

Social Prestige of Scientific and Pedagogical Specialists in Russia and Europe: Paradoxes of Subjective Perception of the Profession

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Abstract The article presents an assessment of the level of social prestige of the academic profession in Russia and European countries. In literature, a thesis about the crisis of the academic profession prevails. The empirical part of the study is based on the results of in-depth interviews with academic staff in Europe (45 informants, 2016–2019) and Russia (120 informants, 2019–2021).

Informants from European universities note the high prestige of the profession, but also point out its decrease from the end of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century. One of the reasons is the ignorance of society about the professional activities of scientific and pedagogical workers and their official duties, which are much broader than the transfer of knowledge to students. In addition, socio-economic factors, insufficient funding for higher education, multitasking and multidisciplinary functions of academic staff, and the consumerist attitude of students to the educational process were named as reasons for the decline in prestige. In contrast to their foreign colleagues, Russian informants noted an increase in the prestige of the profession in recent years. At the same time, this trend does not apply to all scientific and pedagogical staff, but only to those who meet high qualification requirements. Informants from Russian universities note a positive and respectful perception of the academic profession by both the general public and the social environment.

Keywords professional prestige, social image, social prestige, social status, social reputation, sociology of education, higher school, higher educational institution, research and teaching staff, university, teacher, scientist.

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**Problem
Statement**

In developed countries, university research and teaching staff are usually classified as the upper middle class due to their priority role in transmitting cultural norms, values, standards, and a particular lifestyle [Fadeeva, Fedoseeva, 2015. P. 154], as well as their strategic importance for the country's development in the medium and long term.

In this regard, it is not irrelevant to examine university academic staff in more detail. There is no single collective portrait of an academic — instead, there are multiple completely different images. Some may imagine a person with a low income who is overburdened with teaching responsibilities, has no time left for research, and is far behind the global research agenda. Others, on the contrary, may think of an expert with a busy professional life and recognition in the global academic community, who participates in and leads grant-funded research, whose opinions are respected by colleagues and authorities, and whose work results are important to society. In contemporary higher education, both of the types described above can be found (as well as many variations between these two poles). Meanwhile, the first image cannot serve as a positive role model for those who plan to pursue a career in academia, whereas the second image is attractive enough for this purpose. In this respect, the level of social prestige of the academic profession is extremely important as it plays one of the key roles in attracting high-skilled professionals to academia [Gribovskiy, Sorokin, Efimova, 2020].

Between the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, higher education institutions (HEIs) have undergone a significant transformation. While the medieval and classical universities were rare and one-of-a-kind phenomena (in Europe and especially in the Russian Empire), since the second half of the 20th century there has been a global trend towards massification of higher education. In post-Soviet Russia, the 1990s-2000s saw exponential growth in the numbers of HEIs and students [Pugach, 2020. P. 75]. Although the number of university teachers did not grow at the same high rate, the elitism of their profession, supported by attributes of exclusivity, began to recede into the past.

In contemporary Russia, the academic profession is not among the most widespread. Over the past decade, the number of faculty has fallen from 325,000 in the academic year 2010/2011 to 223,000 in 2020/2021 [Borodina et al., 2017. P. 57; Gokhberg et al., 2021.

P. 92]. During the same period, the proportion of young university teachers declined significantly from 38.9% to 10.7% [Borodina et al., 2017. P. 57; Gokhberg et al., 2021. P. 92].

The change in the number of academic staff may be due to a decrease in the prestige of the profession. In its turn, the perceived prestige of the profession is directly influenced by financial, symbolic, and political factors.

This study aims to answer the following question: what is the level of prestige of research and teaching staff as perceived by Russian and European university teachers? The objectives of the study are as follows: 1) to conceptualise the notion of professional prestige; 2) to establish how prestigious the academic staff of Russian and European universities consider their profession; 3) to identify factors that, according to the academics, reduce or enhance the prestige of their profession; 4) to suggest ways to improve the prestige of the academic profession in today's university.

