

SCHOOLS OF HIGHER EDUCATION VERSUS LOCAL LABOUR MARKET. THE CASE OF SCHOOL BIAŁAPODLASKA

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Abstract. *The State Professional Schools of Higher Education constitute an important sector of higher education in Poland. They are the results of the transformation process of the last decade of the 20th century. Since 1999, 36 public professional schools have been organized. After consolidation, there are 33 state professional schools which concentrate on educational activity, however some at them conduct research and other academic activity.*

The main aim of the paper is an evaluation of the functioning of this type of schools in the context of local labour market on the case of Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska, which for several years has been the leading organization in higher education sector in Poland. Sources of materials for research were found in literature, official documents of the school and own diagnostic survey with the use of questionnaires directed to 15 teachers, 105 students and 21 business representatives, which were subsequently analysed.

Research results proved that there are some discrepancies between demand and supply on the local labour market in the group of higher education sector. Comparing to the educational fields offered by the State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska, there is a shortage of workers in such professions as: IT specialists, physiotherapists, construction engineers while the excess of supply exists for foreign language teachers, sociologists, economists, tourism servants, agricultural engineers. In conclusion, a stronger links between professional schools, enterprises and local organisations are suggested. Implementation of practical profile of students requires some changes in curricula as well as in the system of cooperation between schools and regional labour markets.

Keywords: *higher education, labour market, local development, professional schools.*

Introduction

State Professional Schools of Higher Education (SPSHE) are an element of the process of systemic transformation and preparation of Poland to integrate with the EU. Post implementation at the beginning of the last decade the XXth century

of the basic economic reforms designated to reinstate economic freedom and market mechanisms, the system of ownership was also reinstated and the so called light modern development factors associated with knowledge-based economy using immaterial forms of capital – intellectual, human and social capital started to be pursued (Adamowicz, 2014).

The SPSHE started to appear in the final years of the XXth century pursuant to the Act adopted on 26 June 1997 on professional schools of higher education and today, they constitute a significant sector of higher education in Poland (Draus, 2014). The occurrence of state Professional schools of higher education in Poland was embedded in the general-European process of changes in the higher education from the start, being referred to as the Bologna process. For over 15 years, 36 state Professional schools of higher education were in place, which were mainly located in the cities which, as a result of administrative reform, lost their voivodeship city status (Kowalska, 2014). At present, this sector encompasses 33 functioning schools of this type. Despite an increasing number of these schools the sector of public Professional schools of higher education continues to be an important element within the sector of higher education, all the more considering the aspect of education and raising the quality of human resources for the local labour market. The amendment of the law on higher education carried out in the years 2005-2011 increased the programme autonomy of the schools as a result of which, state Professional schools of higher education were able to adjust their standards of teaching to the practical needs of local labour markets. Further new education constitution, accepted by the Sejm on 4 July 2018, also introduces many qualitative changes which will have an impact on the functioning of the Professional higher education sector.

The objective of the hereby work is to characterize the functioning of state Professional schools of higher education in the aspect of their impact on the local labour market, on the example of the State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska (SSHE). The Bialska School has for the past 3 years been the leader in the SPSHE in Poland.

Research materials and methods

The material for research and analyses consisted both of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources encompass information obtained under own survey research carried out by means of questionnaires. Secondary sources are formed by subject literature, regional and local statistical data, Regional Strategy of Innovation for the Lublin Voivodeship, data from POL-on system as well as data from the all-Poland system of monitoring of Economic Fates of Graduates (ELA) of schools of higher education.

The survey research were carried out in 2015 on a sample of 15 university employees, 105 students and 21 representatives of enterprises. The methods of statistical and descriptive analysis were applied.

Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska as the representative of the sector of higher professional education

The SPSHE sector functioned on the basis of the Act of 26 June 1997 on higher education professional schools, which along with entry into force the 27 July 2005 on higher education ceased to be applicable. The purpose of SPSHE is to educate students in the scope of fields of study and professional specializations (practical) as well as to supplement knowledge and retrain them in the scope of a given specialization. The tasks of SPSHE is also to popularize technical progress and co-act with other entities in order to expand knowledge, develop culture and local growth of the region. The existence of SPSHE is ensured by active participation on the local and regional level.

