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**Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future**

**PROFESSIONAL SKILLS OF FUTURE YOUTH WORKERS:  
STANDARDS COMPLIANCE VS EMPLOYER'S EXPECTATIONS**

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***Abstract***

The article presents the results of longitudinal study devoted to competencies of future youth workers. This is a relatively new direction of professional training, so there are difficulties with the selection of priority areas, profiles, and academic disciplines within this specialty. The difficulties are compounded by the fact that in this area there is no officially approved professional standard. At the same time today the training of specialists of this profile is gaining momentum, as the government pays special attention to work with the younger generation. Within the longitudinal study, there was a tendency to decrease the number of graduates who got a job on the profile of the education received; hence, the preparation of future youth workers is imperfect. To find out the reasons for this phenomenon, a survey was conducted among employers being the leaders of youth policy organizations. Five competencies were identified that employers consider to be the key ones. Three out of five allocated competencies relate to the skills of information technologies, so one of the stages of the study was to study the level of the formation of relevant skills among students. The authors showed the existing gaps and deficits between the expectations of employers and the skills of students, analysed possible causes. Based on the results of the study, conclusions and recommendations were formulated, the authors of the article outlined ways to reduce these deficits. This knowledge can improve the efficiency of the educational process at the University.

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**Keywords:** Employer's expectations, information and communication competence, standards compliance, youth worker.



## **1. Introduction**

The sphere of youth policy is one of the actively developing branches of professional activity, that is why the shortage of personnel is very acute here. The preparation of bachelors and masters in the sphere of youth policy is regulated by appropriate educational standards, in which very much attention is paid to general cultural and general professional competencies, sometimes to the detriment of narrowly professional competences. A youth worker, who must be able to resolve industrial and interpersonal conflicts, to assist in social and psychological adaptation of young people, sometimes he himself experiences serious difficulties in the working team with adaptation, and with building business relations. In order to train professionals in demand on the labor market, it is necessary to monitor regularly the expectations and needs of employers, as well as monitor the level of employment of graduates, and in the latter case, we are interested only in those graduates who work in their specialty and have not changed their sphere of activity. Unfortunately, sociological studies on the employment of graduates show that between 18% and 39% (depending on the specialty) of young specialists work in sectors that are not related to the education received, hence the efficiency of the educational process in the university is 60-80%. Among graduates of pedagogical universities, the percentage of those who are employed not by their specialty is even higher. In a market economy, such a result can be assessed as extremely negative, since it indicates significant financial, temporary, personnel and other losses of both for the university and for the young person (Talanov, Baburkin, & Lymarev, 2016). In the longitudinal study, which was conducted in the period from 2013 to 2018, we tried to assess the dynamics of changes in the requests of employers, identify the most demanded professional competencies of the youth worker, the level of formation of these competencies among our graduates and offer socio-educational and socio-psychological technologies, aimed at eliminating deficits and gaps between the requirements of employers and the current level of competence among students of the department "Organization of work with youth".

## **2. Problem Statement**

The problem that the authors of the article are studying lies at the intersection of two different themes: first, the training of specialists, the increase of their professional competence, and second, the work with youth, the formation of a professional motivation among young people.

The issue of professional training of future specialists of various training directions is actively discussed by modern researchers. This is due to the fact that today we are teaching students what they need tomorrow. Schantz points out this contradiction and says that we need to look into the future and understand what competencies will be required for the future specialist (Schantz, 2012). To be successful and effective, any professional will have to learn throughout life, and researchers emphasize the need for targeted selection and management of the knowledge system so that the costs of training could be paid off and could make a profit (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2002). The most effective models of training, according to researchers, are practical-oriented programs (Dreier, 2008; Chitrao, 2014). Among the scientists there is no single point of view as to what skills and skills will ensure professional success. Thus, some researchers (Tolegenovaa, Tunguskovaa, Naurzalinab, Zhubanazarovaa, Baimoldinaa, & Adilshinova, 2015; Andreyeva, 2006) distinguish emotional intelligence or emotional competence. Other

authors put information and communication skills or ICT competence at the forefront, the same point of view is followed by the leaders of the program “Youth of Europe” implemented by ERASMUS + (2015).