**Literature
Review**
Conceptualising
the Notion of
Professional
Prestige

When examining occupational prestige, researchers compare it with related and identical categories, such as social status, social reputation, image, and brand [Mantulenko, Zotova, 2020]. As a sociological category, the social prestige of a profession is formed based on a subjective assessment made internally (perception and self-evaluation by those who practise the occupation) and/or externally (attitudes of the general public towards this group). The image of a professional is also shaped by the image of the occupation conveyed in the media [Köller, Stuckert, Möller, 2019]. Studies into the prestige of socio-professional categories often use the concepts of social well-being [Toshchenko, 1998; Rubina, 1996] and subjective well-being [Diener et al., 1999], which are based on objective indicators of social position: a salary level in relation to the average salary in the region/city, working hours, structural opportunities, authority, etc. [Freidson, 1988].

The social standing of a profession is characterised by a number of stratified properties, or status attributes: social resources and authority (power, means, contacts, and other rights necessary to perform relevant activities); various types of remuneration; cultural valuation of status and corresponding activities (prestige and social standing); market value or deficit of status activity-value in economic and other social markets; characteristics, costs, and investments needed by status holders (education, skills, time, etc.) [Meyer, Hammond, 1971]. A profession can be evaluated not only by the level of prestige but also by the emotional attitude towards it — whether it commands respect [Majchrowska et al., 2021].

Summing up, the social prestige of a profession is determined by tangible factors (the level of remuneration in comparison with

other professions and the level of financial independence of the employee), as well as intangible ones (social reputation, image/brand, conditions for self-realisation and development). The prestige of a profession in a particular society has a strong influence on the motivation of university applicants and their parents who are choosing an occupation: it may cause an influx of lower-performing school leavers into fields of study that are considered less prestigious.

In the public perception, university teachers are not only professionals who prepare young people for their careers but also mentors who share practical professional and life experiences in addition to theoretical knowledge [Istomina, Samoylova, 2016]. University teachers have influence on the quality of education, the reputation of a particular university, as well as the effectiveness of developing moral value orientations in students [Reznik, Yudina, 2021]. Consequently, the reputational responsibility of university teachers plays a significant role in evaluating the social prestige of their profession [Ibid.]. The prestige of the teaching profession in higher education is assessed as medium, while the level of its complexity is considered high [Istomina, Samoylova, 2016].

The social prestige of the teaching profession is determined by society's comparative assessment of the social significance of a teacher's work, the level of respect, and the recognition of the importance of their work [Gruntovskiy, 2015]. High social prestige (respect and social standing) is based on strict ethical standards and demanding academic requirements for professional qualification. In higher education and science, the requirements for the professional qualification level and relevant competencies are constantly increasing [Freidson, 1988].

HEI faculty are responsible for teaching students and developing in them universal cultural competencies and the ability to act in unstable conditions and respond promptly and adequately to the challenges of the future. It is therefore expected that the teaching profession has a high social status, commands respect from students, and is duly rewarded. However, Russian and foreign studies into students' perceptions of the prestige of the university teaching profession show that its social status is undervalued [Martínez de la Hidalga, Villardón-Gallego, 2018; Schneider, 2018; Il'ina, 2017; Efimova, 2015].

When considering the prestige of the teaching profession in higher education, it is also important to note that university teachers usually combine teaching with research [Havlík, Koťa, 2011]. In this case, we should consider not only the prestige of the teaching profession but also that of being a scientist and researcher. Research data shows that university teachers receive their main income from research, with the remainder allocated to teaching [Prakhov, Rudakov, 2021; Prakhov, 2019]. Consequently, there is a difference

between the social prestige of teachers who are actively involved in research and those who are not. The focus of this article is on the former group.

The Social Prestige
of the Russian
University Teacher
in the Past and
Present

During the 19th — 21st centuries, the social prestige of science and higher education in Russia experienced ups and downs. While before the Russian Revolution the position of professor ensured the noble status and associated privileges, in the crisis-ridden 1920s, the academic intelligentsia found themselves in extremely difficult circumstances. In the Soviet Union, particularly from the 1950s to the 1970s, the academic profession had a high social prestige. This was due to increased funding for science and higher education, advanced research infrastructure, better housing conditions for holders of graduate degrees, and many other preferences, which all affected the public perception of the academic intelligentsia. Status symbols that indicated belonging to academic staff imposed certain requirements on university teachers, making them conform to the existing public image. In this way, their social prestige was enhanced even further.

