

## “Professorate Unemployment” in the Modern Russia

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### Abstract

The paper analyses the labor market of faculty members in the period of modernization of higher education in Russia. It emphasizes the causes and specifics of unemployment for highly qualified lecturers. The author distinguishes the factors that increase the risk of the teaching staff of different categories losing jobs; characterizes the main types of “professorate” unemployment at the present stage; and determines the avenues for reducing unemployment and stabilizing the professional market of college lecturers. The paper also emphasizes some prospective lines of professorate research in the context of the educational policy aimed at optimizing the system of higher education and reducing the number of universities.

**Keywords:** higher education, modernization of the graduate school, university professors, unemployment, labour market

### 1. Introduction

In recent decades a contradiction has been mounting in the system of higher education in Russia. On the one hand, university lecturers as a social group have high social responsibility, exercise important social-and-educational functions and play a special role in enhancing qualitative characteristics of the population. On the other, academic teaching staff is suffering from the low level and quality of life, lack of sustainable incentives, and uncertainty of their social status.

Since 2012, the educational community in Russia has ever more frequently discussed a novel problem for Russian higher educational institutions: a growing number of lecturers that lost their jobs. Even faculty members with the most advanced qualification-holders of a higher doctorate degree and those possessing the rank of a professor-are in the risk zone. The problems of professorate labor market are becoming more prominent under the conditions of modernizing college systems in many countries with market economy. For instance, experts observe worsening standing of college lecturers in the labor markets in the USA and Europe (El-Khawas, 2010; Musselin, 2013; Stocum, 2013), and describe negative trends in the level of payment and working conditions of the teaching staff (Ouardighi et al., 2013; Zoghi, 2003; Allen, 2010; Rambli et al., 2010). Studies conducted over recent years show that increasingly negative faculty trends at higher educational institutions are typical for Russia as well as other countries with market economy. Russian scholars evaluate both positive and adverse consequences of Russia joining the Bologna system (Artamonova, 2008; Gokhberg et al., 2011; Popov, 2008), some researchers look into the difficulties that Russian lecturers face trying to adapt to the new conditions (Druzhilov, 2011; Il'ina, 2014; Sotnikova & Kozlova, 2009). Still, “professorate unemployment” in Russia has not obtained the status of a “pressing social issue”, broadly recognized across the Russian society.

### 2. Methods

The need for a comprehensive analysis of the processes on the labor markets of university lecturers in the period of the higher school reforms determined the use of various general scientific and specific research methods. In particular, the author employs such general scientific methods as the system-wide approach, dialectical method,

structural, systemic and factor analysis. The author also applied typological, historic, and comparative micro- and macro-analysis. (Kaurova et al., 2014)

Special attention is paid to empirical research methods that are particularly essential for revealing the most significant trends in development of higher education in Russia. Empirically, the paper is based on official statistical data presented by the Federal State Statistical service (Rosstat) and information obtained through monitoring of academic and educational processes conducted by National Research University-“High School of Economics” (“Science Indicators”, 2014; “Education in Figures”, 2013). To study the trends on the labor market of university lecturers, the methods of economic-and-statistical analysis were used, as well as sociological surveys and psychological tests. Evidently, accumulating and analyzing research findings builds up the basis for knowledge systematization and theoretical generalization of the problems of reforming the system of higher education and developing professorate market.

Other sources included normative legal documents of the Ministry of the Russian Federation for Education and Science (a Concept of a Federal Target Program).

### **3. Results**

#### *3.1 The Main Trends in Faculty Development*

##### *At the Present Stage*

At the beginning of the XXI c. the system of higher education in Russia developed robustly. From 2001-2002 to 2012-2013 academic years the number of lecturers and instructors in state and municipal colleges increased by over than 1.3 times. At that stage the number of faculty members with higher doctorate and doctorate degrees also increased considerably. Currently 2/3 of the teaching staff at state and municipal colleges hold higher doctorate and doctorate degrees (“Education in Figures”, 2013).

In 2001-2002 academic year every tenth lecturer at state and municipal colleges had a higher doctorate degree, while in 2005-2006 academic year the number of faculty members with higher doctorate degree reached 11.6% of the total teaching staff and in 2012-2013-13.1%. Over 1/8 of staff members are professors and nearly 54%-assistant professors.

Even more rapid growth of the teaching staff (including lecturers with academic degrees and ranks) was typical for private colleges in the analyzed period. From 2000-2001 to 2005-2006 academic years professorate at such colleges increased by 2.5 times. Currently 13.6% of lecturers and instructors in private colleges have a higher doctorate degree and over 53%-doctorate degrees (“Science Indicators”, 2014; “Education in Figures”, 2013).