The SSHE in Biała Podlaska was launched in 2000. Since is very beginnings the school developed various fields of study, striving to ensure convenient conditions for learning, rest, practicing sport and developing own interests to its students. The accepted investment strategy of the school allowed to build a modern campus, sport base, Research Centre for Innovations and a complex of environment, agriculture and construction study labs. In recent time, the school managed to significantly increase its material database, mainly thanks to the consequent investment policy, while at the same time managing to effectively obtain the UE funding. Being mainly a didactic facility, educating in professional scope and at bachelor level, for many years it has been educating also at the master level, realizing a general academic profile. It also commenced, as one of few Professional schools of higher education, its scientific-research activity. Thus, the school transformed itself into a didactic-research centre.

The realized investments - school complex is comprised of:

- Didactic building at 95/97 Sidorskiej Street with a usable area of over 11,000 sq., where one may find 50 didactic rooms.
- Didactic building at 102 Sidorskiej Street with a usable area of over 2,700 sq., where 25 lecture and practical class rooms are located.
- The sports hall with a didactic unit and a playfield with dimensions of 52 x 31,8 m, the total area of which is 6,165 sq. may also be found.
- Student house is equipped in 192 accommodation spots with 1 and 2-person rooms in high standard of furnishing.
- Research centre - Research Centre for Innovations (CBnI) which supports scientific development in three fields of studies: construction

(with specialization of renewable energy sources), public health (with the programme of studies devoted to borreliosis and tuberculosis), computer science (elements targeted at optic image processing, telecommunication and semiconductor elements).

- Research centre - Regional Centre for Environmental Studies, Agriculture and Innovative Technologies “EKO-AGRO-TECH” is a modern research infrastructure designated for the conduct of scientific research in the scope of environmental analyses, physic games, biological-food analyses. In total, the school has 19 specialized research labs at its disposal.
- The library, the general area of which for disclosure and resource management amounts to approx. 1,200 sq. The library holds over 33 thousand of inventory units.
- The training-educational centre in Międzyrzec Podlaski.
- Sport stadium (female football) for employees and students, open swimming-pool available for students, employees and inhabitants of the city The school has 18-years’ educational experience, confirmed by positive assessments received from the Polish Accrediting Commission. Within the 18 years of its activity it has occupied high spots in the rankings of higher education schools which ultimately led to reaching in 2016, 2017 and 2018 the first higher education school in Poland from amongst all state schools of higher Professional education (<http://www.perspektywy.pl>). Yet another success of the school in 2016 was obtaining scientific category “A” by the Faculty of Economic and Technical Sciences and scientific category “B” by the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences. The school employs approx. 220 academic teachers.

The school houses a pre-school “Zielony Słonik”, Academic Gymnasium, Academic High School, Children University and University of the Third Age.

In the period of demographic decline and in the framework of its two departments it educates approx. 2,650 students who attend its 18 fields of study and 48 specializations within the free of charge undergraduate studies, engineering, consolidated master and master (supplementary) programmes of studies through which they may develop their passions in 18 scientific cycles. Post-graduate studies are maintained in all fields of studies.

The Publishing House existen at the SSHE publishes 3 scientific journals as well as post-conference volumes, monographs, scripts and academic books as well as contributes to the informative and promotional activities of the school through issuing the paper “Bialski Academic Review”.