A review of the literature on the prestige of the university teaching profession in post-Soviet Russia shows that public attitudes towards academics were dominated by scepticism. In the 1990s, there was a sharp decline in the prestige of the profession. The decrease in its attractiveness at that time followed the decline in the social value of science and higher education, and, according to expert estimates, the prestige of the profession has not yet recovered to its previous level. Studies on this topic focus on the factors lowering occupational prestige and the manifestations of low prestige. Rozhdes-tvenskaya [2019] notes the connection between the declining prestige of the academic profession and the relatively low remuneration of research staff in contemporary Russia. Murskih [2020] attributes the fall in prestige to the decline in the value of education as perceived by the public. Academic careers are less attractive in contemporary Russia than in the Soviet period when science was strongly supported by the state. This leads to ageing of the workforce, brain drain, increased feminisation of research and teaching personnel, and depopulation in science [Dushina, Ashcheulova, 2013].

In today's society, research jobs are increasingly perceived as interesting and offering the prospect of creative fulfilment and international mobility, but also as challenging and intellectually demanding. Yet it is the financial attractiveness of the academic profession that largely determines its prestige to the outside observer. Despite the efforts made, the competitiveness of the academic sector is still questionable: relatively low salaries and the quite low social status of academic staff lead to an imbalance in the age structure in the short term [Yudkevich et al., 2016].

In order to relate the subjective concept of the social prestige of the profession to the objective reality, attention should be paid to the pay statistics of research and teaching staff. The average salary in Russia (as of July 2021) was 52,355 roubles;¹ for university teachers,² it equalled 101,232 roubles (in January — December 2021).³ These numbers are often criticised because they do not reflect *median* salaries and are obtained mainly by increasing salaries to the managerial staff, while the average teacher at a regional university may continue to earn 40,000–50,000 roubles. *‘On average, salaries do not ensure middle-class living standards, even for university teachers in high academic positions’* [Yudkevich et al., 2016. P. 174]. Furthermore, *‘young university teachers are in an even worse situation: their salaries are lower than the average salary in the economy’* [Ibid.]. Dissatisfaction with remuneration makes teachers search for additional sources of income. As a result, the most common practices are teaching beyond the assigned teaching load at the same university, concurrently working at another university, tutoring, or getting employment outside academia [Kiryushina, Rudakov, 2021].

Balatsky [2014] examines the declining attractiveness of the university teaching profession due to the ‘depletion of academic rent’ and notes the negative impact of this trend on universities’ workforce capacity. The crisis of contemporary Russian higher education is attributed to the faculty’s rapid ageing, the outflow of young teaching staff to other areas of employment, the reluctance of master’s graduates to build a career at HEIs, declining general interest in doctoral studies which serves as a ‘factory’ of research and teaching staff of the highest qualification, decreasing efficiency of the doctoral education, and a long process of professional formation for young teachers and obtaining a PhD [Ezroh, 2019].

Experts from academia confirm that the most talented graduates leave the academic sector to pursue other career paths, which leads to the ageing of the academic workforce.⁴ However, in-

¹ Srednemesyachnaya nominal’naya nachislennaya zarabotnaya plata rabotnikov v celom po ekonomike Rossijskoj Federacii v 1991–2021 gg. [Average monthly nominal salaries in Russia in 1991–2021]: https://rosstat.gov.ru/labor_market_employment_salaries?print=1

² Only state- and municipally-owned higher professional education institutions were taken into account.

