

# INTED **2016**

10th International  
Technology, Education and  
Development Conference

7-9 March, 2016  
Valencia (Spain)

# CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS



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# YOUTH OF KAZAKHSTAN: CURRENT PATTERNS OF PROFESSIONAL CHOICE

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## Abstract

This article is part of the research project "Ideological and moral values of youth at the present stage: assessment of state, problems and solutions" (2013-2015). In the article the most significant results are presented which characterize the changes that took place in those years in professional self-determination of young people in connection with economic and social changes of Kazakhstan. The aspirations of young people and their actual steps in choosing the path after school, especially the motivation to form an idea of the future professional activity are considered. Current patterns of educational guidance and professional choice of Kazakhstani youth are analyzed.

Sociological research of the features of professional choices of young people in all its versatility opens up new opportunities and prospects in the study: the balance between supply and demand in the labor market. As statistics show that the current labor market in Kazakhstan is characterized by an imbalance between supply and demand of professionals. Experts of HeadHunter Kazakhstan (job search engine), based on the analysis of vacancies and CVs uploaded to hh.kz show that in professional fields such as "top management", "law and accounting" is much higher than the number of vacancies available. Among high school graduates competition in the medical profession is preserved - an average from 2 to 9 people, as well as in humanities - economic and juridical areas. The less competition is observed in the specialty "Museology", "Protection of monuments", "Foreign philology", "French language", "cultural studies", "technology of processing of wood", "Physics", "astronomy", "geology", " mineral exploration", " library science", " veterinary medicine".

Does this mean that the professional choice of young people is "alarmingly" unrelated to the labor market needs.

What objective and subjective motives guided the youth in a professional choice? According to the methodology of the study, the sample in the years 2013-2015 was 1000 respondents. The survey covers all groups of young people in Kazakhstan - the sample represents young people by gender, age, nationality, marital status, presence of children, level of education, type of employment, degree of religiosity, level of material situation of households and type of settlement. The study results are processed and analyzed using custom software SPSS for Windows (version 21).

Keywords: higher education, youth, professional choice, professional career, HEI choice, choice of specialty.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The younger generation of 14-29 year olds is basically a "product" of social changes of recent years. In the last decade, Kazakhstan has developed a new model of educational behavior and employment of youth. On the one hand, there is the growth of "investment" in human capital and education. In the minds of young people and in society there is a formed opinion on vocational education as a second-class education. Most young Kazakhs seek higher professional education, and soon turn to the postgraduate and doctoral education – master degree and PhD. It moves the transition to a permanent and full-time employment to an older age. On the other hand, access to the labor market and gaining first work experience by the studied specialty or otherwise become increasingly widespread, training in the profession, even during studies, at much earlier age than it was before. Despite the high rates of students enrolling in higher education programs, there is a low level of employment of HEI graduates by their profession. The aspirations of young people in high schools of diplomacy, business, economics and law, led to an oversaturation of labor market by specialists of this profile. In the educational environment the number of applicants to the technical educational programs has decreased. Subsequently, reducing the prestige of the engineering and technical specialties, the country faced with a shortage of qualified technical personnel for the needs of the economy. To date,

the training of qualified technical personnel for the new economy is a national priority, which led to an increase of prestige of the technical profile profession among young people and in society as a whole. The study of patterns of a professional choice of young people in all its versatility opens up new opportunities and perspectives in the study: firstly, the balance between supply and demand in the labor market, and secondly, the professional preferences of young people and the determinants of their formation. In Kazakhstani realities among employers (consumers of educational services) there is a high value of formal confirmation of the educational level - higher education diploma. In this regard, the importance of updated analysis of the factors influencing the professional choices of young people, their interrelations and interaction, as well as finding ways to regulate selection in the interests of society.

## **2 THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL CHOICE**

According to the Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, a profession can be attributed to the incorporated type of the cultural capital, which can be acquired only through certain amount time and effort, and which is inseparable from its carrier. Behind every profession there is a definite socio-cultural type of professional, way of life, a hierarchy of value orientations, its social status [Bourdieu, 1985]. In this aspect, in the study of patterns of a professional choice of young people, it is important to set apart social and professional orientation. Social orientation is a projection and determination of the young man's place in society, a choice of the desired social status, ways to achieve it, and professional orientation is the choice of attractive and interesting for oneself profession among all the others [Toschenko, 2005].