Murakas (2010) conducted a study and identified the competencies that a youth worker should have:

- Specific knowledge and skills in working with young people,
- Skills of strategic planning,
- Social skills,
- Personal qualities (honesty, openness, empathy, creative thinking);
- Ethical values (tolerance, promotion of intergenerational dialogue, gender equality).

Teaching young people and generally working with young people is difficult both from the theoretical and practical point of view, because the age difference between a teacher and a student does not allow one to fully understand the values, motives and goals of each other (Bass, 2005; Naurzalinaa et al., 2015). Nevertheless, teachers are looking for effective technologies for educating young people (Zaitseva, & Kiseleva, 2017) to form both motivation and competencies that will enable young people to succeed in the profession and in life (Urđan & Turner, 2007, Uyanika & Alisinanođlu, 2014). Unfortunately, many studies emphasize fragmentation, one-sidedness in the formation of professional skills, whereas real practice requires a holistic, systematic approach to the formation of professional competencies (Sundburg, 2001).

### **3. Research Questions**

In the course of research, the following points had to be worked out:

- What are the main requirements for the professional abilities and skills of graduates from potential employers?
- How have the requirements of employers to graduates changed over time, what competences can be considered as mandatory for successful activities in the sphere of youth policy, and which only as the wish of a particular employer?
- What is the level of the formation of the basic (key) competencies (highlighted by employers) among the graduates of the department “Organization of work with youth”?
- What are the deficiencies in the professional skills of students?
- What changes can and should be made in the process of training of high-class specialists of the future?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to assess the level of compliance with the requirements of the educational standard regulating the training of specialists in the sphere of youth policy, expectations and inquiries of employers in this sphere of professional activity.

This goal was specified in the following tasks:

- To identify employers' requests to the level and quality of professional competence of graduates of the department “Organization of work with youth”;

- To determine the most demanded from the point of view of employers' professional competence of a specialist in working with young people;
- To assess the level of the formation of these competencies among the graduates of the department "Organization of work with youth";
- To offer socio-educational and socio-psychological technologies aimed at eliminating deficits and gaps between the requirements of employers and the current level of competence among students of the department "Organization of work with youth".

## 5. Research Methods

In order to study the requests and expectations of employers, questionnaires, interviews and a focus group were used. To assess the degree of formation of professional competence of graduates, testing and case-study were used. All the results obtained in the course of sociological research were analysed using mathematical statistics methods, which ensures the reliability and validity of the formulated conclusions.

## 6. Findings

Comparison of the number of students enrolled in 1 course, who graduated from bachelor's degree in 4 years and who found employment in the graduates' specialty, makes it possible to conclude that the percentage of people who joined the ranks of employees in the sphere of youth policy has decreased. The resulting conclusions are illustrated in Table 01.

**Table 01.** Comparative analysis of the dynamics of admission, graduation and employment in the sphere of youth policy

Period of study	Number of applicants	Number of graduates	Number of employed in the profile
2009-2013 academic year	21	20	11
2010-2014 academic year	23	26	10
2011-2015 academic year	24	23	12
2012-2016 academic year	20	23	6
2013-2017 academic year	19	13	4

The number of graduates does not coincide with the number of applicants, since there is a transfer from full-time study to extramural and vice versa, as well as restoration from academic leave and transfer from other universities. Being university teachers, we are worried by the trend towards a decrease in employment by the specialty. This means that applicants make a choice unconsciously, haphazardly, focusing on the prestige or popularity of the specialty, not always understanding the tasks that they have to solve as professionals. An interview with successful graduates confirmed our conclusions: the conscious choice of the direction of training correlates with participation in public organizations, with trips to profile camps of a youth activist. This experience allowed such students to get a job on part-time basis while still

studying at a university, therefore, volunteer and social activities are an indispensable condition for the formation of a high-profile and popular specialist in the sphere of youth policy.

