

# Diploma route could definitely become shorter

Higher educational establishments may undergo changes

By Olga Pimenova

Many say that so many young people now undertake higher education that it has lost its previous significance. Over the past five decades, the number of students has risen 6-fold, with 90,000 people entering universities annually. In Minsk alone, 70 percent of eleventh graders continue on to take a higher degree. Of course, quality of learning is essential; universities are being urged to raise their standards ever higher. Naturally, this is no simple task. From September 1st, most universities and institutes will be following new rules, with the current 'five year diploma' perhaps becoming a thing of the past.

## Between theory and practice

Changing the approach towards higher education cannot be achieved overnight, since alterations will undoubtedly affect both first degrees and Master's degrees. Belarus' Education Minister, Sergey Maskevich, explains that syllabuses are being revised, with practical elements being given more attention. In May, university representatives are to approve new syllabuses for September, so what should we expect? Special attention is being paid to the

socio-humanitarian bloc — especially four modules: philosophy, political science, history and economics. Each module is to include a set of obligatory and optional subjects for study and aims to avoid the senseless repetition of past learning. There are exceptions to every rule but, according to universities, there is no question of cutting any element at departments where disciplines from the socio-humanitarian bloc are profile. History modules will keep their previous status in history departments while the number of hours spent on economics, sociology and pedagogics will be reduced. Economic disciplines will naturally remain foremost in economic departments. Meanwhile, P.E. is to be removed from socio-humanitarian module (although will remain compulsory for four hours a week through until graduation courses). The issue of foreign languages remains one of contention, with some worried that hours will be reduced. However, universities assure us that this won't be the case, although language students will be given more time for independent study, as Natalia Baranova, Rector of the Minsk State Linguistic University, confirms. She notes, "Foreign languages, as well as Belarusian and Russian, are obligatory disciplines at our university. However,

cultural studies are also to be taught at the Intercultural Communication Department."

## More intense learning

Heads of universities believe that 'compressing' the programme will allow one or two terms to be saved. From September 2013, it may be possible to gain a university diploma within 4-4.5 years. However, a Master's degree may be increased to two years. Few universities are in a hurry to adopt a final decision, since it's clear that training for certain specialties (such as becoming a doctor or translator) cannot be easily accelerated. Ms. Baranova shares this opinion, saying, "As far as education terms are concerned, the next year won't see any change. It's vital for us to retain our quality of training. Accordingly, we plan to keep the five year term for 'Modern Foreign Languages' (practice and theory of translation). Students study two languages, where one is often rare and quite challenging."

According to universities, it's vital to ensure that the shift to new educational programmes is gradual, with all aspects weighed carefully. New curriculums should enable the quality of education to be maintained — or enhanced.



Minsk State Linguistic University students at a lecture

# Exact healthcare history on e-card

By Olga Rovenkova

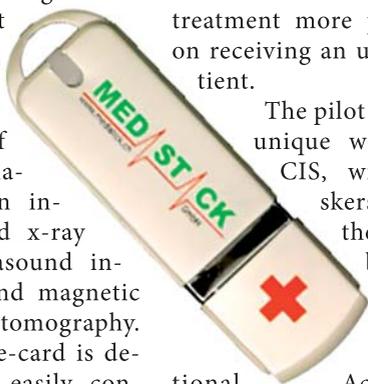
## Doctors promise to introduce e-cards for each Minsker by 2015, replacing traditional medical cards filled in by hand

A plastic rectangle, similar to a bank card, is to show the state of a person's health — including each appointment with a doctor, complaints, prescriptions and results of tests. Information will even include digitised x-ray pictures, ultrasound investigations and magnetic resonance tomography. The compact e-card is designed to be easily connected to a USB port, providing full information on each citizen's health from birth (protected by an e-code).

No doubt, this will reduce the amount of time spent by doctors on paperwork (currently up to a third of their working week

completing medical forms by hand). Meanwhile, patients will have no need to worry about their paperwork being lost, since copying the digital version is simple. Policlinics will also benefit, being able to give more time to patients than to paperwork. Of course, hospital doctors will be able to take decisions on treatment more promptly, on receiving an urgent patient.

The pilot project is unique within the CIS, with Minskers being the first to be given 'cards of health'. The National Academy of Sciences' United Institute of Informatics Problems is to join Chinese Huawei in offering technical support. Digitised medical information is coming into play across the globe, with this new technology set to be activated countrywide if successful.



# Popular and affordable trip

By Yevgeny Nikonov

## Belarus' first economy class diesel train, carrying passengers along regional lines, launched in Kalinkovichi

According to Belarusian Railways (and confirmed by monitoring of passenger traffic), most of those using the Kalinkovichi-Vasilevichi-Khoiniki and Kalinkovichi-Slovechno routes are local enterprise workers and summer cottagers. Naturally, the cost of tickets will be important to passengers, so a sensible compromise has been found (following the 2010 rail passenger transportation plan); this balances the public's ability to pay with profitability.

"The new system classifies lines as international, commercial, urban, region-

al and inter-regional. The last two offer business and economy class, with various levels of comfort and speed," explains Sergey Matskevich, the Deputy Head of Belarusian Railways' Passenger Service. "As far as economic efficiency of regional one-wagon diesel

trains is concerned, this is a major advantage of the joint project by Belkommunmash, Minsk's Wagon Repair Plant and Polish PESSA Bydgoszcz SA engine. It consumes three times less fuel than a traditional diesel train, while significantly enhancing the level of comfort for passengers and engine drivers."

After a short celebration on the Kalinkovichi railway station platform, which included the heads of the Kalinkovichi, Mozyr and Khoiniki districts (to be connected via diesel train regional lines very soon), passengers took their seats. These included Socialist Labour Hero and honoured irrigator Ivan Pyrko and participant of the Great Patriotic War Vasily Kozelko, as well as other people well-known in the Kalinkovichi area.



Regional line diesel train with economy class in Kalinkovichi

# Angel in Your Heart campaign to assist

## Angel in Your Heart charity event supports children in need from Grodno Region for second year in a row

Thousands of people have taken part in raising funds for

physically disabled children, those without parents, and those suffering from severe illness. Various organisations have donated money to the regional branch of the Belarusian Children's Fund while some

have given money at public collection points (on streets and in shops).

Numerous events were held to help raise funds, including master classes at orphanages, hospitals and centres of correc-

tional education. Also, services were held at churches of various confessions. The event lasted until May 15th, with the final sum raised announced on June 1st — International Children's Day.