Within the concept of social stratification of Weber a professional choice was addressed more often through "prestige" category [Weber, 1990]. According to Parsons a choice is defined as the result of a rational process based on a comparison of its available resources, quality, and degree of readiness with the requirements of the intended profession [Parsons, 1968]. But in reality, an individual is not always rational and does not tend to adequately assess its capabilities. Maslow within the theory of professional development updated the subjective aspects of the choice of profession - "self-realization", "self-fulfillment" [Maslow, 2008]. Fukuyama as the choice of profession understands the link of contradictory connection of economy and education. Education allows an individual to make a choice by self-evaluation, analysis of the work content of various professions and testing them, and the economic aspect reflects the real effectiveness of this choice in the field of success in the real industry [Fukuyama, 1992].

Choosing a profession in terms of human capital should be a choice of a place for investments that will bring higher returns (income) in the future, a target factor of the choice made can be expected salaries for different specializations. Selecting the investments' volume takes place on the basis of comparison: the expected return should be higher than expected costs (direct and alternative) [Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1975]. Basic models developed under this concept, explore the impact of the number of years of education on income [Mincer, 1958], and the choice of the education level depending on the amount of family capital [Coleman, 1988; Becker, 1964]. From the point of view of the theory of adaptation [Schultz, 1975] and risk insurance [Kodde, 1986], a diploma of a certain profession can also increase income and employment guarantees of a young man on the labor market.

Titma emphasizes the social nature of professional self-determination, linking it with the development of the labor division and the reduction of social differentiation [Titma, 1975]; he focuses on the possibilities of managing this process primarily through the institutions of education and employment [Titma, 1982]. In researches of educational and professional trajectories of young people directed by Shubkin differentiation of professions by creative nature of the work was used, at the same time there was a higher continuity between occupation of parents and children in professions that provide "more room for creativity" [Cherednichenko, Shubkin, 1985:138-140]. Cultural resources (assets) can be stored and transmitted, but not as easy as the property, but through the using and receiving status rewards in the labor market [Macdonald, 1995:49], that is active development of a professional career.

### 3 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

#### 3.1 Higher education and professional preferences of Kazakh youth

Kazakhstani youth attaches a great importance to higher education as a means of realizing other goals in life. 56.6% believe that getting a higher education is a key prerequisite in order to achieve material wealth by high income, 56.8% - to obtain a widely demanded profession, 50.5% - to make a professional career. Higher education is not essential to find friends (13.4% indicated the importance of higher education here) way to change the place of residence (only 4.5%) and extension of studies (3%). Consequently, for today's youth higher education is a necessary condition for successful social biography and considered as an investment for the future status position. Youth believes that a higher level of education makes the individual more competitive in the labor market and is a key resource for future employment (Figure 1).

A good education is one of the important life aspirations of Kazakhstani youth. 40.7% of Kazakhstani people aged 18-29 had already (according to self-assessments) received it, and 47.8% expect to do so. However, 8.5% of young people consider a good education as inaccessible for themselves (Fig. 2).

