



Student Employment during College Studies and after Career Start

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper is targeted at exploring problems of students' and graduates' entering the labor market, exploiting their labor and creative potential during employment in their area of expertise, as well as their ability to combine university's studies with labor activities and *viz.* The article deals with some demographic aspects challenging graduates. Besides the authors are seeking to research tendencies in employment of students and graduates under the conditions when one crisis follows the other and their attitude to further professional career development. General scientific methods and tools, including UK Higher Education Statistics Agency's ones, have been used in complex to achieve the above mentioned goals.

Keywords: Students, Graduates, Employment, Training, Employment in the Area of Expertise

JEL Classifications: D01, M51

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, product, service and labor markets are undergoing huge changes. Only few large, small and medium-sized businesses are capable of surviving through serious overloads imposed by harsh competition. Human resources, especially young ones, having good potential, vigor and creative abilities can be one of the factors giving an important competitive edge to a firm. However, when they enter a labor marketplace, they encounter a host of challenges, of both objective and subjective nature. Quite often talented college graduates face the challenges of a rigid staff recruitment system with its clumsy selection and evaluation procedures, strict requirements that employers impose in terms of the work experience required from new graduates, unwillingness of employers to spend time and money on bringing young specialists up to date, as every employer probably has had a negative experience of having once hired incompetent graduates from other colleges, etc. As a result,

efficiency of college work is down, career trajectories of young specialists usually look like a flat curve, and businesses and public authorities lack in a necessary resource that can deal with immediate issues and with challenges of a longer impact. In this connection, it is important to improve the model of professional involvement in college and the technology of targeted entry into the labor market. It would allow efficient use of labor resources at a stage where former graduates embark on their professional careers, would ensure a victory in the "battle for talent" and give a significant competitive edge.

Graduate employment is a universal problem. Researchers are involved in a continuous study trying to work out methods and technologies that can increase the proportion of employed college graduates, especially those working in the area they majored in at school, which is of particular relevance amidst complications caused by labor migrations (Vinogradova et al., 2015. p. 161-169). Attempts to bring down youth unemployment by interim contracts

often lead to an opposite effect, with employment weakening (Noelke, 2014).

According to the results of certain studies, employers tend to think that employment of recent graduates is inefficient. That opinion seems to be prevalent among senior executives of Western small and medium-sized businesses. In their work, Trevor Hart and Paul Barratt note that in the UK, management of small and medium-sized firms often refuse to hire recent graduates. The basic reasons for their refusal are cultural and informational barriers, negative experience they had in the past when they did hire those who had just graduated to work for them (some of employers even take a negative “anti-graduate” attitude), possible turnover of HR and their unfitness for a particular business (Hart and Barratt, 2009). On the other hand, UK’s small and medium-sized businesses face a real problem of finding, engaging and keeping talented college graduates (Graduates for Growth, 2012). All issues aside, the UK shows a rather high percentage of graduates finding employment right after graduation. According to a study of the Higher Education Statistics Agency, in the past few years, more than 90% of graduates have found employment within 6 months after graduation (HESA, 2015). The problem gets solved due to the multifaceted approach of both public authorities and private individuals. A helping hand also can be found in useful literature giving advice on how to get employment (Barry, 2007).

The analysis of requirements that employers have for college graduates across the European Union shows that labor markets especially appreciate it when young specialists can double-job as high-quality researchers and employees, and when they display intellectual flexibility along the way (Garrouste and Rodrigues, 2014). In addition to that, there are peculiar national differences in institutional matters, specific features of education systems and, especially, in the level of education in different countries across Europe. Those cross-national differences affect the structure of labor markets in European countries (Wolbers, 2007. p. 189-210).

In Australia, young specialists trying to get employment encounter difficulties if they are graduates in life sciences, maths, and chemistry (Norton, 2013).

Russia also has a number of problem points in the targeted use of specialists trained at national universities. For some time lately, some enterprises have showed a waning interest in making employment contracts with graduates (Mishin et al., 2010).