For many years, one of the major factors complicating the life of a Russian professor was an exceptionally low level of remuneration. In 2000-2001 the average monthly earnings of Russian lecturers at their primary place of employment were approximately \$75-90. Only in Moscow the average salary of university lecturers at their primary place of employment exceeded \$100 in 2000. (Artamonova, 2008).

Presently, there is a clear positive trend: in 2013-2018 it is planned to increase the average salary of university lecturers in Russia to 200% of the average salary in the national economy. In 2013 the requirement to increase faculty remuneration to the level of the average salary in a region had already forced many universities to lay off their staff. Russian regions experienced a wave of unjustified employment terminations and refusals to accept documents for teaching vacancies. It also appeared that increased salaries means considerably stricter requirements to lecturers and instructors and changes in the labor market.

#### *3.2 The Reasons for Destabilizing Faculty Labor Market*

The major reason for the deteriorated situation on the labor market of university lecturers is the policy of the Ministry of Education and Science toward optimizing and reducing the number of colleges across the country. This policy is determined not only by the need to put things rights in the field of the higher education. To a considerable extent reducing the number of universities is associated with the “demographic hole”, where the higher education system was falling in the past 3-5 years. As a result of the significant birth rate drop in the crisis period in the 1990s, the number of school graduates and university entrants decreased dramatically.

In 2010 the Ministry of Education and Science calculated that over 100,000 university lecturers can lose jobs in 2011-2015. According to Rosstat, in 2010 state-run universities employed 341,000 faculty members, and together with private colleges-around 400,000, which means that every forth lecturer was in the risk zone (Druzhilov, 2011). Later the estimate became even more negative: by 2015 the overall number of students can decrease by over 40% in comparison with 2009. Accordingly, the teaching staff shall be cut by no less than 20-30% (the Concept).

Such shortage of open and precise information has at least two explanations. The government either does not have a clear layoffs plan under the frame of reforming the educational sphere, or the planned layoffs in the higher education are so huge that the authorities prefer to conceal the real scope of the problem and are confused with the figures.

In 2013 the situation on the faculty labor market became more complicated when the Ministry of Education and Science issued recommendations to have special quotas for young specialists. According to the Ministry officials, lecturers under the age of 30 should constitute at least 30% of the teaching staff. Since in recent years practically no new positions for university lecturers have been opened, colleges must layoff some older, highly skilled faculty members to free positions for their younger colleagues.

### *3.3 Factors Increasing the Risk of Faculty Members Losing Jobs*

Certainly, university professorate is becoming exceedingly non-uniform, and probability of losing jobs depends on many differentiating factors.

An important differentiating factor is competitive ability, characterized by academic, educational and methodological activities of lecturers (Sotnikova & Kozlova, 2009). Experts outline four segments of intra-college labor market of the teaching staff:

- “Stars”-lecturers with a high level of professional skills and pedagogical excellence, who are full of energy and know how to stimulate students to learn and who are capable to master innovative professional technologies and methods and can make difficult decisions;
- “Good citizens”-lecturers that are competent in their professional duties but are not so full of initiative as the “stars”;
- “Pupils”-in principle ambitious lecturers that are experiencing difficulties in making decisions on educational, methodological, academic or pedagogic types of activities due to insufficient professional-methodological knowledge and skills or poorly developed attitudes;
- “Ballast”-lecturers that demonstrate the worst results, avoid professional or educational-and-teaching and academic work, or are simply unable to carry it out.

In our opinion, the level of risk to lose job also depends on the time factor: the period when a dissertation was defended. Today’s Russian professorate can be tentatively divided into three categories:

1) “Soviet period” professors: persons that defended their dissertations before the beginning of market transformation, most likely at the end of the 1970s-1980s. On the one hand, the overall level of Soviet science and, in particular, the dissertation standards at that period were higher than at present. On the other, many research projects in the Soviet period were excessively ideologized, focusing exclusively on the problems of the command economy. Few representatives of professorate community from this category managed to adapt to the market conditions and compete on professional labor market, mainly due to their age. The youngest professors of the “Soviet period” today are over 65. Obviously the risk to lose job for this category of lecturers is the highest.

2) “Post-Soviet” professors: persons that defended dissertations from the beginning of the 1990s to 2007. In this period the number of Dissertation Councils where dissertations could be defended increased considerably. Some Councils endeavored to maintain a particular level of academic work, others were fully commercialized and turned the dissertation defense procedure into a mechanism of enrichment. According to their age and professional experience, “post-Soviet” professors are suitable candidates for active work and successful career in a modern Russian university, although for some passive or clearly weak lecturers of this category the risk of unemployment at the present stage is significant.