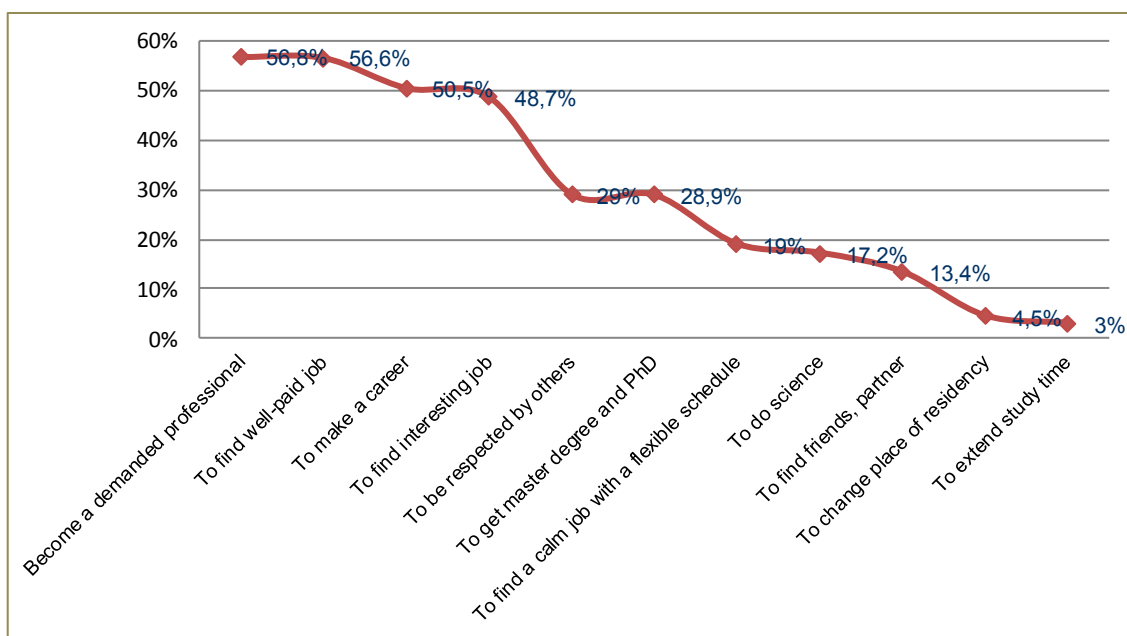


Fig 1. The objectives of getting higher education according to evaluation of youth, N=1000.

To talk about the profession sought by today's youth, first of all it should be interesting. 93.6% of young people say that they either already have or they can get a job for an interesting profession. They are oriented towards a prestigious profession, to a lesser degree: 20.6% say they have it, and 69.9% think that they can get it. Even smaller number of young people said about the possibility of building a professional career.

It should be noted that the fewer young people would start own business than to achieve professional success. While 5.7% of the today's youth already have it, and 64.4% believe that they can do it, business attracts them to a lesser extent than an interesting and prestigious job and career. The highest frequency rate of young people who find it impossible for themselves to achieve success in the business sphere (18.7%) (Fig. 2).

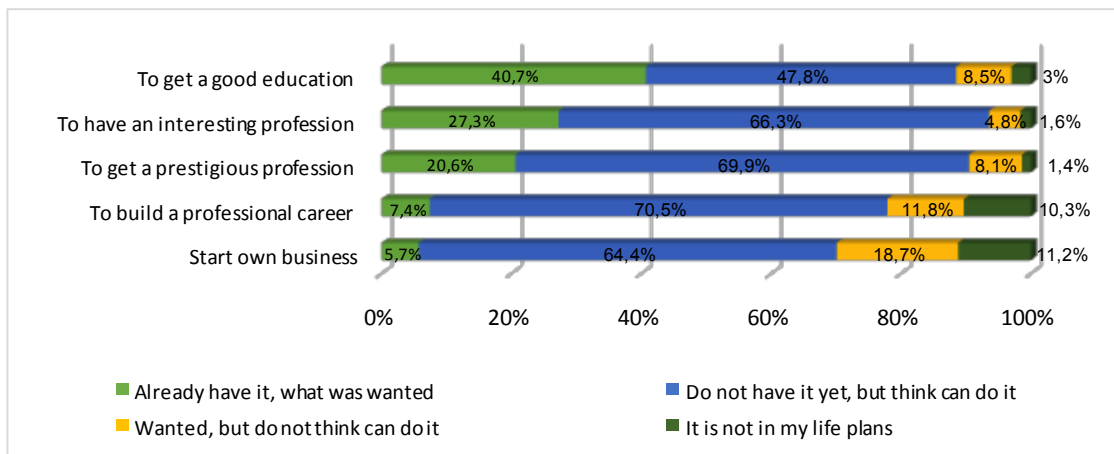


Fig 2. Settings of Kazakh youth in educational and professional spheres, N=1000.

The vast majority of the younger generation wants their professional activity to be well paid - about 69% of the respondents say so. Another 66.8% of young people want their profession to be interesting. 32.8% of young Kazakhstanis set out factor of working conditions as essential in assessing their workplace. 22.8% of young people would like to not only receive a good salary, but also to achieve professional recognition. Another 19.6% of young people want their profession to benefit the whole of society, and 16.6% of the representatives of the new generation dream of a diverse, creative and initiative professional activity.

However, among the youth there are also those who do not bind life goals to the professional activity: 12.1% of young people expressed their desire that profession, above all, could give a lot of time left for other activities (leisure, family and school). Another 5.8% of the younger generation, many of whom do not have a high level of education, want their professional activity was effortless and easy.

The special value for today's youth is the opportunity to work in profession that they love. At least, to achieve this goal want almost all respondents - 98.9% of young people, however, 6.5% believe that it is unlikely for them to achieve the realization of this desire.

