

Visiting Professors at Polytech: experts we are looking for!

It is truly prestigious for every higher education institution to host overseas professors. At the world's leading universities scientific and pedagogical employees sometimes form more than a half of the whole academic staff. In Russia the situation was considered to be worse. However, since the '5-100-2020' Program (hereinafter academic excellence 'Project 5-100') has started, the participating universities, including Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, exhibit the growth of the internationalization of higher education. For example, within last three years the number of foreign students in our university grows by 10% annually. The number of foreign professors who come to deliver lectures is also significant. This was even discussed at the meeting of the Russian President Vladimir Putin and HSE rector Yaroslav Kuzminov. During the meeting the rector of HSE informed the President about Project 5-100 performance. "The number of foreign professors and employees at Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University in comparison with 2013 increased by 10 times," Yaroslav Kuzminov quoted some figures. "That's good! The most important thing they would be specialists we need," said Vladimir Putin.



But is there a risk that quantity will ruin the quality? Pursuing refreshing teaching

staff with foreign professors Russian universities will attract low-skilled ones?

The academic excellence 'Project 5-100' expanded our opportunities, made it possible to conceive a thoughtful approach to attract and arrange participation of foreign professors in our education process, – said Vice-rector for international Relations Dmitry Arseniev. – But we always cherry-pick visiting professors and give grounds for their invitation: from both financial and worthwhile points of view. And one of our main goals is to attract the best experts on the international labor market, leading scientists with PhD acquired abroad.

The best points about having foreign professors are that they have another culture, another teaching approach and programs content. They significantly expand views on teaching and related research activities. We also shouldn't forget that overseas professors can contribute to transfer of advanced foreign industrial experience.



According to the results of the Academic Staff Selection Commission more than 35 foreign professors are going to start their work at Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University.

Professor of the University of Lancaster (UK), George Aggidis, joined our friendly Polytech family. He was invited as a lecturer for the international Master's degree program in English – 'Power Plant Engineering'. Professor Aggidis has a PhD in engineering and teaching and has been engaged in research activity more than 30

years.

His lectures in Polytechnic University are dedicated to the aspects of renewable energy, fluids, and ocean energy. In an interview Professor from Great Britain told why he has come to Russia and what helped him to feel in St. Petersburg at home. Also he told that he was impressed by Polytechnic students and what was his goal as a teacher.

- Mr Aggidis, why did you decide to come to work to Russia and teach at Polytech?

- Firstly, I have never been to Russia. It is definitely exciting experience to combine work and getting more insights into Russian culture and mentality. I've dealt with engineering during my whole life. Secondly, I have been to many countries – China, America and European countries with the aim to explore energy and engineering solutions. I thought it would be a great opportunity to expand my knowledge and to share my experience in this area.

- What do you think about Russian people?

- You are friendly and polite.

- What were your first impression of the students and the group you've taught?

- I haven't lived here for a long time, but I immediately noticed the interest and involvement of the audience. Your students seem to be very well-organized and disciplined. It helps to maintain a qualified educational process. They really listen to me with interest, and ask sometimes unconventional questions. It shows their engagement with the subject field. The second thing which pleasantly surprised me is that the group is a really international one. It makes our discussions rather exciting due to the large number of different opinions. My experience shows that multicultural teams work better and easily find a solution to any problem.



- In your opinion, what are the advantages of teaching and learning at Polytech?

- The thing I've immediately marked for myself is the special spirit of an ancient institution. Speaking about competitive advantage, I indicated the deep and serious experience in engineering, energy and fluids. From what I read you have old and very impressive buildings from 1899, and all your students seem to be very orderly and everything seems to be running very well. From the competitive edge you have a very strong background in engineering and in energy, and also fluid machinery, and these are the areas and background you need to take forward new areas of research like the one I am working on - ocean energy, which includes wave energy and wave energy convertors, tidal current energy, current convertors and tidal rains, and tidal rains convertors, on top of hydropower that you are quite familiar with.. In this regard, there are things we can think about while doing joint research projects.

-According to your opinion, what is the difference between Russian students and students in Lancaster?

- I think students tend to be the same, obviously based on the background and what they have done up to the time. They came to the university, it can affect how they will perform. In some countries, especially for engineering, students have a very strong mathematical background and that is what you need for engineers. But

in some other countries they don't. So you can tell the difference, and obviously if this is the case, you will need to make sure that we have to bring the standard of all the students to the same level so they can progress with the courses they decided to attend.

- Which teaching approaches do you consider to be the most efficient? And which of them do you personally apply?

- Well, the way you propose to carry out these lectures discussing them directly with students, engaging them and then testing them on their understanding, making them present what they understood on an assignment, giving them a real assignment to carry out. It's probably a good way of teaching and lecturing at the university level.

- I hope you had enough time to explore and learn more about our city. What did you like best about our city?

- Your city charmed me. St. Petersburg looks fabulous. There are a few cities where you can visit such museums as Hermitage. I am from Greece (I came to Great Britain from ancient city Thessaloniki), that is why when I see a great variety of ancient churches and cathedrals I feel at home here. And your channels and bridges are incredible!

- Thank you for the interview, Mr Aggidis! We wish you good luck in teaching Polytech students. And we hope that you'll make lots of unforgettable discoveries here in St. Petersburg!

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