

THE VOCATIONAL SKILLS OF GRADUATES WITH A DEGREE IN TOURISM AND RECREATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Introduction. The paper discusses the issue of vocational skills amongst students of university studies in tourism and recreation at the Josef Pilsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport in Biała Podlaska. The objective of the research, whose results are presented in the current paper, was to diagnose the results of studies at undergraduate and postgraduate level in relation to their knowledge, skills and social competencies.

Material and methods. Research was carried out in June 2012 by means of a diagnostic poll using the random survey technique. The survey encompassed students graduating from undergraduate and graduate programmes (N=199).

Results. Analyses indicated that students of both programmes evaluate their knowledge and skills acquired in the course of studies as low. On the other hand, students evaluated their social competencies, in particular those connected with the university's profile, as high. According to respondents' declarations, the level of knowledge, skills and other competencies acquired in the course of undergraduate and graduate studies does not fully meet respondents' requirements.

Key words: quality of education, tourism and recreation, graduates, national qualifications framework

Introduction

The Polish higher education system is primarily shaped by the current requirements made by the EU and imposed on all European countries. The Bologna Declaration, which obliges 29 European countries (including Poland) to establish a common area of higher education with comparable and more effective systems of education, plays a significant role in the process. The increase in the European mobility of university graduates and the improvement of Europeans' employability on the international labour market are fundamental elements of the agreement.

Linking the education systems that function in individual countries is made possible by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This document provides instruments allowing for evaluation and comparison of qualifications acquired in various systems of education. The framework was developed on the basis of recommendations made by the European Parliament and Council, dated 23rd April 2008 [1]. The documents define the term "qualifications" as a formal result of evaluation and validation carried out by a competent authority which states that a person has met particular criteria of education results.

The EQF defines 8 levels of qualifications encompassing a full set of qualifications to be acquired (beginning with basic levels up to higher education studies). These levels have specific education results assigned to them. The results are understood as what a student knows, understands and is able to do upon graduation and are only defined in general terms. This is due to the fact that the division aims solely at regulating the collection of qualifications (acquired throughout a lifetime) as a whole with regard to levels of education. Results of education were divided into three categories – knowledge, skills and competencies [2].

The European Qualifications Framework constitutes the basis for the development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which takes into account the character of education systems in individual countries. The European Commission decided that such a framework is crucial for the proper operation of national education markets and in order to make a comparison of qualifications acquired across Europe. The significance of the NQF for the labour market was also emphasised because a clear and understandable record of education is vital both for employers and employees [3].

The National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education developed in Poland encompasses the description of results of education for general education and a practical profile in terms of 8 areas of education: humanities, social sciences, exact sciences, natural sciences, technical sciences, medical sciences including health and physical education sciences, agricultural sciences including forestry and veterinary and art [4].

The results of education defined in the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, similar to the EQF, encompass acquired knowledge, skills and social competencies. These were defined individually for each level of education. The NQF remains in agreement with the EQF and, at the same time, determines in more detail the results to be acquired upon graduating from a particular area of education.

Specialised Results of Education is the next category present in the context of higher education. These are developed by individual universities on the basis of the National Qualifications Framework and constitute a catalogue of particular results to be acquired in the framework of particular programmes of study. Knowledge, skills and social competencies ought to bring about the specialised results of education.

Specialised results constitute a category, which, according to guidelines of the implemented reform, is of superior charac-

ter in relation to the curriculum of studies. Therefore, results defined earlier ought to influence the character and type of university classes offered later. This, however, may pose considerable problems in practice as specialised results of education constitute a novelty and introduce elements previously unconsidered in higher education. Curricula, on the other hand, are usually based on previous classes and subject matter discussed at particular university studies. Such a status quo may lead to discrepancies as regards the required results of education and the possibility of achieving these [5].

Such a perspective justifies research in search of diagnoses of results of education achieved in the course of current programmes of study and relating these to requirements posed by the National Qualifications Framework. Such diagnoses may indicate the degree to which current curricula provide the possibility of achieving the desired results of education.