There is an issue of making a clear-cut choice of a future profession when a person selects the form of studies and a university, and that previous choice affects finding employment within the preferred area of studies. A company called MAR Consult studied the nature of graduate employments in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Nizhny Novgorod and Samara. It found out that more than half of its panelists (52%) were not employed according to their college major, with the respondents naming low wages (29%), weak demand for their area of expertise (15%), small attraction of that area for the specialists themselves (9%) as the key reasons (Samsonova, 2015). In Moscow, however, that percentage was much lower.

Another important issue is a certain contradiction between requirements for young specialists in a social and economic environment, which is dominated by the necessity of finding new forms and methods of work and economic rationales in the present-day managerial activities, on one hand, and the actual professional skills, competencies and training of the graduates of today. The data obtained in a series of studies detect a critical need of employers in getting and anchoring on its staff a highly qualified managerial workforce who possess advanced competencies and working skills, in creating favorable conditions for their professional development and advancement (Frolova, 2014. p. 56).

However, the education system of today, as it undergoes modernization, is not fully ready to meet the needs of employers. At present, we see an active ongoing discussion of the many negative trends peculiar to the Russian higher school, and, in particular, of the issues related to a significant deterioration of the quality of professional activities of educators (Ilina et al., 2015. p. 165-171).

Especially, graduate employment is a major problem in Russian monocities (Kryukova et al., 2014. p. 258-267).

The current economic crisis further complicates the entry of graduates into the labor market. The employer wants the young employee who has just been hired to be able to appraise situations independently, to make sensible decisions, to put forward reasonable initiatives all the time, to come up with innovative ideas that can be used in the business process, to apply their knowledge in creating a new and unique value for the consumer, to be well versed in the technologies of applying advanced solutions developed by the industry. However, not only newcomers but even experienced employees would encounter difficulties in meeting this list of requirements. The result was a “battle for talent.” It broke out and is waged on all levels and in all areas of business.

Students themselves, when they are at college and when they embark on their careers, give different estimations of the hardships they face when entering the labor market. The basic one is lack of relevant experience. That factor is the one that imposes constraints on the efficiency of personal fulfillment of the recent graduate and on the development of their talent.

Both for employers and educators, just like for students themselves, one important thing today is the need for expanding individual educational and life trajectories of students (Kirilina, 2013. p. 21).

The university must become a systemically important link in that process. Universities that claim leadership in the training sector are tasked with a challenge of having not only a powerful research, academic and educational infrastructure, but also an integration infrastructure and technologies that would allow to raise the percentage of students employed in the area of their major to 100% (Bakhtina et al., 2015. p. 179-190; Vinogradova et al., 2014).

In addition to the challenges, there are good solutions that help with effective application of the working potential of college graduates.

Individual approach to the issue of former graduates' entry into careers is actively used, via informal connections among executives of different levels and areas of business, which increases the probability of graduates' employment (Bogatyeva and Kuranova, 2013).

Solutions are being found to the issue of quickly providing graduates with proper documents in order to facilitate their entry into the labor market (Bakhtina et al., 2015. p. 179-190). The quality of professional training improves, and the percentage of relevantly employed students and graduates generally increases when students learn the basics of time management.

Training of young HR specialists occupies a special place in the Russian education. Amidst current economic crisis, the efficient use of workforce is becoming more and more important, therefore HR managers are of increasing demand (Dolgorukova et al., 2015. p. 451-457). Among them, both experienced specialists and active and creative youngsters are welcomed, as the latter are more apt to initiate new projects and generate innovative ideas. The ability to work as part of a team, to communicate efficiently both at the professional and personal levels is highly appreciated: Contemporary psycholinguistic researches have proved that speech communication should be considered as verbal interaction of people in order to coordinate their joint activities (Kurbakova, 2013. p. 10-17). Those people tend to reveal their talent, original thinking and creative potential way before graduation, when they are still in college (Kirillov et al., 2015. p. 193-204).

Creative approach is required everywhere, from science and engineering to culture and arts. No doubt, every area of professional activities of today's college graduates has its special features, but there are a number of regular patterns that young specialists encounter when they strive to realize their creative potential as efficiently as possible (Shcherbakova, 2014).