3) “Market period” professors. Since 2007 the state has been trying to regularize Dissertation Councils and make the dissertation defense procedure more transparent and controllable. A considerable number of persons that defended their doctorate or higher doctorate dissertations in this period are young, active lecturers truly engaged in scientific research. At the same time, the share of those whose dissertations are sheer commodities purchased at a sufficiently high price remains significant. In 2012 an anti-plagiarism campaign took place in Russia, as a result of which dozens of lecturers, businessmen, politicians were dishonorably stripped of their degrees, including higher doctorate degrees. However, representatives of the “market period” professorate, who were not accused in “anti-plagiarism”, feel quite confident on the labor market and the unemployment risk for them is relatively low.

### *3.4 Specifics of “Professor Unemployment” in the Modern Russia*

With sharp intensification of competition on the labor market, a statistically average Russian professor is very

vulnerable due to several reasons:

- A habit to a stable life
- Low level of labor mobility (absolutely unprepared to geographical mobility)
- Lack of skills necessary to compete for a position
- No command of foreign languages
- Considerable theoretical knowledge with a clear lack of practical experience (no experience of working beyond the field of higher education)
- Absence of the “knowledge commercialization” culture: skills and abilities to convert one’s intellectual capital into real money (without turning to criminal methods)
- A firm belief that the top “professor” status is a life-long guarantee of being sought-after within the system of higher education.

The specific feature of “professorate unemployment” in Russia is, first of all, its latent nature. Highly qualified college lecturers that lost jobs practically never approach the Government Employment Services, which means they are not officially recognized as unemployed and are not included in the statistical reporting on the state of the labor market. An unemployed professor prefers to search for a new job through his friends, or in the worst-case scenario, browsing the Internet, although the latter option is not of much help. The vacancy-advertising web-sites frequently give information about private tutors for schoolchildren or instructors of foreign languages for different courses or language schools. Rare announcements about college vacancies are typically placed by commercial educational establishments with a doubtful reputation and not very good working conditions (mostly offering part-time positions). Private employment agencies (personnel agencies) also are not in a hurry to assist in job placement for unemployed professors. Majority of personnel agencies work with orders from particular commercial companies, and universities are not profit-making customers so far.

### 3.5 The Main Types of “Professorate Unemployment”

Analysis of the main trends on the labor market of lecturers, however, enables to outline several major types of “professorate unemployment”:

#### 1) Frictional unemployment.

Is present at any time and within any system of economic relations. It takes place when a lecturer leaves voluntarily to find a new place of work. Sometime, it can be a form of a protest when a lecturer with a top “professor” status uses it to express rejection of a policy pursued by the college administration. The problem is that the period of searching for a new job when the overall number of universities is reduced, can drag on for a considerable time. Moreover, there is no guarantee at all that the problem of finding a new job will be resolved.

#### 2) Structural unemployment.

At the moment the most wide-spread type of unemployment in the field of higher education. Highly qualified lecturers lose jobs due to restructuring and optimization of the university system. For instance, the structure of the training areas is changed or weaker colleges merge with the stronger ones or are closed.

Specialists in humanities and social sciences are in an especially difficult situation. The Ministry of Education and Science plans that reductions should first of all affect economics and law students.

#### 3) Reputational unemployment.

It is a new type of unemployment for Russia associated with shameful exposures of persons involved in preparing and defending dissertations with a considerable plagiarism. Members of professorate have different attitudes to the victims of “anti-plagiarism” campaign but for lecturers with a damaged reputation it is extremely difficult to find a new position at colleges. And it concerns not only those who were dishonorably stripped of their academic degrees but also those who were involved in such dissertation defense processes in some or other way. Prestigious universities prefer not to deal with participants of “anti-plagiarism” debunking.

In Russia the problem has been shamefacedly slurred over, although many American and European researchers recognize the importance of an “anti-plagiarism” college policy and the need to estimate the reputational risks for lecturers (Abas & Graves, 2008; Suomi, 2013).

#### 4) Latent unemployment.

This is not a new type of unemployment, but recently it is becoming increasingly more widespread. A professor is trying to hang on to his position and is forced to agree to work part-time. It is not uncommon when a lecturer

with the “professor” status works only for 0.1-0.25 of the typical salary. The situation is characteristic for senior citizens (70 years old and over) or other discriminated categories of workers. There is a risk that with intensifying competition on the labor market probability of discriminations against various categories of lecturers will be only increasing (Lee & Won, 2014; Reay, 2004; Shirshina, 2006).