³ Srednyaya zarabotnaya plata prepodavatelej obrazovatel’nyh organizacij vysshego professional’nogo obrazovaniya gosudarstvennoj i municipal’noj form sobstvennosti po sub’ektam Rossijskoj Federacii za yanvar’-dekabr’ 2021 goda [Average salaries in the state- and municipally-owned higher professional education institutions in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation for January–December 2021]: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/media-bank/04-21-05.xlsx>

⁴ Interview with G. Kantorovich, Vice Rector of the National Research University Higher School of Economics: <https://www.hse.ru/news/1163623/17147416.html>

indicators of doctoral education in 2021 showed 'a reverse of the negative trend in the training of research personnel: the total number of doctoral students reached 90,200 (+7.0% compared with 2019), and enrolment in doctoral studies was 28,000 people (+12.4%)'.⁵

The 2013 reform of doctoral education made it the third level of higher education following bachelor's and master's studies and allowed doctoral students to complete this level without defending a dissertation. After almost a decade, the year 2021 saw the comeback of the model that emphasises the research component of doctoral studies and includes a mandatory pre-defence of a doctoral thesis in the study programme.

University teachers' working conditions vary widely depending on their city, the type of HEI in which they work, the subjects they teach, and the level of their involvement in research. Therefore, to get an objective picture of the situation, we should also examine the subjective views of university teachers about the prestige of their profession.

Methodology The empirical data for the study was drawn from semi-structured expert interviews with 120 Russian teachers and 45 teachers working in European universities (the UK, France, and Germany), all of whom were involved in research besides teaching.

In Russia, we interviewed research and teaching staff from six leading universities participating in Russian Academic Excellence Project 5-100, including National Nuclear Research University (MEPhI), Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, St. Petersburg National Research University of Information Technologies, Mechanics and Optics (ITMO), Tyumen State University, National Research Tomsk State University, and Far Eastern Federal University. The specific feature of this category of university teachers is that they are obliged to engage in research activities next to instruction.⁶ The authors understand that these academics' perceptions of the prestige of their profession may differ significantly

⁵ <https://issek.hse.ru/news/634783433.html>

⁶ The contemporary higher education system in Russia is highly stratified and includes: 1) two universities 'of federal significance': Lomonosov Moscow State University and Saint Petersburg State University; 2) a group of leading HEIs that have been granted the status of national research or federal universities and participate in Project 5-100 and Federal Academic Leadership Programme 'Priority-2030'; 3) leading field-specific and research universities that do not participate in the higher school development programmes but are important actors in Russia's research and educational landscape (the European University in St. Petersburg, the Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology, New Economic School, Innopolis University, Sirius University of Science and Technology, etc.); 4) other HEIs, which are almost invisible in the research field but perform important educational functions in the context of regional labour markets.

from the views of teachers at other universities, that is, our sample is not representative of the entire population of higher education teachers. However, we believe that referring to the experiences of the leaders is relevant and productive, as they are a benchmark for the entire higher education system in Russia.

The Russian university teachers were interviewed face-to-face in the period from 2019 to 2021 at their workplaces.⁷ The teachers at European universities were interviewed in the same format in the period from 2016 to 2018. Informants were selected taking into account gender and age balance. Despite the diversity of the European higher education landscape, the HEIs from the three selected countries belong to the traditional multidisciplinary research universities (the universities in Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, and Sheffield, UK; the universities in Paris, Nice, Toulouse, and Rouen, France; the universities in Cologne, Passau, Erlangen — Nuremberg, and Bremen, Germany). In this respect, they are similar to the leading Russian universities selected for the study. At such universities, combining research and teaching is a prerequisite of the employment contract, whereas most academic staff at universities of other categories are usually predominantly engaged in teaching.

Results
Social Prestige
of the Academic
Profession:
Russian
Informants'
Opinions

As expected, Russian academics' views on the social prestige of their profession showed a certain degree of variation. The 'optimists' among them prevail over 'sceptics', which is understandable since the participants of the study work in the country's leading universities and are involved in research projects. We will first consider the group of sceptics, followed by the 'optimists'.

The factors contributing to the low prestige of the academic profession mentioned by the informants can be divided into several categories:

- global trends in higher education development;
- socio-economic specifics of how Russian universities function;
- intra-university 'rules of the game'.