Leaders of different levels and agencies or business entities regard those problems and finding solutions for them differently. That necessitates development of a multi-variant model of college student and graduate employment based on experimental data. To do so, a series of experiments were held, the data obtained from them were analyzed and trends in the modification of the object of the research have been discovered. In the future all of those can be used to develop an innovative model.

2. METHODOLOGY

To identify the nature of issues when employing college students and graduates, general scientific methods were applied. The analysis allowed categorizing study groups and identifying the nature of actions of their members in terms of employment during the entire period covered by the research, and the synthesis helped bring them all together. The historical method was applied to identify trends in the nature of the changes that employment of students (graduates) undergoes with time, and their development. Sociological methods (observation, survey: Interviews, questionnaires) were used to identify attitudes to social phenomena connected with employment, career and professional development

of students, and changes in their social status. Statistical methods were used to analyze the obtained data for the purpose of a well-reasoned substantiation of the conclusions regarding the genesis and resolution of employment-related problems.

The empirical base of the research into student employment amidst a complicated economic situation, both during studies and at the career onset, was comprised of two undergraduate study groups majoring in HR Management, Russian State Social University (RGSU): First group of 27 people (graduates of 2013) and second group of 25 people (graduates of 2015), both completed a full-time program. The study embraced 5 years (from 2011 to 2015).

At first, a 100% cover of each group was contemplated. However, for various reasons, an insignificant percentage (8%) of the students, or graduates, to be more precise, of the second group failed to provide information about themselves at the last stage of the research, which precluded appraisal of the nature of the changes in their employment. Gender-wise, in the first group, 89% of the respondents were female and 11% were male, and in the second group, 92% were female and 8% were male. The age of the panelists varied from 21 to 25.

The investigation into the nature of student employment covered three or four stages. The first group: Stage 1 - Senior-year program (12 months); Stage 2 - Undergraduate program (12 months), Stage 3 - 6 months after college graduation (in accordance with the English methodology used by the Higher Education Statistics Agency), Stage 4 - 2½ years (30 months) after college graduation (RSGU). The second group: Stage 1 and Stage 2 were the same as in the first group (12 months), and Stage 3 covered 6 months after college graduation.

3. RESULTS

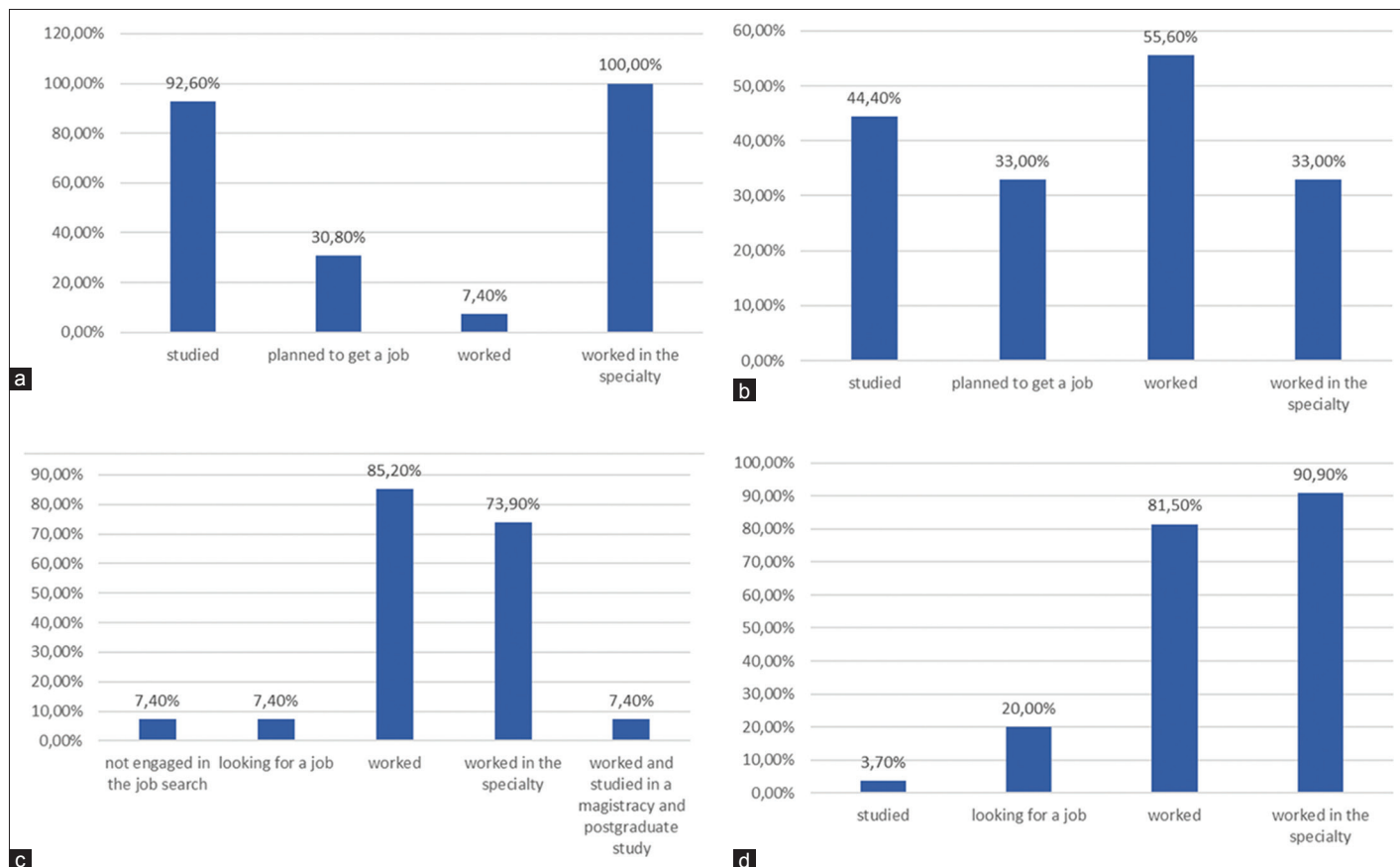
3.1. Charts Revealing Changes in the Condition of the Students (Graduates) Regarding their Employment, According to the Stages of the First Group

