bobrova, S.I. Zakhartsev, V.V. Lazarev, V.P. Salnikov, V.A. Tolstik, R.L. Khachaturov and Doctor of Sociological Sciences T.N. Ivanova). Seven well-known scientists were unworthy of the RFBR grant.

But the RSF has acquired legal form not only age requirements for the team (at least half of the team is under 40 and even 35 years old), but also strict requirements for the project manager: he must have at least 7 or 9 (depending on the specific competition) publications in international databases, and in some competitions even more an additional requirement is that all publications in international databases must be on the stated topic, which immediately cuts off the lion's share of applicants.

But already during the period of the merger of the two funds, or rather, the liquidation of the RFBR, skepticism about "dubious optimization" was noticeable. On the Day of Science on February 8, 2021, at a meeting of the Council for Science and Education under the President of the Russian Federation, a young employee of the Novosibirsk Research Institute A.S. Proskurina, as well as other members of the Council, including academics, voiced the main problems of Russian science, naming among them the liquidation of the RFBR. The reaction of the authorities was zero.

In our opinion, scholars of the humanitarian cycle will be severely disadvantaged in the RSF. But we could not even imagine the scale of age discrimination, when grants are allocated provided that at least half of

the team of scientists belong to the category of young. This restriction hit the professor hard. We are by no means against encouraging young scientists, and there is a certain sense in this. But, in our opinion, firstly, there should be independent competitions for young scholars (graduate students and assistants), as it was in the RFBR. Secondly, it should be borne in mind that in the natural sciences and humanities there are slightly different criteria for age-related scientific productivity: if a physicist and a mathematician make major discoveries at a young age, then experience and broad encyclopedic knowledge are important for a humanities scientist, which only increase with age.

### **3. What does the compliance of the grant application with international standards mean and how it may contradict national interests?**

Scientists who have applied for a grant from the Russian Foundation for Basic Research or the Russian Academy of Sciences at least once know that there is a section called "Compliance of the topic and content of the study with international standards". At the same time, for some reason, there is no question about who, in fact, sets, develops and sets these very world standards of scientific research. It is simply assumed that these world standards are foreign standards.

Legal science is the most important sphere of the modern system of constitutionalism, an element and guarantee of national security. A lot of contradictions have accumulated in Russian science and scientometry over the past three decades. Ill-conceived changes in scientometry, including under the good slogan and the intention of "compliance with international standards", come into conflict with the national-historical traditions of the humanities, lead to the loss of what has been achieved, infringement of national interests and undermining national security.

There is no doubt that integration into the European and world scientific space has objective prerequisites. However, it is also obvious that integration processes cannot be the same and uniform in relation to the entire scientific space. This is relevant, for example, for natural science and technical disciplines (if state secrets are not

affected). However, it is doubtful that the task of integration is equally urgent for lawyers focused primarily on the application of national legislation.

It is naive to count on a grant in the current system of evaluation of self-examined educational institutions, if the applications say that the transition to the Western system of higher education – the introduction of credit units (instead of academic hours), testing systems, providing the opportunity to choose disciplines, the technologization of education – did not bring the expected results, especially in the field of humanities education. The reformers did not take into account that the laws of mathematics, physics, chemistry are the same for all countries, and legal laws serve national interests. Modernization of legal education, conceived under the slogan of joining the world community, has turned into modernization of documentation, and the quality of education into the quality of documentation. This phenomenon in philosophy is called the substitution of a goal by a means: "paper seas" in education, digitalization in scientometry, being a means, turn into an end in itself. The quality of education and science recedes into the background.

The processes of digitalization of the quality of science and education lead to what is called substitution – substitution of the goal (obtaining new knowledge in science, transfer and acquisition of knowledge and skills in education) by various pseudo-scientific and pseudo-educational means and processes.

Speaking about the state of legal education and science in the aspect of national security, attention should be paid to the problem of the correlation of national traditions and foreign experience. This problem can be presented as a correlation of national traditions and supranational (cosmopolitan) principles. A critical assessment is necessary to understand what consequences associated with the loss of national traditions can be achieved if: a) it is not possible to minimize in practice the negative consequences of the introduction of this system in education; b) its own national doctrine of

humanitarian education, including legal education, is not being developed.

Many foreign countries have not joined either the Bologna system or the international citation databases. And in America itself, there are no unified criteria for evaluating the scientific activities of scientists, even within the same faculty. For example, scientists in the field of civil or criminal law and procedure cannot be evaluated by the same criteria as constitutional scientists or theorists. In the USA itself, each university and even each department has its own criteria for scientific activity that correspond to its specifics and profile, and publications in WoS and Scopus are just auxiliary criteria. In our country, they have been turned into basic and self-sufficient. Including in the grant policy.