At the next stage of our research, we conducted interviews, questionnaires and a focus group with leaders of youth policy organizations in order to highlight the most important competences and professionally important skills of a specialist in working with young people. Here are the five main competencies that should be formed, according to employers, among specialists in the youth sphere.

1. Skills in the information environment: a confident user of Internet and social networks, skills of information promotion in social networks (Social Media Marketing); skills to write articles, reports; photography skills; skills of information search in different sources.

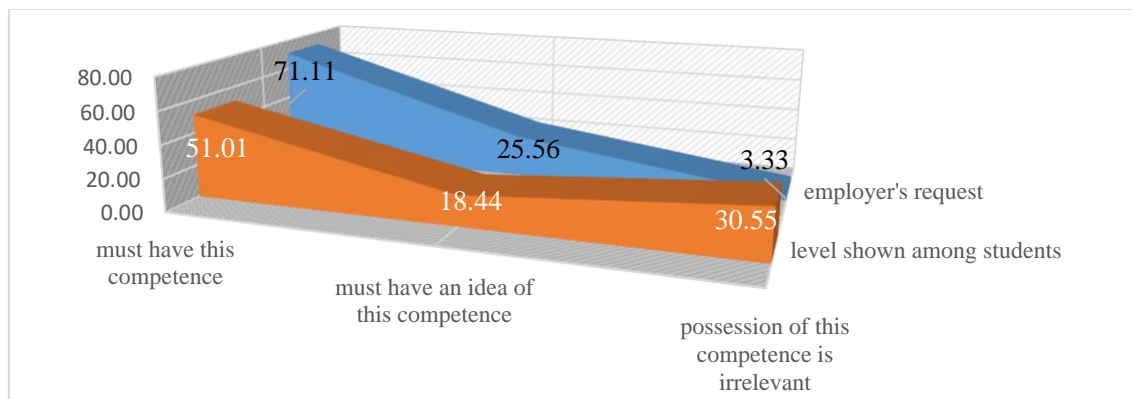
2. Skills in working with presentation materials, knowledge of various formats for preparing presentations (MS PowerPoint, Slides, Prezi, PromoShow, AppleKeyNote).

3. Skills of graphic design: structuring of a material, visualization, stylistics of registration of materials depending on an audience.

4. Skills of work with state and municipal financial systems.

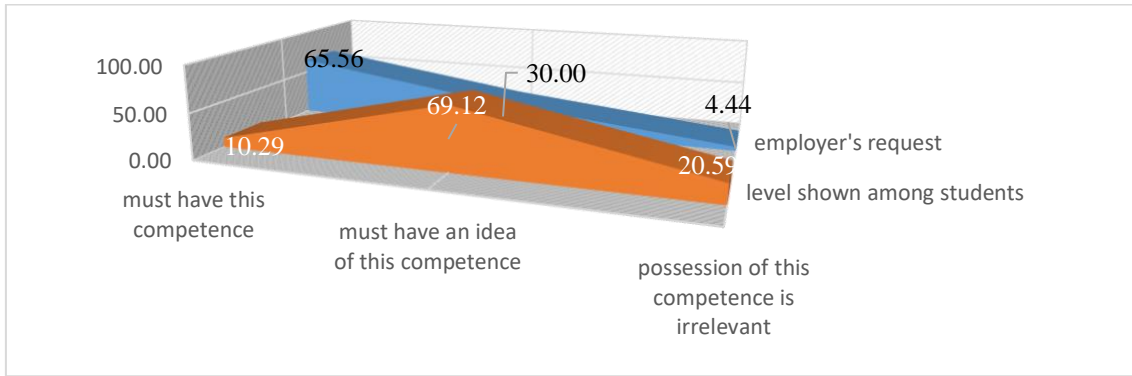
5. Skills of work on organization of activities and promotion of children's and youth public associations.