The study of students' careers at Stage 1 showed that after completing their senior year 7.4% of the students studied and managed to find employment relevant to their majors, basically when they interned, and the rest of the group, or 92.6%, did not work during their studies, with 30.8% of them planning to find a job during their undergraduate year (Figure 1a).

During Stage 2 of the study, we managed to find out that 44.4% of all students did their studies, and 55.6% students worked, in addition to their studies, in the course of their undergraduate year, and 33% had jobs relevant to their majors (Figure 1b). Another 33% were planning to get a job.

At Stage 3 of the study, 85.2% of the panelists were employed, with 73.9% of the respondents having launched their professional careers within the area of their study (Figure 1c). 7.4% were trying to find a job, and an equal percentage, 7.4%, were not looking for a job. All of the unemployed were female, and 25% of them were on maternity leave. 7.4% of the graduates were completing their

Figure 1: (a) The nature of employment of the students in the first stage of the study, (b) the nature of employment of the students in the second stage of the study, (c) the nature of employment of the students in the third stage of the study, (d) the nature of employment of the students in the fourth stage of the study



studies for a master’s degree or postgraduate studies, and were employed at the same time.

At Stage 4 of the study, 30 months after graduation, 81.5% of the former graduates were employed, with 90.9% of the panelists having jobs relevant to their college majors (Figure 1d), 18.5% unemployed (100% of them female), out of whom 20% were looking for a job.

Out of all unemployed, 60% were on maternity leave, and 3.7% were not working while completing their studies for a master’s degree.

3.2. Charts Revealing Changes in the Condition of the Students (Graduates) Regarding their Employment, According to the Stages of the Second Group

The analysis of the results of Stage 1 showed that after completing their senior year 16% of the students studied and managed to find employment relevant to their majors, basically when they interned, while the rest of the group, or 84%, did not work during their studies, with 48% of the respondents planning to find a job in the last semester of their studies (Figure 2a).