The mission of the SSHE in Biała Podlaska is to educate the youth at high quality level, to initiate and conduct scientific researches as well as to act towards the development of the city and the region. In accordance with the updated strategy for development of the SSHE in Biała Podlaska, the strategic goal for 2020 will remain to transform the school into the Bialska Academy (Update, 2015). This stems directly from the accepted by the school main strategic goal according to which the school in Biała Podlaska is supposed to be: a modern higher education school which educates highly qualified personnel for the purposes of regional economy, healthcare, education and social zone. It is also supposed to strive to strengthen the memory of the school's patron in national and international cooperation. The realization of the above goal was associated with actions within five following scopes:

- 1) To increase the number of independent science personnel - doctor habilitatus.
- 2) To obtain authorizations (first) to carry out doctorates in the field of health and economic sciences.
- 3) Annual update of educational offer - liquidation or replacement of fields of study with recruitment at the level of 20-30 attendees with related fields of study.
- 4) Maintenance of entitlements to educate at master level within the 5 fields of study: national security, economy, nursing, tourism and recreation, public health and within the consolidated master studies in the field of study of physiotherapy.
- 5) Development of social and scientific base.

Table 1 Didactic offer of the SSHE in Biala Podlaska (status as on 01.10.2018)

Conducted fields of studies of I degree				
Construction	National Safety	Dietetics	Economics	Finance and accounting
Philology (English and Russian)	Computer Science	Mechanics and machine construction	Pedagogy	Nursing
Medical Rescue	Agriculture	Sociology	Tourism and recreation	Management
Conducted II degree fields of study (supplementary)				
National Safety	Economics	Physiotherapy	Nursing	Tourism and recreation
Public Health				

Source: own elaboration.

Furthermore, the school also offers programmes of 26 post-graduate studies within 8 fields of science and a number of qualification courses (5 types),

instructor trainings (3 types), language courses (8 types) and skill trainings (3 types).

At present, the school is preparing for reorganization and adjustment to the requirements of the new Act on Higher Education which has been in place since 1 October 2018. Increasing the number of faculties to four, among other things, is planned.

The assessment of didactic and research activity of the SSHE in Biała Podlaska in the context of its adjustment to the local labour market

The concept of open economy, based on knowledge, has introduced into the theory of economy a new development paradigm, whilst into the economic reality - a new quality in which knowledge, skills and competencies become the key factor which determines the seed of economic growth (Żelazny, 2006). There is a feedback occurring between economy, labour market and the education offered by colleges. Relations between the labour market and the preparation of higher education schools' graduates into entering the area of factual economy are of particular significance (Jakubowska & Rosa, 2011). The paradigm of third generation university indicates the multidimensional nature of the functioning of higher education school, however, this education and scientific research constitute two basic tasks. Didactic offer should ensure the graduates a set of adequate knowledge, skills and competencies so that a relatively smooth transition from the world of education to the world of labour was possible (Krajeńska, 2003). However, issues may occur in this problem area which consist of unadjustment of qualifications to the labour market. The most significant is the structural unfitness which consists of discrepancies which may be observed between the qualifications of potential employees and the current and planned demand on the labour market submitted by the employers. But, also mental unfitness occurs, in case of which there are discrepancies between the employers, the employees and the potential employees in the scope of knowledge and expectations related to employment (Trych, 2011).

Biała Podlaska belongs to a group of small cities with population amounting to 57,545. About 62 % of the city inhabitants are at productive age, 18 % are at pre-productive age while 20 % of inhabitants are at post-productive age. Selected labour market data of Biała Podlaska, at the background of the Lublin Voivodeship, have been presented in the table below.

Table 2 Data regarding the Biała Podlaska labour market at the background of the Lublin Voivodeship (status as at 31.12.2016)

Selected data	City	Voivodeship
Employed	13 714	383 022
Registered unemployed	2 995	95 596
Share of registered unemployed below the age of 25 in %	10.2	16.0
Share of registered unemployed remaining without work for longer than 1 years in %	48.2	45.4
Registered unemployment rate in %	12.7	10.3
Work offers	41	1764

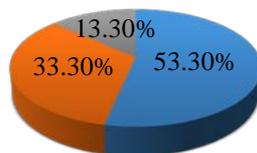
Source: *Statistical Handbook of Elected Representative 2017, Statistical Office in Lublin, Lublin 2017.*

The functioning of the SSHE in Biała Podlaska in terms of its impact on the local labour market has been verified under the survey research of employees and students of Bialska higher schools as well as the representatives of business within Biała Podlaska district.