(1) Global trends in higher education development

Many informants realise that the role and place of the university as a social institution are changing over time. The global trends of informatisation, digitalisation, and increasing accessibility of knowledge are calling into question the function of the university teacher.

⁷ Some of the interviews were conducted online because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

‘In my parents’ and grandparents’ time, the university teaching profession was considered prestigious. Nowadays, it is not. This is a global trend. The decrease in its prestige is due to the availability of information. Learning should be a lifelong process and should not be limited to university education. A university is more a place for socialisation than for acquiring knowledge. Other social institutions [perform] similar socialising functions, so why would the university still be central in this process?’ (female, 50+, Doctor of Sciences in Sociology, Prof., Department Head).

(2) Socio-economic specifics of how Russian universities function

The academics are concerned about the funding of higher education and the competitiveness of salaries in their sector. The informants lack the sense of social and financial security that many associate with the Soviet higher school.

‘The prestige of university teachers has been artificially lowered, they used to be paid three to four times [more]. They were treated with respect as they developed the economy and advanced technologies. Today, only commerce is in demand and people are engaged not in science but in making what can be sold. The primary objectives of the state have changed’ (female, 30+, Candidate of Sciences (PhD) in Chemistry, Assoc. Prof.).

‘There is a tacit agreement: we do not work too hard in order not to be too dissatisfied with our salaries’ (male, 50+, Candidate of Sciences (PhD) in Economics, Assoc. Prof.).

The phenomenon of secondary employment is seen as a sign of problems in the sector.

‘There are lots of universities and some are of questionable quality. The transition period played a role here. It was when university teachers lost face as they were forced to combine jobs. Nowadays, you rarely come across a university teacher who works in just one job. Most have numerous side hustles and are always on the run. They cannot concentrate on their work and have to make money on the side... You often cannot tell what they do at all: in summer they are on expeditions, then they run around thousands of places, giving lectures’ (female, 50+, Candidate of Sciences (PhD) in History, Assoc. Prof.).

All informants say that the base salary does not allow a university employee to lead a comfortable life. The interviewees mention not only secondary employment but also participation in research projects as a source of extra income.

‘When there are ongoing projects, I have enough money for my house and family. In general, a professor’s life is normal, not poor, if he does not live only on his base salary’ (male, 30+, Candidate of Sciences (PhD) in Engineering, Assoc. Prof.).

(3) Intra-university ‘rules of the game’

When discussing what constitutes the work of research and teaching staff and how it is organised today, informants mention two factors that are detrimental to the prestige of their profession.

Firstly, they consider the demands placed on the academic staff to be inflated.

‘You have to fulfil impossible indicators without much prospect of career advancement. Many people question whether they actually need it or whether they’d rather do some other job with a clear job description, duties, and tenure’ (male, 50+, Doctor of Sciences in Philosophy, Prof.). In the eyes of the professional community, the growing demands are exacerbating the mismatch between the work effort and the remuneration received.

Secondly, the informants note that higher education is often seen as a service, which results in students’ consumerist attitude towards the educational process and, consequently, towards the teachers.

‘Our education system is client-oriented, it is for students, while teachers get blamed for everything. Students feel this and begin to treat a teacher as if he owes them. Students sometimes misbehave in class — stand up and leave, speak rudely, react negatively online’ (male, 50+, Doctor of Sciences in Engineering, Prof.).

‘If a student did not like something, he can report it and his complaint will be considered at the rector’s office or ministry level. It is mainly underachievers who complain. When I criticise them, they say that their human rights are being violated’ (female, 30+, Candidate of Sciences (PhD) in Chemistry, Assoc. Prof.).

‘Our students know that no matter what they do, no matter how badly they do, they will not be expelled. It is easier to expel us’ (male, 50+, Candidate of Sciences (PhD) in Economics, Assoc. Prof.).

The deference which a student could have towards the teacher by definition is no longer common in higher school. Today, an official position or academic credentials, such as academic degrees and ranks, are not enough for a university teacher to ensure his or her high standing in the eyes of students. For academic staff, it is

a sensitive issue, which explains why the informants mentioned it among the factors of low prestige of the academic profession.