The objective of the research undertaken was to evaluate the results of education in tourism and recreation studies at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport in Biała Podlaska (FPES) of the Josef Pilsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw. Research was based on the self-assessment of students graduating from undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at the university.

Material and methods

Research encompassed 199 respondents. Respondents consisted of 3rd year students of undergraduate tourism and recreation studies (N=96) and 2nd year students of the postgraduate Master's programme (N=103). Research was carried out in June 2012. The deliberate sample encompassed all available students of the year group under scrutiny.

The research made use of a diagnostic poll, using the random survey technique. The questionnaire included questions regarding respondents' professional training, acquired knowledge, skills and social competencies. Respondents carried out the self-assessment and scored each question on the scale 1-5 (5 being the maximum).

Results of the study were presented by means of the arithmetic mean of scores given by respondents. Comparative analyses of respondents' answers, which take into account the level of education, by means of the Student's t-distribution were also carried out (differences of $p < 0.05$ were regarded as statistically significant). Students' competencies were evaluated in the context of Specialised Results of Education in operation at the university and developed for tourism and recreation studies.

Results

The Faculty of Physical Education and Sport in Biała Podlaska offers general education studies in tourism and recreation. The university offers full-time undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

The undergraduate programme offers a specialisation in the field of recreational instruction and encompasses 2036 hours of classes worth 180 ECTS credits. Studies last 6 semesters. Graduates graduate with a Bachelor's degree. The objective of this programme is to prepare the graduate to undertake employment in tourism and recreation and continue education in the course of postgraduate studies. Graduates are qualified to undertake employment in travel agencies, hotels, vacation, sports and recreation centres, health and beauty centres, agrotourism and agricultural consulting centres, government and local government administration, social institutions, foundations and associations. Students are also ready to start their own businesses and undertake private contract work.

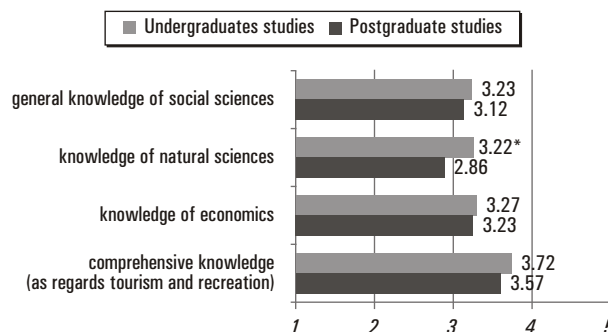
Postgraduate studies are offered with 4 majors: recreation, personal coaching, active tourism, management of tourism and recreation businesses. The total number of hours of classes amounts to 945 worth 120 ECTS credits. Studies last 4 semesters. Graduates graduate with a Master's degree. The objective of these studies is to prepare the graduate to undertake employment in tourism but also to undertake doctoral studies.

On the basis of the National Qualifications Framework, tourism and recreation studies were based in two areas: social and medical sciences, health and physical education sciences. The specialised results of education which are to be achieved by graduates of the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes were applied to these areas. Specialised results encompass a particular scope of knowledge, skills and social competencies.

Knowledge

In accordance with the specialised results of education, a graduate of undergraduate tourism and recreation studies at the FPES in Biała Podlaska ought to acquire general knowledge as regards social sciences, basic knowledge of natural sciences and economics and basic relevant knowledge as regards tourism and recreation. Specialised results of education for the graduate programme assume an expansion of knowledge acquired in the course of undergraduate study. Such knowledge was defined in the catalogue of the specialised results as an understanding of particular issues, their diagnosis, analysis and evaluation.

Figure 1 presents the result of the respondents' self-assessment. Arithmetic mean scores on the scale 1-5 (5 being the maximum) are presented. These scores reflect the level of knowledge the alumni of undergraduate and postgraduate studies have at their disposition. Respondents evaluated their knowledge of social and natural sciences and economics as merely sufficient. Only subject-specific knowledge (relating to tourism and recreation) was evaluated slightly higher.