At Stage 2 of the research, we conducted a survey among the students, which included the same questions. As a result, we managed to establish that 32% of the students were studying, 68% of the students, when they were in their undergraduate year, were

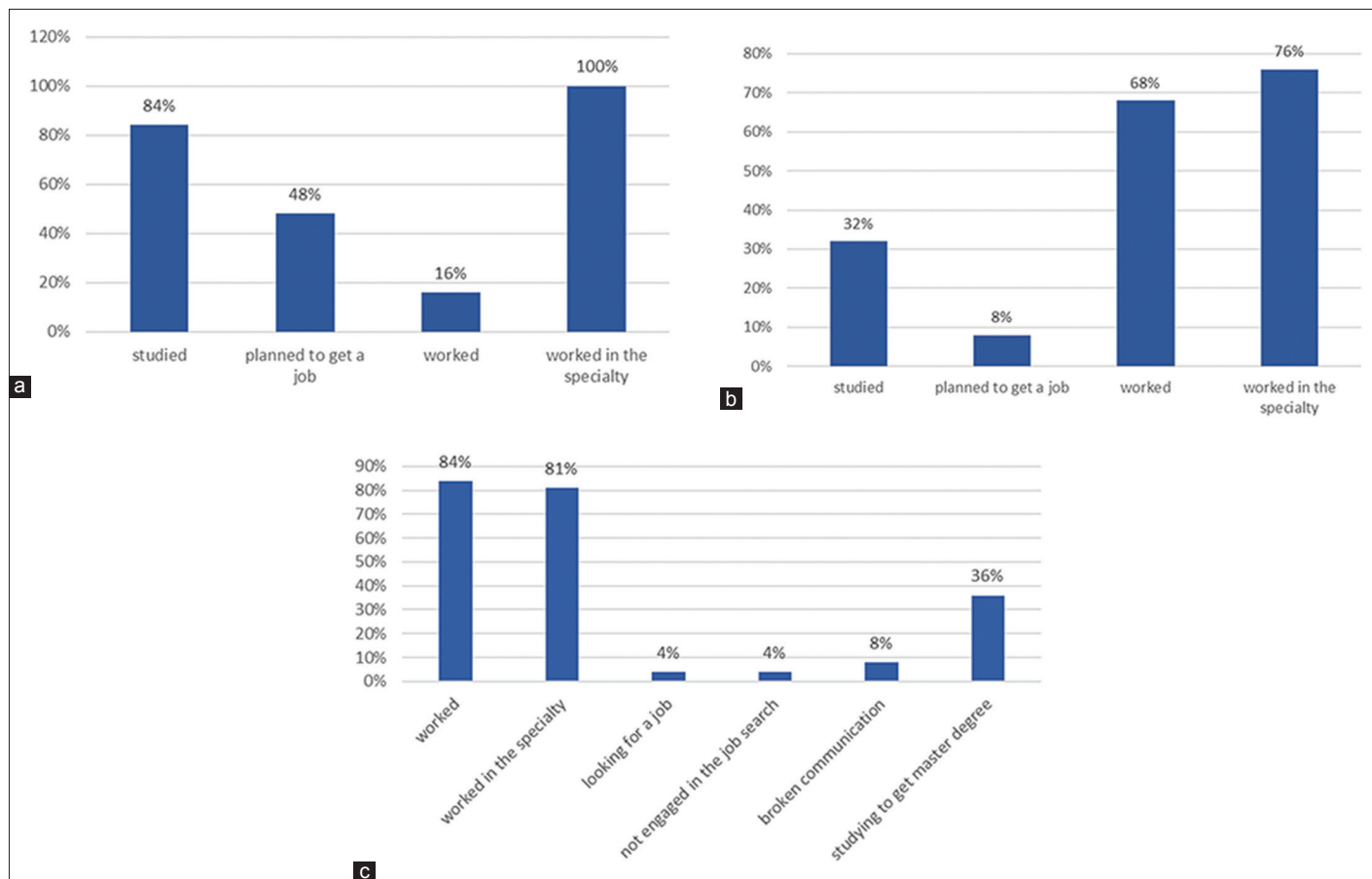
engaged in working activities, in addition to their studies, and 76% of those polled had jobs relevant to their majors. 8% were planning to get a job (Figure 2b).

It must be noted that many students, who worked outside the scope of their majors, were in the HR reserve pool of their employers, and would be appointed to positions related to personnel management. Nearly all of the students who were engaged in real work, concurrently with their studies, managed to transfer to individual tutoring schedules.

