Swiss research on commodities: another bold step

The Swiss Research Institute on Commodities (SRIC) is newly born. When the Master in International Trading, Commodity Finance and Shipping was created in 2008, it was a bold step. With the new research institute, the university is leaping forward again in a field which is quite unique.

How does Jean-Dominique Vassalli, Rector of the University of Geneva and President of the foundation that oversees the institute, feel about this new venture?

“When the Master was created, it was a bit of a novelty. In particular because the students hold at the same time a job in their field of study. Working while studying is of course not exceptional, that is what happens also in medical school, for instance”. The courses make more sense to the students when they can apply teachings directly, but the commodity master is a bit of a strange animal because the students must ensure that they have a job in the industry before they can apply to the programme. What is imperative to Professor Vassalli is that the courses extend beyond practical topics. “The academic teaching must broaden perspectives. For example, ethics and human rights are important to Geneva. They must be included in the curriculum”. The research institute is a multi-stakeholder venture. It involves the academic world, the commodity industry, Swiss authorities at federal and cantonal levels. “The institute is a partnership between people from different backgrounds, a ground for cross-fertilisation. We would like to reinforce the presence of NGOs as they encourage keeping a critical eye”. Although formally SRIC is a separate entity from the university, it will not have its own research staff and will primarily play the role of an interface between partners and enhance synergies. “anchoring the institute to the University will enable it to use a wide set of skills present in different faculties, in addition to the Faculty of Economy and Manage—
be initiated by students of the Masters Programme. They can also be proposed by partners and take advantage of a variety of complementary approaches. “Some assignments may originate from corporate mandates. However, the institute is not meant primarily as a service to companies but as a true research centre”.

Interview Nicolette de Joncaire

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