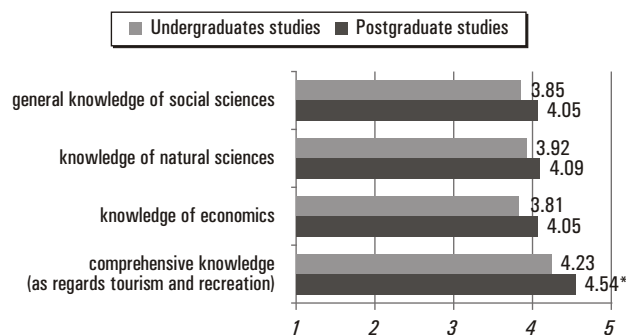
* statistically significant differences, $p < 0.05$

Figure 1. Comparison of the self-assessment of respondents' knowledge upon graduating from undergraduate and postgraduate studies

Taking into account the results of education assumed by the university, one would expect the level of knowledge to be higher at the postgraduate level. However, it was noted that students graduating from the graduate programme evaluated their knowledge lower than undergraduate students (the value of the arithmetic mean of all scores for undergraduate students amounted to 3.37 and for graduate students 3.20). Statistically significant differences were also observed in the evaluation of knowledge of natural sciences.

Students' self-assessment of their level of acquired knowl-

edge constitutes a subjective evaluation undoubtedly determined by their expectations. The attempt at a diagnosis of these expectations among students graduating from undergraduate and postgraduate studies seemed relevant (Fig. 2).



* statistically significant differences, $p < 0.05$

Figure 2. Comparison of respondents' expectations regarding the scope of knowledge they wanted to acquire in the course of undergraduate and postgraduate studies

Respondents' expectations with regard to knowledge acquired in the course of studies turned out to be higher than the actual result (the arithmetic mean of all scores was slightly above 4.0). Respondents representing both programmes of studies expected mainly good preparation as regards relevant knowledge directly connected with tourism and recreation. Moreover, as anticipated, the expectations of graduates of the postgraduate programme were naturally higher than those of undergraduate students. In addition, as regards relevant knowledge, the difference was statistically relevant.

Skills

A graduate of tourism and recreation studies at the FPES in Biała Podlaska ought to acquire a set of skills defined in the catalogue of the specialised results of education.

Undergraduate studies ought to give them a grounding in organisation. The graduate ought to be able to plan and organise various types of tourism, recreation and sports events for different target groups. In these activities they ought to be able to find, interpret and put into practice the fundamental legal regulations. It is also assumed that the graduate will be able to utilise information technologies in order to obtain and disseminate information. In addition, the graduate ought to be able to make use of basic marketing knowledge and obtain and analyse economic data.

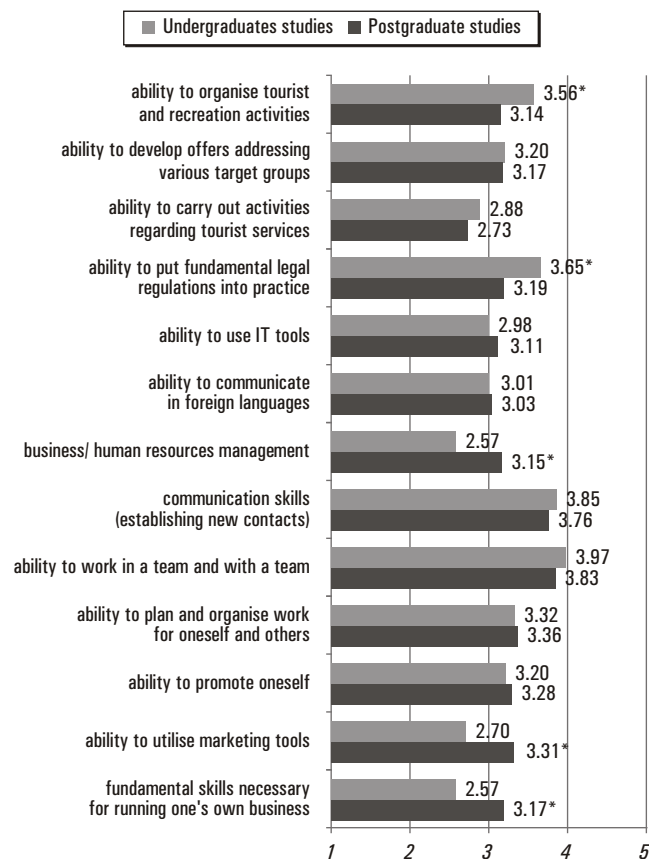
Undergraduate studies are also intended to prepare students to undertake tasks connected with tourism services (mainly as a tour guide and tour leader or holiday representative) in Poland and abroad. Therefore, students are required to acquire suitable communication skills and language proficiency corresponding to B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Postgraduate studies in tourism and recreation are intended to extend the set of skills acquired in the course of the undergraduate programme and prepare students to take on management positions. As a consequence, postgraduate studies focus on developing skills connected with management. The graduate ought to possess analytical and problem-solving skills connected with their future profession. What is more, they ought to be able to plan the work of others as well as their own. Moreover, they ought to be able to use marketing and financial skills. A holder of master's degree in tourism and recreation ought