During Stage 3 of the study, we managed to establish that after college graduation 84% of the students found a job, with 81% of the respondents employed in the area of their study. 4% were looking for a job because they lost a previous one, and 4% were not engaged in any active search of employment. 8% of the panelists disrupted the communication (lost touch with the social strata of their group and university), which precluded getting authentic information on their employment. 36% of the graduates (100% of those employed in the areas relevant to their studies) decided to pursue a master’s program at their alma mater, the RSGU, majoring in HR management and combining studies and work (Figure 2c).

This is evidence of that panel group’s endeavor to develop continuously, of the sincere trust in the team of educators, and of the quality of training provided by the university.

Figure 2: (a) The nature of employment of the students in the first stage of the study, (b) the nature of employment of the students in the second stage of the study, (c) the nature of employment of the students in the third stage of the study



4. DISCUSSION

4.1. The Nature of the Changes in the Employment of the First Group

It was established during the study that students started to have a real interest in employment when they were in their senior year, and during the undergraduate year that interest grew significantly. It is evidenced by the number of students who found a job or were planning to get a job at those stages of the study (Table 1).

As a result, at Stage 2 of the study, more than half of the students multitasked, i.e. they worked and studied at the same time. The stats concerning major-related employment of the students reduced significantly at Stage 2, because more students started their professional careers and many were experiencing difficulties in finding jobs relevant to their area of expertise while still in college. The students, however, were striving to get a work experience in their preferred line of work and to boost their value in the labor market. At the same time, employers were mostly interested, first of all, in applicants who were ready to be employed fulltime (in the 5:2 mode). And, second, they required specialists with a track record in personnel management.

At the further stages of the research, most graduates (73% and 90.9%) managed to find a job relevant to their majors. It means that the students made an informed choice of their career when applying for admittance to the university and were reinforced in

that view after college graduation, keeping interest in that line of work. However, improved figures of student employment are directly linked to a more demanding workload and complications in the activities of college educators in view of the working students' switch to individual tutoring schedules.

Taking into account the fact that the studies of about half of the students were funded by the government, budget money was spent in a targeted manner and paid back (Kryukova et al., 2014. p. 258-267). The analysis of the data relative to unemployed graduates generally confirms that. The unemployed were all female, out of whom 60% were on maternity leave, solving the nation's demographic problem, and 20% were temporarily (structurally) unemployed.

It must be noted that only 7.4% of the graduates decided to pursue their development by applying to a master's program or a postgraduate program after having started their professional careers following college graduation. On the whole, that percentage was in line with that period in the development of the Russian economy and the labor market's need for finding replacements for senior positions in the future.

4.2. The Step-by-step Changes in the Employment of the Second Group

The analysis of the actions of the second group showed that the number of students who were engaged in studies only was

dwindling: At Stage 2 it fell to 32%, and at Stage 3 to zero, when the respondents graduated from college and embarked on their professional careers (Table 2).

In doing so, the students were trying to stick to specially designed individual development plans, similar to those that students in France prepare for themselves with the assistance of orientation services set up at every government-funded university and specialists in the area of focus of their future professional careers (Employment of Graduates in France, 2012).

During their undergraduate year, 68% of all students were employed, with 76% out of them having jobs relevant to their majors. This fact gives evidence of the students' increased motivation to work in their area of expertise, of the flexible attitude of university administrations and faculty to making arrangements on tutoring schemes with an emphasis on individual forms of interaction and studies, of the high quality of training of personnel management specialists at the university, and of the greater demand for young professionals in the labor market. Having graduated from the RGSU, a large proportion of them continued studies at a higher level, enrolling into a master's program, and mixing studies and work (36%). It means the students were willing to build their development in a more straightforward and persevering manner, to plan their careers from their university foundation. Practically all of them pursued their studies on a paid basis at the RGSU, which confirms their trust in the quality of training provided by that college. After graduation, the vast majority of the former students were working in the areas of their expertise (81%). Plans to get a job were also continuously dwindling, as more students were finding employment while still in college.