The school personnel, especially lecturers on individual fields of study who are generally perceived as equipped in good theoretical knowledge of the functioning of the local labour market in the context of the realized didactic process at school. Their opinion is important as to the tendencies and functional links on the local and regional market. The research was attended by 15 employees (didactic and administration) of the SSHE in Biała Podlaska.

Vast majority of research participants noted that Bialska school conducts labour market analyses and the analyses of the status of local economy, whether by means of own research or using the existing elaborations and reports. The employees are also obliged to update and adjust the programmes of studies to the needs of educational market as well as to the labour market purposes. One of the questions within the survey questionnaire concerned the frequency of carrying out a review and update of educational offer. As many as 67 % of the respondents noted that it was monitored on an ongoing basis, at the occasion of commencing each academic year, whilst 33 % of them noted that it was monitored in justified cases.

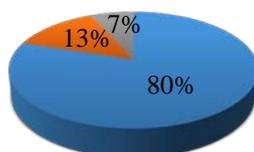
The vast majority of respondents indicated that they conduct analyzes of the labour market and the state of the local economy using other studies or through their own research, which is a positive aspect (fig.1).



- We use the elaborations of other researchers and institutes related to the labour market, since it helps us shape the future school strategy
- We conduct our own researches under scientific studies

Figure 1 *The opinion of respondents on analyses conducted by the school on labour market and local economy*

Source: own elaboration on the basis of the opinions of employees of the SSHE BP (n=15).



- Significant since it helps us in the choice of future fields of studies and attracting new students
- Moderate since the plans are established on the basis of many factors and the indicated ones are not the most significant
- Weak since the school does not focus only on the local environment

Figure 2 *Impact force of situation on the local labour market and in the regional economy on the school's education and research policy*

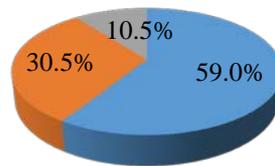
Source: own elaborations on the basis of the opinions of employees of the SSHE BP (n=15).

The vast majority of the survey participants considered the situation on the labour market and the region's economy to be very strongly impacting the realized fields of studies, and only 7 % considered this impact to be weak, which indicates a large connection to the local environment (fig.2). Similar results presented the situation of observing the fates of graduates by the school. These actions are the task of the career department which, in the opinion of 80 % of the respondents, efficiently operates in this regard, while only 20 % considered its actions to be rather weakly effective.

The school, considering its territorial location, concentrates mainly on servicing local and subregional labour markets. The basis of such a strategy is the location in the space on which other academic centres from Warsaw, Lublin, Białystok and Siedlce have an impact.

The views of students concerning the labour market are of significance since they impact the choice of fields of studies, further education on post-graduate studies and decisions concerning the future place of work. Many students already

while selecting their major and place of studying have a well-formed vision of where they would like to work in the future.



■ It was very useful ■ It was useful but I did not obtain sufficient skills ■ Only to a small degree

Figure 3 Usefulness of gained knowledge in the course of studies during professional internships /current work

Source: own elaboration on the basis of the opinions of PSW BP students (n=105).

Students, while assessing the usefulness of the gained knowledge in the course of studies and during realization of professional internships / current work, considered it to be useful in vast majority, even though certain indications were reported that they lacked certain skills (fig.3). One of the subsequent questions concerned concentration of classes on theoretical knowledge or practical one. Over 55 % considered theory to be interweaving with practice, whilst further 35% noted that they learnt theory through practical solving of problems. On the other hand, more than 9 % of students considered theory to be the dominant domain. The results concerning contact with professional advisor, who might assist in establishing professional aptitude seem rather worrying, as well as further professional path. Only 9 % of respondents confirmed that such a meeting had taken place at school while the remaining respondents either were not aware of such a possibility or did not use it so far.

The school trains personnel mainly for the needs of local, subregional and regional labour market. This does not mean however that the school graduates do not find employment in other regions of Poland or abroad. Verification of the gained knowledge and skills with practical experience occurs at the workplace. Within the local labour environment also the social competencies gained at school are put into use. The attitudes and competencies in the scope of graduates' entrepreneurship are revealed when faced with the practical reality.