to demonstrate language proficiency corresponding to B2+ level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Each level of education is to add fundamental skills crucial for running one's own business.

Respondents evaluated the level of professional skills acquired in the course of studies as rather low (arithmetic mean for all scores amounted to 3.22). In the case of respondents representing graduate studies, the evaluation was a bit better and scores amounted to 3.25 on average. In the case of undergraduates, the score equalled 3.19. The following skills received the highest scores: communication skills and team-working skills. Undergraduate students evaluated readiness to start their own business, company management and the ability to use marketing skills as the lowest. In their turn, the respondents graduating from the postgraduate programme evaluated their skills in tourism services as the lowest (Fig. 3).



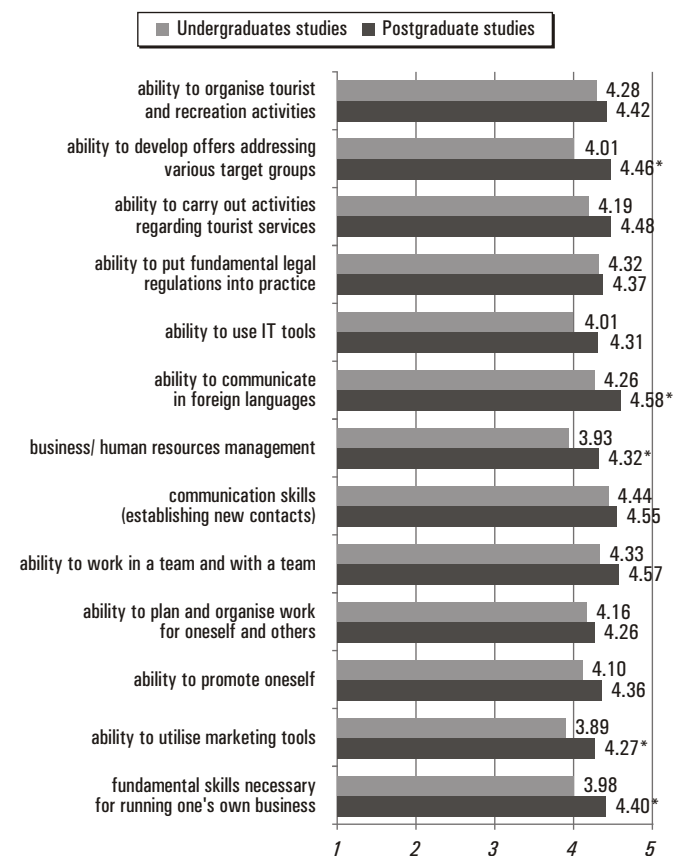
* statistically significant differences, $p < 0.05$

Figure 3. Comparison of the self-assessment of respondents' skills upon graduating from undergraduate and postgraduate studies

When comparing the answers of respondents representing undergraduate and postgraduate studies, it turned out that the latter evaluated their ability to organise tourism and recreation events and their ability to implement legal regulations as considerably lower than the former. On the other hand, students of the postgraduate programme evaluated skills of running a business and the ability to use marketing tools as considerably higher than students of the undergraduate programme.