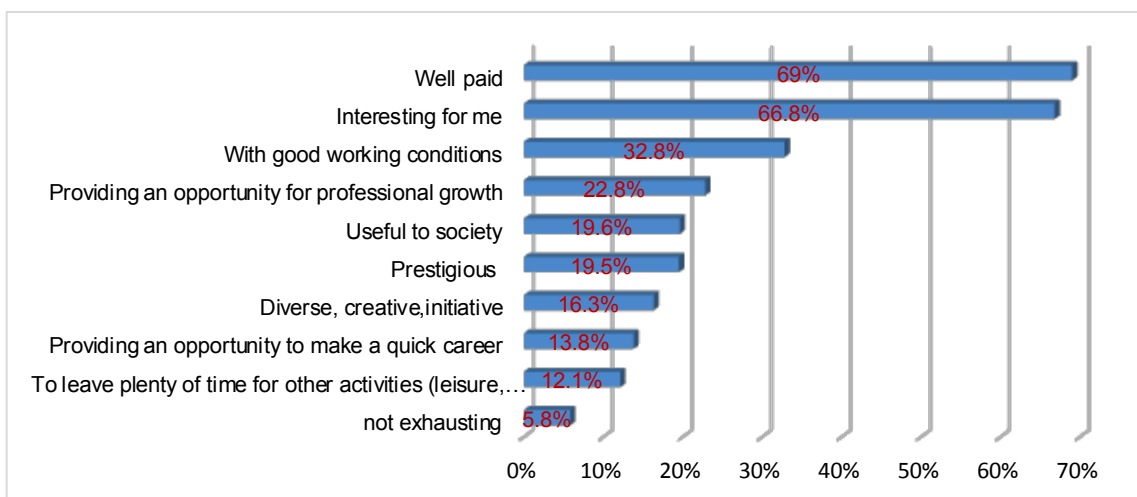


Fig. 3. Responses to the question: "What requirements must meet the profession, which would fully satisfy you?", N=1000.

### 3.2 The criteria for professional and life successes

Kazakhstan's youth considers the skills and qualities that are in varying degrees, typical for professionals as more important prerequisites for achieving professional success. 66.4% of the younger generation believes that one of the necessary conditions, which helps to get a job on the



desired profession, is presence of high qualification and knowledge. This criterion is especially important for those living in large cities (78.9%), holders of higher education (72%) and with medium and high income (65-69%). In terms of gender the presence of high qualification and knowledge are equal for both young men and women (64.6% and 68.6%, respectively). In all youth age groups percentage is above 60%, the scope does not exceed 4%.

Opinion about the importance of personal qualities such as discipline, diligence, responsibility is more prevalent among women (44.3%), a relatively wealthy (52%), of an "older" age group - 25-29 years (39.9%). According to the youth as a whole, the figure is 42%.

35% of the representatives of the new generation are ready to work with full dedication: in educational cut youth with primary education can be distinguished (26.6%) and secondary (41.5%), in the other groups in the context of education interest rates are almost equal. For young people who are in poverty, it has zero importance, and for the wealthier ones is an important factor (45.2%). In terms of age it can be seen a linear dependence, the highest rate of 37.1% in the age group of 25-29 years is gradually reduced to 31.5% in the group of 15-19 years.

"The ability to get along with the boss" (34.6%), "initiative and enterprise" (32.8%) and "possession of a specialty, which is now highly valued" (32.6%) are important in obtaining good job for every third representative of the younger generation.

In the perception of youth having the links and acquaintances in employment for a good job is losing attractiveness: particularly among young people a higher level of education (19.8%), living in large cities (17.7%), with average and higher income (20, 5%), aged 14-19 years (21.7). In the total sample percentage is 23.2%.