Local economic entities constituted a significant group of respondents in the survey research, since it was necessary to test the opinions of the representatives of the demand side (employers) regarding the knowledge, skills and social competencies gained by the graduates of the SSHE in Biała Podlaska. The survey

questionnaire also contained a number of questions regarding the local labour market and the methods of searching for employees.

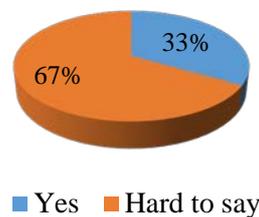


Figure 4 Perception of students/graduates as potential future employees
Source: own elaboration on the basis of opinions of business representatives (n=21).

The entrepreneurs, asked about their perception of students/ graduates as their potential employees replied (67 % of respondents) that it was difficult to state it. One third of them confirmed seeing them as their future employees, having acquainted themselves with the didactic offer of the SSHE in Biała Podlaska (fig.4). On the other hand, 81 % of the respondents considered employees with higher degree education as being more interested in their professional development within a company, whilst the others thought otherwise. Moreover, they appreciated a third degree education while considering such employees are being characterized, above all, by better communication and work organization, better professional preparation, openness and creativity.

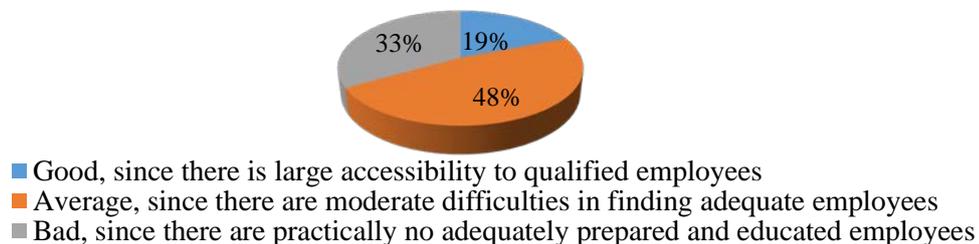


Figure 5 The opinion of respondents on the assessment of local labour market
Source: own elaboration on the basis of opinions of business representatives (n=21).

Exactly 67 % of the survey participants who are the representatives of local market assessed the local labour market to be on a high or average level. The research participants notice the availability of qualified employees or moderate difficulties with finding them. However, as many as 33 % assessed this labour market poorly due to lack of adequately prepared and educated employees (fig.5). Also, the structure of replies to yet another question concerning whether the graduates of SSHE can be characterized by an adequately high level of knowledge and skills looks promising. Almost half of the survey participants (48 %) is of the opinion that they ought to have a greater practical and specialized knowledge instead of general and theoretical one. Subsequent 33 % of the survey participants

noted gaps in practical skills, noticing at the same time the right level of theoretical knowledge. Whilst, 14 % considered their level as adequate and 5 % noted that their level of theoretical and practical knowledge was adequate. The fact that a large part of entrepreneurs (53 %) expected the graduates of the SSHE in Biała Podlaska, equipped in the necessary skills and qualifications in the coming 3 years on the local labour market is rather comforting. This stems from the fact that the employers follow the teaching programmes at the higher education school (practical profile) as well as being aware of an increasingly improving reputation and authority of the school. Also the engagement in obtaining external financing designated for realization of innovative and modern teaching aids has been appreciated. The school itself sees an opportunity in it, realizing scientific-didactic projects directed towards both the students and the didactic personnel, which facilitate increasing knowledge, skills and competencies of the graduates.

One ought to point out, that an important body at the school that guards the adjustment of educational offer to the local labour market needs and ensures good preparation of the graduates to the activities in professional environment is the school convention which to a large degree consists of the local society and business representatives.