When examining the issue of students' professional training in the context of the skills acquired, an attempt at diagnosing

their expectations in this matter was made. Research revealed that the expectations of graduate students were high (approx. 4.5 on a 5-point scale). The expectations of undergraduate students were slightly lower- 4.15. In case of 5 researched elements, differences were significant (Fig. 4). However, regardless of their level of education, students' expectations were higher than the actual level of skills they had acquired.



* statistically significant differences, $p < 0.05$

Figure 4. Comparison of respondents' expectations vs. the skills they wanted to acquire in the course of undergraduate and postgraduate studies

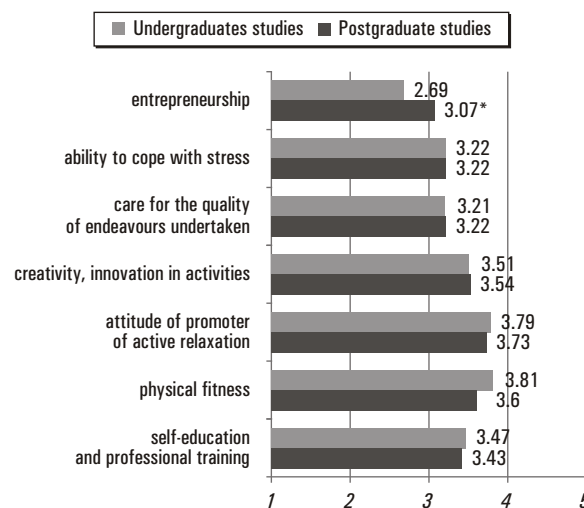
Social competencies

The collection of specialised results of education for undergraduate studies in tourism and recreation encompasses numerous social competencies that characterise a typical graduate. Independence in actions, resourcefulness, care for the quality of their work and safety can be found amongst these. What is more, the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, including care for one's own physical fitness, is also significant. The graduate of an undergraduate programme ought to understand the need for life-long learning and be able to acquire knowledge and professional skills with the use of reliable sources.

For the graduate level, a similar range of social competencies was assigned, however, these competencies ought to highlight features characterising people taking up management positions. Resourcefulness, innovation, creativity, independence in actions, responsibility for oneself and others ought to be enumerated here.

When diagnosing the level of social competencies presented by respondents, it turned out that they evaluated their physical fitness and promotion of active recreation the highest. This fact

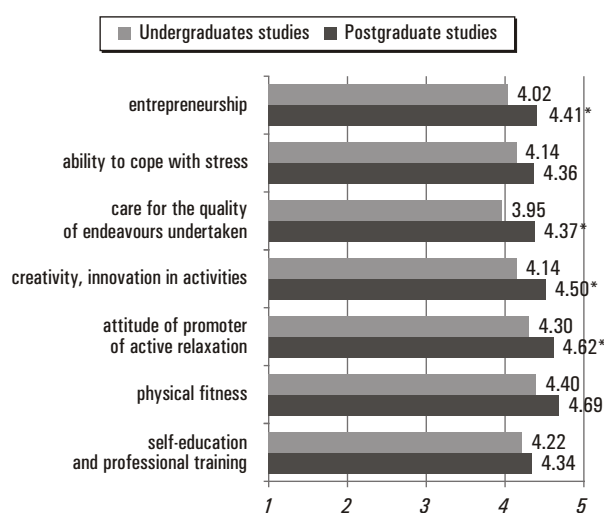
seems to be justified by the character of education at universities of physical education. The low level of competencies connected with entrepreneurship is alarming, as readiness to establish one's own business constitutes one of the objectives of education in tourism and recreation. The arithmetic mean for all competencies evaluated by respondents amounted to slightly over 3.40 (Fig. 5).



* statistically significant differences, $p < 0.05$

Figure 5. Comparison of the self-assessment of respondents' social competencies upon graduating from undergraduate and postgraduate studies

Students' expectations were also analysed. Results of the analysis can be found in Figure 6. Data indicates that students' expectations are higher than the level of competencies actually acquired. Graduate students exhibited high expectations (4.5 on a 5-point scale). Undergraduate students evaluated their expectations slightly lower (4.17). In case of 4 evaluated elements statistically significant differences occurred (Fig. 6).