On the whole, comparative analysis of the nature of the changes undergone by employment in the both groups helped identify one local trend: A shift in the moment when students start their professional careers, from the graduation to the senior and

Table 1: Dynamics of the changes in the system of education — employment of the students (graduates) of the first group

The employment of the students	Stage 1 (%)	Stage 2 (%)	Stage 3 (%)	Stage 4 (%)
Studied	92.6	44.4	0	3.7
Planned to get a job	30.8	33	7.4	20
Worked	7.4	55.6	85.2	81.5
Worked in the area of their specialty	100	33	73	90.9

Table 2: Dynamics of the changes in the system of education — employment of the students (graduates) of the second group

The employment of the students	Stage 1 (%)	Stage 2 (%)	Stage 3 (%)
Studied	84	32	0
Planned to get a job	48	8	4
Worked	16	68	84
Worked in the area of their specialty	100	76	81

undergraduate years at the university. That pattern allowed most students to enter the labor market with guaranteed success, to find a job in their area of expertise and to start making their retirement savings from an earlier age (Pochinok et al., 2015. p. 161-168).

Career planning in the second group was better thought out and more goal-driven, with some of the students opting for employments with desired global brands. As a result, 11% of the graduates in that group managed to find jobs at leading international companies, such as General Electric, BASF, Philip Morris International, and their jobs fall within their area of expertise. When working while still in college, they were able to adapt to the corporate culture of those companies, and managed to make themselves more valuable to their employers. This local trend finds supportive evidence in a more systemic study of university student and graduate employment in Moscow, a large megalopolis. In 2011, temporary employment of students increased in volume, which helped 24,000 people find interim jobs that they were able to do in their free time from studies. Emphasis was placed on making an interim job an internship for the future specialist and a permanent employment for graduates (Zaugolnikov, 2013).

It validates the loyalty to the chosen major and its promising potential, and confirms the need for timely acquisition of working skills and competencies, mixing theoretical studies with hands-on experiences, giving a competitive edge to the students. Moreover, in the course of Stage 3, as they pursued their career development, 7.4% of the graduates from the second group were promoted, while no career advancement occurred in the life of anyone from the first group at Stage 3, and only at Stage 4, 30% of the subjects managed to raise their professional status.

A third local trend was the increasing preference of major-related jobs among students when they selected their first employment.

An investigation into the causal relationships in that matter of university student (graduate) employment helped discover a fourth trend: Expansion of individual tutoring programs for the students who enter the labor market before graduation and try to mix studies and work, with simultaneous complications in the activities of the faculty. It required from educators a more active involvement in pedagogic activities, use of student development technologies, for instance, coaching, and an attempt to ensure a more distinct interaction between academy, education and practice.

5. CONCLUSION

An abundant creative potential, vigor and agility, innovative ideas of college students and graduates encounter the problem of finding demand among employers who as often as not seek applicants with work experience. According to the study described above, the key to easing the tension in the matter of university graduate employment was an earlier entry of undereducated HR specialists into the labor market at the final stages of their studies.

The very dynamics of the students' entry into the labor marketplace is changing in time, as it is affected by a complicated situation in

economy and in the labor market. For instance, while the first group covered in the study started to embark actively on their career paths only when they were in their undergraduate year, the second group were more resolute in becoming aware of the labor market in their senior year and in launching their careers, and in their final year at school more than half of all students multitasked, mixing studies and a job. At Stage 3, the vast majority of all graduates managed to find work relevant to their college majors.

The study found out that the dynamics of the change in the outlooks of students and, subsequently, employees, is quite peculiar. While still in college, at Stage 1, students of the first group were faced with the challenge of finding employment, and only afterwards, of finding employment in their area of expertise. Students of the second group identified getting a major-relevant employment as their priority right from the start.

The key changes in the university student and graduate employment were manifested in the four identified local trends: A shift occurred in the moment of the entry of the students in their professional life from the graduation to the senior and undergraduate years in college; career planning became better thought out and more goal-oriented, with some applicants specifying their willingness to find employment with a desired global brand; an increasing preference was given to major-related jobs by students when finding their first employment; a wider use of individual tutoring programs for the students entering the labor market before graduation and mixing studies and work was observed, with simultaneous complications in the activities of the faculty.

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