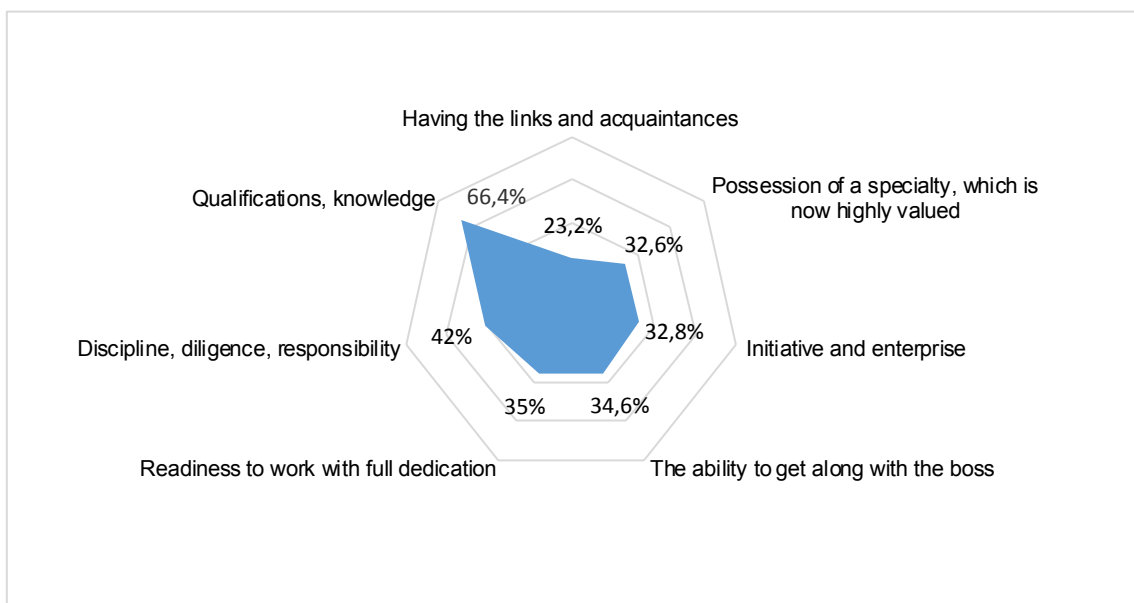


Fig. 4. The criteria for professional success, according to youth, N=1000.

As can be seen from the data in Figure 5, for majority of young people (62.2%) key factors for success in life are hard study and work. The importance of such factors as the presence of influential relatives and friends gradually decreases with increasing of education levels and welfare. With age, conversely, number of believers that "success is the result of hard study and work" decreases with 64.1% aged 14-19 years to 56.7% in 25-29 years.

An important criterion in the evaluation of the work is wage for 57.9% of young people, and its thoughtful and interesting character for 42.1%. In all age categories of youth prevails attitude to work, as to a way of achieving material well-being. The highest percentage at the choice of judgment "the most important - is how much is paid", is found in the age group of 20-24 (60.1%).

As the level of education increases in the evaluation of work the significance of wage decreases and thus the significance of its content component grows.

Among young men frequency indicator at the choice of judgment" the most important - is how much is paid" slightly higher than among young women (59.2% and 56.7%, respectively).

Regardless of the type of employment, the vast majority of young respondents are willing to get a high-paid job, and most importantly in the work its wage for them. Special contrast is characteristic for people employed in NGOs: 81.8% of respondents who work in non-governmental organizations say wages as the main criterion for work and only 18.2% are willing to spend a significant part of life in the interesting work.

With the rise of the well-being orientation of young people towards an interesting work is increased: 36.4% of young people with financial difficulties are willing to spend a significant part of the life doing an interesting job, even if wages are low, among the wealthier youth interest rate on this position grows up to 71.4 %.

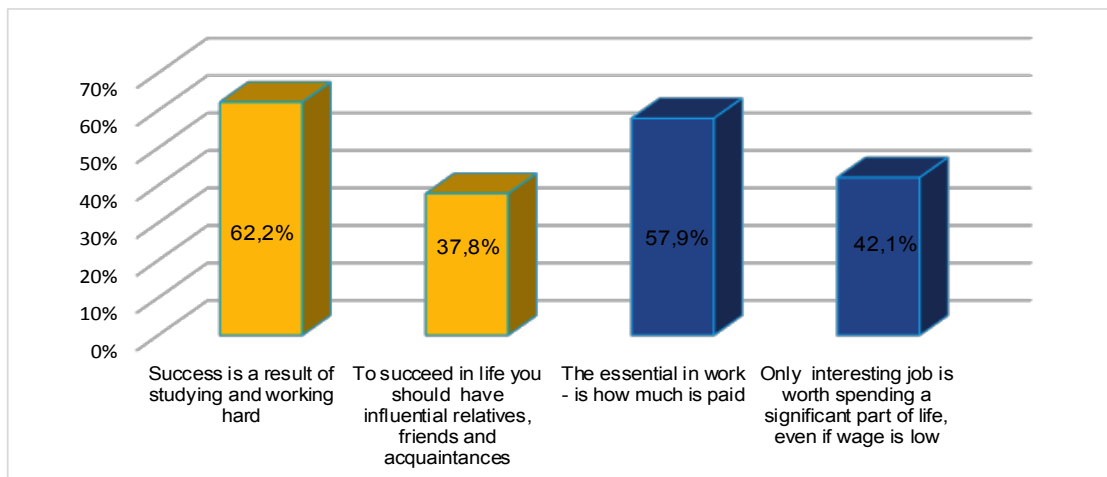


Fig. 5. Youth value judgments on success in life and work, N=1000.

### 3.3 Representations of the prospects of the profession

Representations of the prospects of the current / acquiring profession often determines the future career plans of young people: "Continue to study / work in this profession?" Or "Choose a different profession?". Therefore, in the course of research young respondents were asked the following question: "What your profession gives you?"- for young workers and "What your specialty that you are acquiring now gives you?" - for studying young people. Answers to these questions are presented in Fig. 6.

