

# Young Belarusians Choose Professions with Poor Employment Prospects

Belarusian State University organised an open house at the end of March. Many future secondary graduates had their first impressions of the most prestigious university in the country. However, it would be more useful for them to know about the threat of unemployment they will face after graduation, even after leaving such a prestigious institution.

Ironically, the labour market is showing a very low demand for professions which appear most desirable for students. The government itself has admitted to the alarming excess of young lawyers and economists, but the reaction remains very Soviet: many plans with no real steps to deal with the problem.

## Graduates Poorly Prepared for Adult Life

The best way to teach a student his or her profession is having them plunge into real work. Belarusian universities have a special element for all their students – an internship. In theory, every student is supposed to have several internships in order complete their degree.

Nevertheless, employers always complained about the detachment between academic study and practical work with its overly theoretical orientation.

Alexander Lukashenka has many times expressed his dissatisfaction with the lack of practical preparation in universities. But in his words this idea sounded more radical: "For two years they must drill science in our universities, institutions and academies, and for another two years they must work in specific enterprises". However, nothing has

changed since this statement was made in July 2012.

While senior students must get ready for a future job during their final semester, they face another serious academic challenge. Insofar as the state runs the overwhelming majority of Belarusian universities, the Ministry of Education claims as its own duty and responsibility to be accountable for students' level of education.

During these exams, the examiners consist of several professors and a representative of the Ministry of Education. They test students on how familiar they are with the major subjects of their chosen field.

This group, called the "state commission", also takes part in another important educational procedure: the defence of students' theses. During the summer of their final year, students are to give a speech before the state commission, illustrating the practical applicability of his research and reaffirming its main points and ideas.

The students themselves do not seem to be entirely happy with their education. When asked "what has your university failed to give you for pursuit of a job?" students have said they are dissatisfied in multiple areas. They have reported that they were not adequately prepared during their studies in improving their language skills (60%), managerial skills (55%), or specialist knowledge (33%). In other words, students themselves are well aware that today's system of higher education remains insufficient to find employment.

### **Not Everybody Gets a Place**

The real figures of youth unemployment in Belarus remains unknown because the official statistics account only for those who apply for a job to a state employment service. However, the survey shows that 70% of young specialists are dissatisfied with their first working places.

The crucial issue behind Belarusian youth unemployment is an [imbalance](#) between the needs of the labour market and the system of higher education.

Programmers remain the most sought-out professionals as well as construction workers, medical personnel, engineers and shop assistants. For instance, on 1 September 2012, 74% of all vacancies in the state employment service were for blue collar workers (construction, technical, manual workers). At the same time, the demand for accountants, lawyers, economists and HR-managers has been low for a long time.

In this context, the list of the most popular university specialities among students looks surprising. Approximately 45 % of all students gets a legal, economic or management education. At the same time, technical schools and colleges suffer an acute deficit of entrants. Programmers seem to be the only exception: this job attracts many students and they enjoy a [substantial demand](#) on the labour market.

The Highest Passing Grades in 2012 (according to the ministry for education)

<b>№</b>	<b>Speciality</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Passing Grade (out of 400)</b>
1	International law	Belarusian State University	374
2	International relations	Belarusian State University	369
3-4	International tourism management	Belarusian State University	366
3-4	World economy	Belarusian State University	366

5	Social communications	Belarusian State University	364
6	Foreign languages (English)	Minsk State Linguistic University	362
7	World economy	Francysk Skorina Gomel State University	360
8-10	Information Technology and programming	Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radio Electronics	356
8-10	Foreign languages (German)	Minsk State Linguistic University	356
8-10	Dentistry	Belarusian State Medical University	356

Design, law, computer graphics, and finance have become the most popular in terms of the sheer number of candidates.

In May 2012 Alexander Lukashenka complained: "Enough lawyers, economists and historians; there is no place to put them". In August 2011 he made a similar statement. The problem which comes with such an excess of these potentially unemployed students has become apparent, even at the very top.

### **Many Words with Little Effect**

To solve any problem one must look at its roots. Belarusian students choose law instead of medicine and management instead of construction because these occupations seem more financially attractive to them.

In order to lift the prestige of these "necessary" jobs, the Belarusian government must do its best to provide potential workers and engineers with decent wages.

Or they could follow Germany's example and grant tax

exemptions to the companies that conclude contracts with technical college students while they study and give them a working place after graduation.

Giving universities a free hand can work as well. There are no grounds for thinking that a governmental clerk can predict the situation on the labour market with such precision, that he should be entitled to decide how many lawyers or engineers the universities should educate for the future labour market.

Belarusian officials have also proposed specific plans for dealing with the problem, but for now they are unable realise them. In the beginning of 2012, vice-premier Anatoliy Tosik came up with an initiative to double student fees for "unnecessary" specialities. Although the minister for education supported the plan, it has yet to be implemented.

The same destiny awaited the idea of reducing the number of places for students studying to become economists, lawyers, managers etc. Indeed, it has been the anticipated reform that is to hit the upcoming 2013 university admissions cycle. However, the minister of education Syarhei Maskevich announced that the 2013 admissions cycle would undergo no serious changes except an increase in the requirements [for a passing grade](#).

In other words, governmental officials have decided not to change their plans concerning the urgent problems they have already recognised. Unlike many other countries where higher education administration and the state are separate, the Belarusian government has the full capacity to interfere with the educational process, but it still prefers to do nothing and instead continues to preserve a largely [Soviet system of education](#).