The follow up on fates of the graduates with the use of the all-Poland system of monitoring of Economic Fates of Graduates (ELA) is a tool designated for increasing the quality of education and adjusting educational offer to the requirements of the labour market. At present, this system has quite a large database at its disposal which are obtained mainly from the Social Security Institution (ZUS) and the integrated information system regarding science and higher education POL-on. On the basis of the gathered data, cross-sectional reports are elaborated according to which, in case of second degree studies, as many as 85.3 % of graduates were registered in the Social Security Institution's registers, while the average period of job search in case of graduates of the 2nd degree studies, post obtaining a diploma, amounted to 3.28 months (<http://ela.nauka.gov.pl>). On the other hand, the average time from obtaining a diploma to undertaking the first job on the basis of an employment contract post obtaining a diploma amounted to 3.8 months, while the risk of unemployment among the graduates of the 2nd degree studies in the first year post obtaining a diploma amounted to 19,8 % in total. The percentage of graduates who had any sort of experience at work in the first year post obtaining a diploma amounted to 73,5 %, while the percentage of graduates who had a work experience on the basis of employment contract in the first year post obtaining a diploma amounted to 57,8 %. Monthly remuneration on account of employment contract amounted to, on average, 2,119.94 zlotys while the overall median amounted to 1,816.73 zlotys. An average relative index of wages of graduates (average value of the quotient of

average monthly salary of a graduate towards the average monthly salary within their poviata of residence) amount to in total 0.52.

While performing the analysis of data available in the barometer of professional it is visible that in Białą Podlaska certain issues with adjusting the didactic offer to the local demands on the labour market occur. In 2018, within Białą Podlaska district and the city of Białą Podlaska deficit professions included, among others: IT specialists, physiotherapists, construction engineers or accountants which are compliant with the fields of study available in the SSHE in Białą Podlaska. Whilst, such professions as pedagogues, foreign language teachers, sociologists, economists, travel agency personnel and tourism organizers or agriculture experts belong to surplus professional and despite this, they are available within the didactic offer of the the SSHE in Białą Podlaska (<http://barometrzwodow.pl>). It is however not obvious whether the above state of affairs is of interim or a long-term nature.

Conclusions

Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Białą Podlaska, as one of the best schools in the public sector of higher professional education in Poland, successfully develops its didactic activity while considering the needs of the local labour market, though its profile is open, it does not fully cover the demand of this market regarding specialist with third degree education. The school realizes practical studying profile and undertakes scientific-research activity as well as expert activity towards the economy and society in the region.

One of the most significant factors of the functioning of state Professional higher education schools is establishing partnerships between the school and the workplace. A need of close cooperation of a public Professional institution with employers stems from the specificity of these schools and, above all, from their practical approach towards the process of education. As a consequence of such cooperation which ought to be based on the participation of the convention in the shaping of the programme of actions, participation of employers in the realization of the didactic process, a graduate should possess knowledge and practical skills as well as adequate social competencies.

The process of permanent education which, post-graduation from studies, assumes systematic further education, is an inseparable element of constantly changing labour market. The SSHE in Białą Podlaska seems to be noticing these issues, which is reflected in the efficiently operating Academic Centre of Continuous Education which encompasses within its offer proposals for persons at all ages. Furthermore, didactic-scientific activity of the Białaska School is well-correlated with all smart specializations of the Lublin Voivodeship which translates into, among others, the right infrastructural backup (specialist labs and

research centres), human resources, organizational structure as well as the realized fields of study and their specializations (<http://rsi.lubelskie.pl>).

Bearing in mind fields of study of the first degree studies at a practical profile, as well as an increasing number of additional project classes, workshops, e-learning trainings, directed at teachers and students, one may note that the SSHE takes into consideration in an increasing scope the expectations of the employees on the local labour market. The new act, Continuation of Education, implemented since 2018, may become a chance for further improvement of the adjustment of the didactic offer and scientific research to the needs of entrepreneurs and the local society. The new, bicameral model of organization of the higher education school assumes, apart from the so far school bodies of the senate and the rector, appointment of the school council performing the function of its collegial body, consisting of the representatives of local government units and the employers. This ought to lead to ensuring a greater coherence of the elaborated changes and the educational process as well as its adjustment to fast changing needs of the labour market.

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