Thus, although sceptically-minded informants emphasise economic factors, they also attach importance to other circumstances that undermine the prestige of their profession. Importantly, some are specific to Russia, while others are a consequence of global trends. Interviews with professors at European universities reveal similar patterns.

Factors contributing to high prestige of the academic profession mentioned by the informants can also be divided into several categories:

- attractive aspects of the profession;
- favourable financial conditions;
- the uniqueness of scientific and educational content;
- status of a particular university.

(1) Attractive aspects of the profession

According to the informants, some of the characteristics of the academic profession certainly enhance its prestige — for instance, its engaging nature and usefulness.

‘University teachers are a very active community where work is always in full swing, such as work on co-authored publications. The communication is friendly. It is an interesting and enjoyable job’ (male, 30+, Candidate of Sciences (PhD) in Engineering, Assoc. Prof.).

The university as an employer is seen as a place to unlock employees’ diverse talents: from linguistic to psychological competencies, from teamwork and project support skills to the ability to communicate with the media.

‘University teachers possess important competencies and a combination of knowledge, skills, and abilities or strive to develop them in themselves. The teaching profession requires that [you] don’t sit still, you are involved in many different activities, and you are constantly learning something. It’s not only about dealing with students and giving lectures. It is a multifaceted job, which is why it is valued’ (female, 45+, Candidate of Sciences (PhD) in Sociology, Assoc. Prof.).

Academic freedoms associated with the academic profession also play an important role in shaping its positive image.

‘The job of a university teacher gives a certain kind of freedom. You do not have a rigid five-day work week, and you can set your research objectives and choose colleagues to work with’ (female, 30+, Candidate of Sciences (PhD) in Economics, Assoc. Prof.).

(2) Favourable financial conditions

The informants tend to acknowledge that the level of income in academia is increasing. This is becoming an important factor contributing to the prestige of the profession.

'The prestige of the profession of a university teacher increased when they started to get good pay for their work' (male, 30+, Candidate of Sciences (PhD) in Biology, Assoc. Prof.).

The competitiveness of university salaries compared to salaries in the real economy plays a major role.

'In our sector, salaries are comparable to those in the industrial sector. This increases the demand for university positions and the chance to attract interesting individuals to our sector' (female, 30+, Candidate of Sciences (PhD) in Economics, Assoc. Prof.).

(3) The uniqueness of scientific and educational content

Informants point out that not all academics can expect high prestige, but only those who meet very high requirements. They are teachers who not only impart knowledge to students but also develop important social and professional competencies in them which are difficult to obtain through self-education.

'[Colleagues] who do not simply read lectures from a piece of paper or outdated textbooks but use modern technologies and can interest students with innovative ideas enjoy a much higher level of prestige' (female, 60+, Doctor of Sciences in Philosophy, Dir. of Inst., Cor. Mem. of the Russian Academy of Education).

Student interest is therefore also a measure of prestige.

'They started to see the educational institution not as a place they are obliged to attend but as a constant source of new knowledge that they really want to get' (male, 30+, Candidate of Sciences (PhD) in Engineering, Assoc. Prof.).

In this context, the Humboldtian model of combining research and education is relevant: an academic who shares with students the results of his or her own research rather than the materials from a textbook has a much better chance of winning the competition with open sources of information for the attention of the audience.

(4) Status of a particular university

Informants strongly believe that the prestige of their profession depends on the university where an academic works.

‘In some universities being a teacher is prestigious, in others not. When a friend of mine studied at [name of the university], students paid for getting a pass, and the teachers were somewhat wild and not very intelligent. It is no wonder that he did not see the teaching profession as prestigious’ (male, 30+, Candidate of Sciences (PhD) in History, Assoc. Prof.).

The Project ‘5-100’, aimed at increasing the international competitiveness of Russian universities, had a noticeable positive effect on the prestige of the academic profession.

‘Our university participates in “5-100”, so it is prestigious to work here. Even if I am offered a high administrative position at a neighbouring university, I will refuse’ (male, 30+, Assoc. Prof.).