#### **4. How will the Russian grant policy change in connection with the adoption of the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of March 9, 2022?**

On March 7, the Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation sent a letter to the Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, in which he was instructed to develop domestic criteria by March 15, excluding international citation bases from them. On March 11, 2022, a letter was sent from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation to the Government of the Russian Federation signed by Minister V.N. Falkov "On the submission of a draft resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation. Order of the Deputy Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation dated March 7, 2022 No. DCH-P28-3426ks" as follows:

"The Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, pursuant to the instructions of Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation D.N. Chernyshenko, in accordance with paragraph 61 of the Regulations of the Government of the Russian Federation, approved by the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation dated June 1, 2004 No. 260, introduces a draft decree of the Government of the Russian Federation "On publications indexed in international databases" (next – the project).

Especially interesting in the explanatory note is the information that the total number of legal acts of the Government of the Russian Federation and federal executive authorities, which currently contain requirements for the availability of publications indexed in international databases, is more than six hundred (!). Taking into account the acts of the Russian Federation, regional committees on Science and Technology, local acts universities, the number of such legal acts is estimated in tens of thousands.

Considering this circumstance, the explanatory note states that "in order to exclude the need to amend each of these acts, and also taking into account that the initiative provides for a time-limited moratorium, it is proposed to issue one legal act of the Government of the Russian Federation on the issue of non-application of requirements for the availability of publications indexed in international databases.

On March 19, 2022, Government Resolution No. 414 "On some issues of the application of requirements and target values of indicators related to publication activity" was adopted. As you can see, the name of the Resolution differs from the name of its project.

Let's analyze the said Resolution, which provides:

1. Not to apply until December 31, 2022, established by acts of the Government of the Russian Federation (for some reason, the phrase "and federal executive authorities", which was in the draft, disappeared):

a) requirements for the availability of publications (publication activity), in publications (scientific publications), journals indexed in international databases (information and analytical systems of scientific citation), as well as target values of indicators related to this publication activity when:

evaluating the effectiveness of scientific, scientific and technical and innovative programs and projects, higher education support programs (the phrase "as well as the state assignment for scientific research", which was in the project, disappeared);

implementation of state support measures (grants, grants in the form of subsidies, subsidies from the federal budget) of scientific, scientific, technical and innovative programs and projects, as well as programs and projects in the field of higher education;

evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the activities of budgetary and autonomous institutions, as well as other organizations and the work of their managers (the phrase "as well as when evaluating the effectiveness of the work of employees of such institutions and organizations", which was in the project, disappeared);

evaluation of the effectiveness of the implementation of control events, activities, results and indicators of federal and national projects, state programs of the Russian Federation;

evaluation of the scientific qualifications of applicants for academic degrees and academic titles, as well as the effectiveness of scientific activities in the field of state scientific certification (the highlighted item was in the draft, but it is not in the text of the Resolution);

b) requirements for participation in foreign scientific conferences, as well as to the target values of indicators related to publication activity based on the results of these conferences, when evaluating the implementation of control events, events, as well as the results and indicators of national and federal projects, state programs of the Russian Federation.

In comparison with the draft, three new paragraphs appeared in the Resolution:

1. The requirements and target values of indicators specified in paragraph 1 of this resolution are subject to application if such requirements are met and the target values of indicators are achieved before the date of entry into force of this resolution;

2. The federal executive authorities shall bring their acts into compliance with this resolution within a 2-month period.

3. Recommend to the executive bodies of state power of the subjects of the Russian Federation to bring the acts of the subjects of the Russian Federation in accordance with this resolution.

4. This resolution comes into force from the date of its official publication (this paragraph was in the draft under number 2).

The Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 414 has the character of a moratorium on the criteria on the priority of publications contained in international citation databases, but by no means mean their complete abolition. The moratorium is valid until December 31, 2022. It is until this date that new criteria for evaluating scientific activity in Russia should be developed.

### **5. Some conclusions**

So, after the merger with the RFBR, the Russian Foundation for Basic Research is the only federal fund that allocates funds for scientific research, therefore, the grant policy of modern Russia is predetermined by the activities of this fund and its requirements for grant applications, the criteria for evaluating scientific research developed by it.

The RSF gives priority to the so-called international citation databases. Even monographs and journals recommended by the Higher Attestation Commission are not appreciated. It is still unclear how the policy of the RSF will change after the adoption of Resolution No. 414.

It goes without saying that the regional councils for awarding prizes in the field of science and technology are guided by the same criteria. Whether anything will be changed in this part in the regions also remains unclear, since the Government Decree recommends that the executive bodies of state power of the Russian Federation bring their acts into line with the said resolution, but does not oblige them to do so at all.

If we interpret the Government Decree more broadly and proceed from the fact that new domestic criteria for evaluating the scientific activities of universities should be developed by December 31, 2022, these should be developed with the broad involvement of the scientific community, which should show the highest activity in discussing these criteria.

It is necessary to hold hearings on this issue

in the State Duma under the leadership of the Chairman of the Committee on Science and Education.

Similar hearings should be held in all regional parliaments. Thus, such hearings were held in the Samara Provincial Duma on April 12, 2022, and the resolution was sent to the Governor of the Samara Region, the State Duma, the Government of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation.

And the last. In our opinion, the practice of publishing articles for authors' money, which corrupts both such paid journals (collections) and scientists themselves, should be completely stopped. Publications for money undermine the prestige of science itself, the authority of scientific activity and scientists.

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