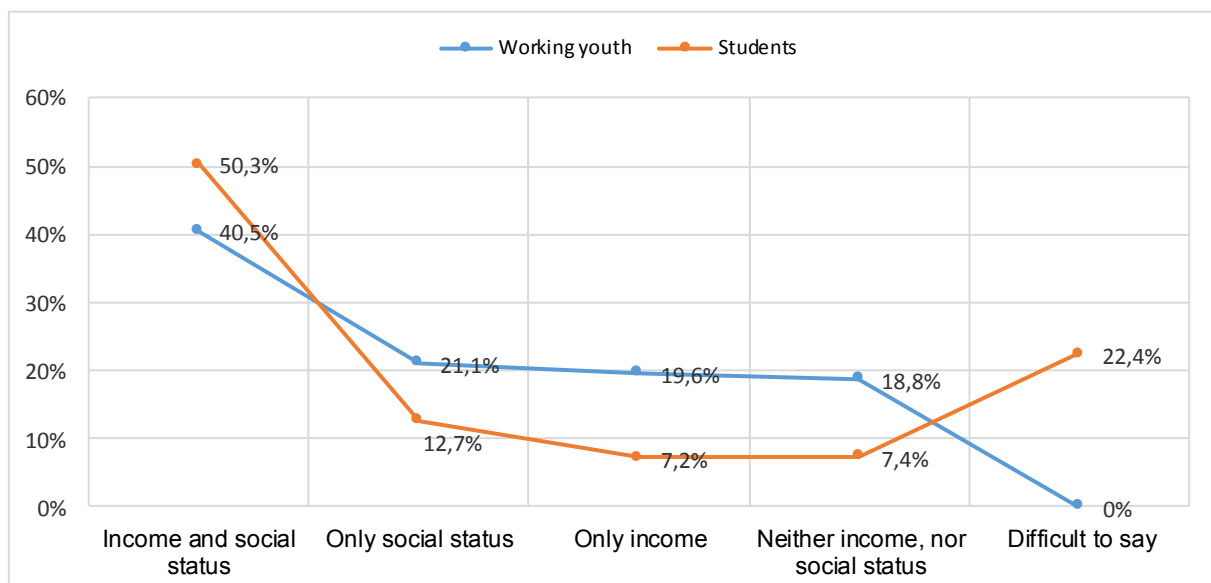


Fig. 6. Evaluation of prospects of current / acquiring profession, N=1000.

Optimistic estimates are characteristic to youth that is studying now rather than to young workers. So every second student estimates obtaining specialty as a prestigious and highly profitable (50.3%), while a similar assessment gives 40.5% of young workers. 18.8% of working young people define their profession as the low-income and non-prestigious, this position is held only by 7.4% of studying young people. Such positions as a prestigious profession and highly profitable profession, individually, more pronounced among working youth (21.1% and 19.6%, respectively) than among studying young people (12.7% and 7.2%, respectively). The lack of practice in the profession influenced the fact that 22.4% of studying youth found it difficult to assess the prospects of their future profession.

Do the figures stay the same for the different socio-professional groups of youth? Thus, in the context of different social and professional groups, the highest percentage of position "income and social status" characteristic for the young engineers and technicians - 80%. Relatively to a lesser extent evaluate its profession as a highly profitable and status young workers and young entrepreneurs (56.2% and 54.5%, respectively), but the young representatives of the latter are characterized by high rates of selecting "Only social status" (27.3 %). One in four young workers of factories, mines, construction sites said the profession is not forward-looking, which does not give any income or social status, and only 18.8% see it as highly profitable. Young medical professionals, in general, assess their profession as a very promising: highly profitable and status - 58.2%, and only status - 32%.

The differences in the evaluations among young members of the same professional sphere can be explained by different specialization and the level of educational. So in medicine, there are highly qualified doctors and nurses; in education there are university professors and primary school teachers, often having only a secondary special education. But doctor and nurse represent different career choices, with different segments of the labor market, income, level of prestige. Representatives of these professions working in the same institution, often belong to different social strata.

Table 1. Evaluation of profession in the context of young representatives of different socio-professional groups, N=1000.