Following an overview of the opinions and reasoning of Russian university teachers about the prestige of the academic profession, we will now examine the views of their European colleagues on this issue.

**Social Prestige
of the Academic
Profession:
European
Informants’
Opinions**

Many European informants agree that, while the status of the academic profession remains high, its prestige has been declining over the last decades. French and British informants report a decline in the venerability of the profession much more frequently than German ones.

The typical points made by the sceptically-minded informants can be divided into the following factors:

- the lack of understanding in society;
- the growth in the number of faculty;
- generation gaps;
- desacralisation of the university;
- financial aspects.

(1) The lack of understanding in society

One of the reasons for the decline in the prestige of the academic profession mentioned by the informants is that society does not always fully understand what university academic staff do, what their job actually is.

‘People are not sufficiently informed about the job of a professor in France. They have no idea what it means to be a professor at a university. My friends think all I do is teach. They have no idea what science and research actually is’ (male, 30+, PhD in Sociology, Prof., University of Rouen Normandy).

(2) The growth in the number of faculty

The British informants point to the increase in the number of university teachers as a cause of the declining prestige of their profession:

'There are hundreds of thousands of teachers in universities. They seem to become a new proletariat. It has become a mass profession' (male, 60+, PhD in Sociology, Prof., University of Birmingham). The growth in numbers is making the profession less elitist, diminishing its halo of exclusivity and inaccessibility.

(3) Generation gaps

Academics at European universities also note the transformation of intergenerational relationships. Young people refuse to recognise the authority of their elders as given.

'In France, the turning point came in May '68. [There was] a conflict between students and the university as such, they occupied the buildings, locked the deans in their offices. This resulted in the desacralisation of the professorship, which seriously damaged the prestige of university teachers' (female, 50+, PhD in Sociology, Lecturer, Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales, Paris).

(4) Desacralisation of the university

Elaborating on the desacralisation of the university, the informants mention that contemporary society is a consumer society, in which education is seen as a service.

'We live in a consumer society. A university teacher is seen as a service provider' (female, 40+, PhD in Sociology, Lecturer, University of Nice Sophia Antipolis). The UK academics, for instance, note the trend towards customer centricity of the higher school: 'The transformation of the system. <...> Now it is a business. Our students pay tuition, so they are customers and we have to give them the services they demand' (female, 50+, PhD in Sociology, Prof., University of Manchester).

(5) Financial aspects

Speaking of other factors reducing the prestige of the profession, the informants note that there are fields (e.g., business and financial sector) where one can earn much more than at university.

'For ordinary people, a professor, an associate professor is another world! They are important people, like a teacher or a doctor in the 19th century. For businessmen, however, we are some kind

of vagrants' (male, 60+, PhD in Sociology, Prof., Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales, Paris).

The financial aspect of a university job as a factor that decreases the prestige of the profession is more frequently mentioned by the French informants and less frequently by British and German ones.

The European informants who are optimistic about the prestige of the academic profession most often referred to various aspects of the public recognition of academics' work.

According to all European informants, people tend to recognise their intellectual superiority as a given.

'When I say that I work at a university, I feel that people have good assumptions about me beforehand. Even before we get to know each other. They say: "You have a PhD?! You must be smart!"' (female, 30+, PhD in Sociology, Research Fellow, Visiting Lecturer, University of Birmingham).

Respect for the profession stems from the perception of an academic as someone whose work makes the world better for other members of society.

'Scientists are respected for contributing to and changing public life' (male, 30+, PhD in Sociology, Research Fellow, University of Bremen).

According to the informants, society continues to see the profession of a university teacher as prestigious also because of certain associated privileges and advantages (long annual leave, considerable freedom in organising one's daily work activities, etc.).

The informants from French universities noted that in contrast to professors in the capital, professors in small towns always have a special status.

'In a small town, a university professor is a very important person, a VIP person! The mayor invites them to various ceremonies. It's different in a big city. In Paris, for example, the social prestige of a professor depends on the size of the university' (male, 70+, PhD in Sociology, Prof., Paris-Sorbonne University (Paris IV)).