* statistically significant differences, $p < 0.05$

Figure 6. Comparison of respondents' expectations as regards social competencies to be gained in the course undergraduate and postgraduate studies

Conclusions

In accordance with the definition embraced by the European Parliament, the National Qualifications Framework denotes “a tool used for the classification of qualifications into levels of achievement in order to integrate and coordinate national subsystems of qualifications and improve clarity, availability, development and the quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society” [1].

The National Qualifications Framework in Polish higher education was based on the results of education described in categories of knowledge, skills and social competencies. Knowledge was defined as the result of the acquisition of information in the process of learning and understood as a set of remembered facts, rules, theories and practices connected with a particular field. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework knowledge is divided into theoretical and factographic. Skills were defined as the ability to use knowledge and know-how in order to execute tasks and solve problems. Skills are divided into cognitive skills (encompassing logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical skills (encompassing fitness and the ability to use suitable methods, materials and instruments). Competencies are defined as a proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and methodological talents at work or while learning and in a personal career. Competencies in the framework of the EQF are defined in the context of responsibility and autonomy [6].

In the case of the specialised results of education, thus results considered on the level of curricula, emphasis is placed on additional differentiation of results into general, domain applicable and detailed. General effects are those characteristic for the particular level of education and to a large extent independent from the domain of studies. Domain applicable results ought to be understood as those relating to a particular area of study. Detailed results are specific for the particular curriculum and its implementation at individual universities [7].

The objective of the study, whose results are presented in the present paper, was the diagnosis of the results of studies in tourism and recreation at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport in Białą Podlaska. The study was based on undergraduate and postgraduate students' self-assessment.

Research indicated that students of both programmes evaluate their knowledge acquired in the course of studies as quite low. Only the level of relevant knowledge (as regards tourism and recreation) seems satisfactory. Respondents' expectations as regards the acquisition of knowledge were higher than the actual acquisition. Therefore, it can be stated that studies did not provide students with sufficient knowledge to meet their expectations.

The opinions of students graduating from postgraduate programmes did not present an increase in knowledge in relation to graduates of the undergraduate programme. This fact can be justified by the differing expectations of graduate students, their maturity and familiarity with the line of business. However, the possibility of graduate students not expanding their knowledge still exists. Specialised results for education in tourism and recreation at the FPES clearly indicate that graduates of the postgraduate programme ought to possess greater knowledge (relevant knowledge, knowledge of economics, natural and social sciences) when compared to undergraduates. Such stipulations necessitate further research aimed at an unambiguous explanation of the existing state of affairs.

The skills acquired by respondents from both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes were evaluated by the students themselves as average. The range of skills acquired was actually lower than those expected.

The fact that undergraduate students evaluated their skills in establishing and running their own businesses as low is dis-

turbing, because one of the objectives of the university as regards tourism and recreation studies is the provision of skills required for exactly that. A similar situation emerges in the case of postgraduate studies. Here, the respondents emphasised poor preparation for undertaking activities connected with tourism services. On the other hand, the curriculum of the postgraduate programme aims at achieving such a result.

The level of social competencies was the element of the results evaluated the highest. Respondents demonstrated high physical fitness, eagerness to promote healthy lifestyle and active recreation. This remains in line with the university's profile and the expected results of studies.

When analysing respondents' answers regarding their expectations as to the educational process, one can observe that students primarily expect the acquisition of suitable social competencies, then skills and, lastly, knowledge. Meanwhile, research indicates that it is knowledge and skills which constitute factors determining graduates' employability rather than social competencies [8].

Earlier research encompassing previous classes at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport in Białą Podlaska indicated a similar level in the students' self-assessment regarding knowledge, skills and competencies and a similar level of expectations as regards education [9, 10, 11, 12].

The results of education obtained in the course of undergraduate and postgraduate studies seem to diverge to some extent from the defined specialised results of education currently in operation at the university. It is noteworthy that current research was carried out among classes following the “old” curriculum which does not conform with the NQF. Research results revealed areas which required changes in order to achieve the results stipulated in the “new” curricula.

Acknowledgements

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