It is thought that the issue of personnel ageing, that is considered one of the factors hampering modernization of the university system, will be resolved by reducing the teaching staff of universities. Today, indeed, 51% of lecturers in Russian colleges are 40-60 years old, and 13%-60-65. The trend, however, is typical for many developed economies. For instance, the average age of lecturers across all US colleges is 50, with only 25% lecturers at the age of 35-44. Young lecturers (younger than 35) account for 8% (Alen, 2010; Ramblie et al., 2010). The problem is not that many lecturers in Russian universities are of pre-pension or pension age: the status of highly-skilled university lecturer presumes a certain level of professional maturity and a relevant age.

### *3.6 Efforts to Stabilize the Situation on the Professional Labor Market of University Lecturers*

In our opinion, the top-priority lines of efforts towards stabilizing the situation on the labor market for highly-skilled university lecturers should be as follows:

- 1) Clarifying and specifying the plans of the Ministry of Education and Science to optimize and restructure universities. The planned targets for reducing the teaching staff must be carefully calculated, justified and presented to the university community.
- 2) Devising a clear system of criteria for evaluating professional activities of highly-qualified college lecturers. The system must be unified for the colleges of similar profile (for instance, classical universities, technical colleges, etc.)
- 3) Instead of a sheer formality, there should be actual competition to fill the teaching vacancies strictly on the basis of the established criteria.
- 4) Transition to individual “effective contracts” for every teaching staff member, clearly specifying all requirements.
- 5) Creating conditions for fair competition on the labor market of university lecturers in compliance with all norms of the Labor Code of the Russian Federation.
- 6) Abolishing the mandatory quotas on 30% positions for lecturers under 30.
- 7) Establishing conditions for increasing inter-college mobility of lecturers based on the Cooperation Agreements between colleges.
- 8) Creating specialized, employment entities that render intermediary services on findings jobs for college lecturers. Such entities should be interregional and inter-departmental.
- 9) Monitoring the situation on the labor market of university lecturers with involvement of representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science and trade unions.

## **4. Discussion**

Over recent years the pressing issues of reforming the system of higher education have been in the focus of discussion by Russian academia. The need to meet the new requirements set by the society to higher educational institutions predetermined some radical changes on the labor market of the teaching staff for universities. Therefore, raising the problem of “professorate unemployment” generated a considerable interest within the educational community. The main findings of the research conducted by the author were reported and actively discussed at various academic conferences. In particular, the state and problems of labor market of the teaching staff under the conditions of reducing the number of colleges were presented at the XIV National Social-Pedagogical Congress organized by Russian State Social University on 5-6 June 2014. It was pointed out that the issue of “professorate unemployment” is becoming significantly more acute since Russia lacks a tradition of professional mobility in the field of higher education. A stable position, full-time employment and long-lasting relations with the same university always were considered the basic values in an academic carrier of a lecturer. In view of these circumstances, reducing the level of “professorate unemployment” will not be easy.

The author published several papers on the analyzed problem in the leading Russian academic journals (Il'ina, 2011; Il'ina, 2014).

## **5. Conclusions**

We are currently accumulating and systematizing empirical data to analyze the issue of “professorate unemployment”. The findings of our research form the base for theoretical generalizations on the problems of

reforming the system of higher education and developing professional markets of the teaching staff for universities. (Zaernjuk et al., 2014; Kryukova & Sokolova, 2014)

The research undoubtedly does not cover all aspects of the trends on the labor markets of college lecturers. It seems that a perspective line of studying “professorate unemployment” is to evaluate social-and-psychological aspects of the problem. It may be necessary because with increasing negative trends on the teaching labor market the situation with staff is deteriorating. Social-and-psychological problems that are the result of ill-considered personnel policy at colleges lead to open and latent conflicts at faculties, generate professionally destructive behavior and simply acts of indecency. Under these conditions devising psychological recommendations to minimize adverse consequences of teaching staff layoffs would be effect-oriented rather than a simply theoretical exercise.

Russian higher educational institutions are going through many problems and unemployment among lecturers is probably not the most pressing one. The situation, however, requires special attention since there have been no experience of resolving such issues in the history of Russian university system. Large-scale protests and a consolidated lecturers’ movement against forthcoming layoffs are unlikely due to non-uniformity and lack of integration within the teaching community. Nevertheless, it is obvious that wholesale redundancy across the teaching staff of universities can have adverse social-and-economic consequences not only for the educational community but for the entire system of higher education in Russia.

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