The German informants pay particular attention to such symbolic signs of prestige as the continuing tradition of writing 'Doctor' and 'Professor' on letterboxes and entrance door plaques in the homes of academic staff. The collected field material allows us to better understand the specifics and problems of the academic profession nowadays and to put forward suggestions to enhance its prestige.

**Practical
Recommendations
and Conclusion**

We have shown that Russian and European academics have largely similar views on the level of prestige of their profession. However, when assessing the prestige of the academic profession over time, the former group is more likely to see a positive trend, while the latter tends to see a negative one. Based on the informants' narratives, below we will discuss the potential prospects for increasing the social prestige of the university teaching profession.

First, we will summarise the aspects of the university teaching profession that contribute to its positive image. According to university teachers, these include: job stability; the opportunities the university provides to its employees (academic mobility, access to extended education, assistance in social issues); the professional community, relationships between colleagues, etc.

Secondly, it should be emphasised that occupational prestige is determined by the financial aspect, the influence capacity, and public recognition of the profession.

In the competitive market environment, the success of fundraising by university researchers depends on a field of study, a research topic, the current context, the quality of competing applications, etc., so it is different for everyone. Some can only count on grants from public funds, others can compete for project funding from foreign and international organisations that support scientific research, and yet others are capable of raising funds from industry partners by conducting research for the industry.

For this reason and due to the traditional job title hierarchy at universities that reflects different career stages, faculty income varies from barely more than a living wage for a teaching assistant without an academic degree to several hundred thousand roubles per month for a scientifically productive professor leading major research projects.

Nowadays, the prestige of the university teaching profession is determined not so much by the educational (pedagogical) aspect of the job as by the scientific one. In particular, the participation of major Russian universities in programmes for enhancing their international competitiveness has a significant impact on occupational prestige. Although the Russian Academic Excellence Project '5-100', implemented in 2012–2020, has not helped the participating universities into the world's top 100, it has contributed to their significant progress in international academic rankings such as Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and Times Higher Education (THE). The visibility of Russian universities and the citation impact of Russian researchers active at the global level have increased.

Regarding public recognition and influence capacity as components of occupational prestige, the expert interviews suggest that these aspects can be improved by ensuring systematic interaction of universities' public relations and information policy offices with

the media to regularly inform society about the research conducted in universities and the achievements of academic staff. Increasing the media profile of professors and associate professors, and encouraging them to act as expert commentators (who comment on phenomena, processes, events, etc.) will also increase public interest in and respect for the university as a social institution.

Another promising means of increasing academics' influence capacity is to include them in councils at public authorities. This has been practised for several years already. Professors and associate professors often become members of public chambers and councils under ministries, governors, departments, and local legislatures as experts, consultants, or advisers.

The main research question of this study was whether the perceptions of the research and teaching staff about the prestige of their profession correspond to the objective reality of contemporary higher education.

The analysis of the informants' responses shows that their typical judgements and reasoning correlate well with the findings of contemporary researchers. When evaluating their job, academics point to both markers of prestige and crisis of their profession, which mirrors the actual developments in contemporary higher education.

Importantly, the Russian and European academics whom we asked to assess the social prestige of the academic profession considered intangible factors of prestige as important as tangible ones. The analysis and consideration of the perceived prestige factors can contribute to building effective human resource policy and human development strategy for academic staff both at the country level and in individual HEIs.

The perceptions of Russian and European academics about the prestige of their profession, its manifestations, and factors contributing to its enhancement and decline are largely similar, which indicates the globalisation of contemporary higher education.

Throughout this century, the role of universities will continue to change. The projected decline in universities' elitism will affect the academic profession. However, over the millennia of its existence, the higher school has repeatedly demonstrated its adaptability, and it will certainly retain its important place among social institutions as academic staff will remain significant actors in intellectual life.

The application of the results of this study is limited by the fact that the Russian participants were all employed at the leading Russian HEIs. The perceptions of occupational prestige by university teachers at other types of HEIs should be investigated separately.

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