What your profession gives/ will give you?	Which socio-professional group do you represent?					
	Workers of factories, mines, construction sites	Engineering and technical workers	Humanitarian and creative intellectuals	Service workers	Medical workers	Entrepreneurs
Income and social status	56,2%	80,0%	68,4%	60,0%	58,2%	54,5%
Only social status	-	6,7%	26,3%	20,0%	32%	27,3%
Only income	18,8%	6,7%	-	11,4%	8,1%	9,1%
Neither income, nor social status	25,0%	6,7%	5,3%	5,7%	1,7%	9,1%
Difficult to say	-	-	-	2,9%	-	-

Our data show that the prospect of a profession influences the re-evaluation of the correctness of a professional choice. Thus, the young people of Kazakhstan, assessing profession as a highly paid and prestigious to a lesser extent expressed a desire to change their professional choice (13%). Also in this group, the percentage of those who are confident in the correctness of made choice of profession is significantly higher than in the others -63.4%. For young people income is more important rather than the social status of the profession. Thus, only 28.3% of Kazakhstani youth evaluating their profession as a prestigious, would not change their professional choice. In a similar position share of young Kazakhstanis evaluating their profession as a highly profitable is 55.9%. And in the category of young people defining their profession as a prestigious, but not highly profitable is the highest frequency component wishing to change their professional choice (35%). The uncertain zone includes young people who are studying / working on non-prestigious and low-income professions. In this group 65.7% of young people found it difficult to answer.

Table 2. Influence prospective of profession to re-evaluation of professional choice, N=1000.

If there was a possibility:	Response options to the question: «What the profession that you work in/studying gives you?» (number of respondents, %)			
	Income and social status	Only Social status	Only Income	Neither income, nor social status
Would choose again the specialty I am studying	63,4%	28,3%	55,9%	20,0%
Would not choose the specialty I am studying	13,0%	35,0%	23,5%	14,3%
Difficult to say	23,5%	36,7%	20,6%	65,7%

The main reasons for wanting to change the choice is the difficulty of employment, low income, low prestige of the profession, a difficult and not interesting nature of the profession.

### 3.4 Criteria for selection of HEI and specialty

In youth when choosing a HEI the top three important criteria includes the prospects of receiving quality education (61.4%), an interesting profession (51.7%) and low tuition fee, opportunities of fee-free education (46.8%). It is indicative that quality education in the public opinion of young Kazakhs is projected by certain universities and their "brand" The three less important criteria include recommendations of close friends and relatives (27.1%), providing dormitory (26.1%) and the presence of the military department (22.5%).

Table 3. Criteria for choosing HEI, N=1000 (в %).

Response options	Very important	Important	Not very important	Not important at all
Prospects of receiving quality education	61,4	36,3	1,6	0,7
Interesting specialty	51,7	42,6	4,3	1,4
Low tuition fee, opportunities of fee-free education	46,8	42,3	8,6	2,3
Prestige and rankings of HEI	37,4	46,3	12,7	3,6
Possibility of studying abroad additionally and getting dual –diploma	33,4	37,4	23,9	5,3
Learning more than one foreign language	31,3	47,8	17,3	3,6
Comfortable, close proximity to the residence place	27,1	37,4	27,5	8,0
Recommendations of close friends and relatives	26,1	49,3	20,8	3,8
Providing dormitory	22,5	32,3	29,5	15,7
Presence of the military department	20,9	29,9	26,4	22,8

What kind of orientation dominates among the Kazakh youth in choosing a profession: social or professional? In general, they are characterized by pragmatic considerations: the possibility to get high income (53,3%), the prospects of employment (45,5%), the prestige of the profession (44,2%). However, the importance of substantive component of future profession is gradually increased. So

almost every fourth representative such factors as an interesting and creative nature of profession (25.1%) and the opportunity to fulfill own potential (23,1%) are important.

Findings of a sociological research conducted in 2015 among the Kazakh youth can be interesting, indicating that in recent years, the number of young people who dream of a civil servant career increased twice. 30% of young people consider public service relatively attractive direction for a successful career building, whereas in 2012 only 17%. Those who find attractive jobs in the major national companies and corporations show stable percentage (22%). In the top of the rankings of youth preferences remains the financial and banking sector, which got 37% of young Kazakhs, only 10% are willing to work in the education system. It should be noted that number of those wishing to work in public administration is greater among young men and residents of small towns than among young women and residents of large cities.