The three competencies relate to the possession of ICT skills, so in the next stage, we used tests and practical assignments to assess these skills among students, having previously specified with employers, at what level the relevant competence should be formed. The results are shown in Figures 1-3.



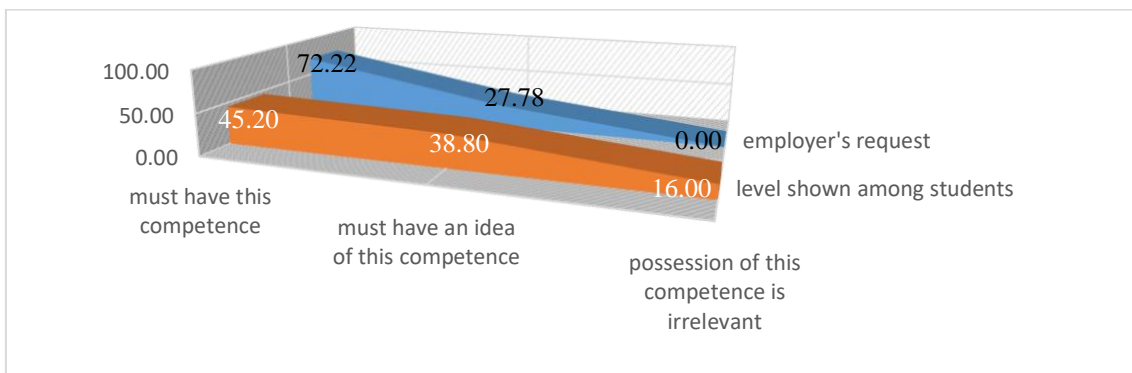
**Figure 01.** Skills in the Information Environment

So, in total, 97% of employers consider the working skill in the information environment to be very necessary, while the actual level of students is about 70%, so the deficit is 27%, therefore, about a quarter of graduates will experience difficulties in professional adaptation, because they lack basic skills.



**Figure 02.** Skills for working with presentation materials

96% of employers consider it very important to work with presentations. The level of student presentation graphics skill is about 80%. Although the deficit is only 16%, but employers want to see the highest level of possession of this skill, and students show only a general idea of it, which, in the long run, can create difficulties and problems in the professional sphere.



**Figure 03.** Graphic design skills

All employers unanimously consider the skills of graphic design as an obligatory skill of the modern specialist, whereas the students demonstrated the formation of this competence only at 84%, thus, the deficit is 14%. Similar to the previous skill, there are significant differences in the expectations of employers regarding the professionalism of graduates and the real level of competence among students.

The data obtained during the research show the discrepancy between the requests of employers and the requirements of the educational standard. In the current educational standard, little attention is paid to the formation of ICT competencies. The standard is designed to form research and organizational competencies.

## 7. Conclusion

Based on the study, the following conclusions can be made:

1. The system of training for future youth workers should be built in the complex and interaction of the following structures: school - youth public associations - university - employer.

2. In order to set an effective training of personnel who meet the requirements of the labor market, it is necessary to monitor the request of employers at least once every three years.

3. To form the necessary professional competencies, students need to share their abilities and skills with professionals, therefore employers should act as teachers in the training process and leaders of practice.

4. When developing professional standards, including those related to youth work, it is necessary to rely on research of professional competencies of successfully working specialists and future specialists, and also it should be developed taking into account the requests of employers.

5. It is necessary to include training courses in the training program for youth workers; that will create information and communication competence, the ability to motivate and support young people in public activities, as well as personal qualities that will enable the future professionals to be successful.

6. Conduct scientific and practical conferences, round tables with the participation of employers, within which to inform about the requirements of the future profession and labor market.

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