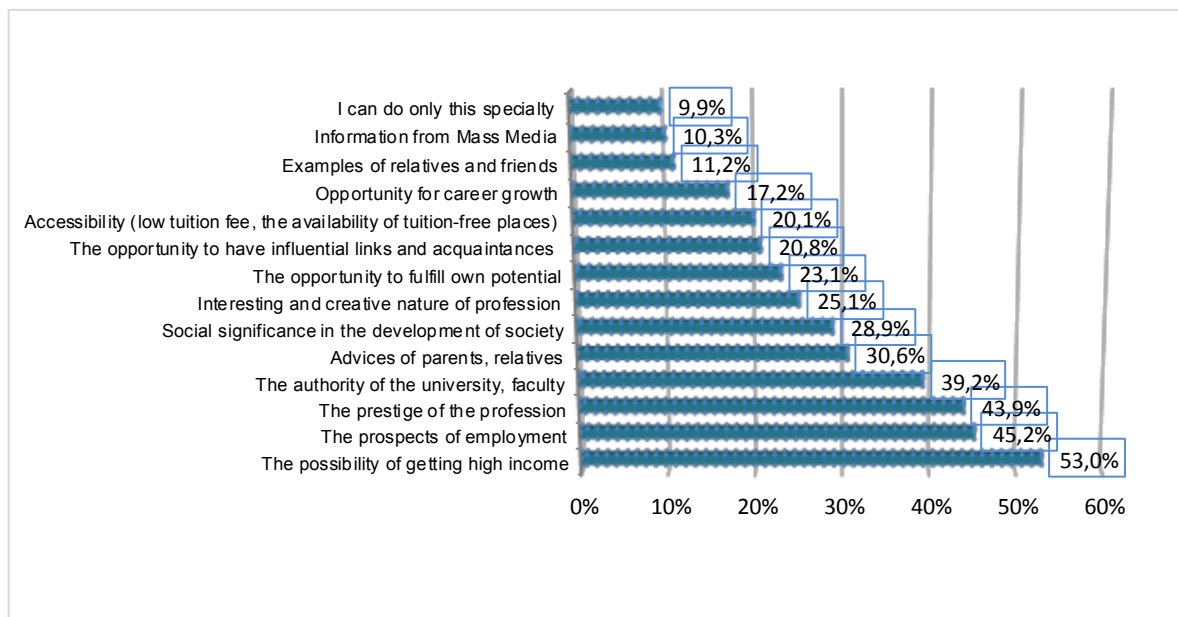


Fig. 7. Motivation to choose a specialty, N=1000.

The specificity of the structure of motives for choosing the specialty of Kazakh youth is the fact that in its social behavior they are guided not only (and not so much) by personal views, ideas and interests, but are under the influence of the values and models of educational and professional behavior that are prevalent in their social environment. Almost one third (30.7%) of young people in choosing a specialty is guided by the advice of parents and relatives. It should be noted that for 28.9% of young people important factor when choosing a specialty is its social significance in the development of society.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

- As our research has shown, young people in Kazakhstan attaches great importance to higher education as a guarantee of future professional and life success. Namely quality education that is projected by certain universities and their "brand" among youth is a priority.
- Profession sought by young people, should be well-paid and interesting. However, when there is a choice well paid job is a preference. Young people are less focused towards a profession, involving social status, but low incomes. However, with the growth of the level of education the importance of wage decreases and, accordingly, increases the importance of the content part of the profession. Interest in starting own business among young people are low, many people think that it is not achievable.
- Important prerequisites for employment and professional success are considered availability of competencies and knowledge. Such judgments are characteristic to the young residents of large cities, those having higher education and have medium and high incomes. The priority of the links and relatives to achieve professional success persists among young people from rural areas and with low level of education.

- In the evaluation of the profession, student youth is characterized by optimism rather than working youth. However, the lack of experience limits the ability of a student cohort in a full assessment of the profession future.
- Government initiatives to improve the prestige of the professions of engineers and technicians among the youth and society, are giving its results. High scores are expressed by young engineers and technical workers, most of whom (80%) define their profession as a highly profitable and having a high social status. Low scores are expressed by young workers in factories, mines, construction sites, and entrepreneurs. Almost one in ten (9.1%) young entrepreneur evaluates the profession as unpromising.
- The prestige of a career civil servant is increasing. In recent years, in the number of young people who want to work in public administration has increased twice. Aspirations of young people to the financial and banking sector stay stable. The education system attracts them to a lesser extent.

In general, the professional choice is determined by pragmatic motives such as the possibility to make high profits, employment prospects and prestige of specialty. An analysis of the dynamics allows stating the importance of improving of the content characteristics of work among young people. Young people began to pay particular attention to developing, interesting and creative nature of the profession. The specificity of the motives of vocational choice of Kazakhstan's youth is the fact that in their choice they are guided not only by personal aspirations, but by educational and professional behaviors surrounding social environment, in particular by relatives.

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