
Section 2.

PUBLIC POLICIES AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Magdalena KacperskaFaculty of Political Science and Journalism
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

GRADUATES ON THE LABOUR MARKET – CHOICES, QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Summary

The text presents the challenges that the Polish education system faces which first and foremost are the urgent need to streamline it and adjust it to the needs of the labour market. Moreover, it was indicated that an adequate economic policy should be implemented which will pave the way to employment-intensive economic growth. The combination of these two elements should contribute to ensuring an opportunity for the growth of the Polish economy in the future. Poland has a lot of unlocked potential, and even though its economy is trying to catch up with the most developed European states, they are not standing still waiting to be caught up. Therefore, no efforts should be spared when addressing these challenges and shaping reality instead of passively contemplating it.

Key words: *Polish education system, labour market, graduates*

In an earlier paper, *Relevance of the Polish education system to labour market needs*, this author indicated several elements which demonstrated the insufficient adaptation of the Polish education system to the requirements of the modern labour market. They include the lack of consistent activities undertaken at the elementary and (lower) secondary level in order to help young people realise and identify their predispositions, and the skills and abilities required in different professions, stimulating their interest, and so on. Additionally, the choice offered in terms of vocational education is insufficient and does not correspond to the technical requirements of the labour market, while higher schools specialising in the humanities do not offer the competences, skills and qualifications that are indispensable on the labour market, as indicated by employers (discussed in the paper). This paper analyses the situation of graduates of successive levels of education on the labour market, and the expectations employers have as concerns young workers, as well as the issue of mismatched competences.

To be able to answer the question of whether the Polish education system is addressing the needs of the labour market as well as identify the challenges

it faces, the situation of graduates¹ of different levels of education should be presented. The latest data on this issue is provided by the Human Capital Assessment project (BKL), which was a quite unparalleled piece of research into the labour market on the Polish and European scale. The Polish Agency for Enterprise Development collaborated with the Jagiellonian University to carry out labour market research where the following principles were applied:

- the research was nation-wide but the data was also representative of the regions. Thus, analysis was possible on both national and regional levels;
- the research was cyclical and was carried out in five editions. The first edition took place in 2010 and the following ones were repeated annually until 2014. This enabled the regular monitoring of the labour market;
- research in all the editions followed a uniform methodology, enabling comparisons of research results in given years.²

The third edition of the Human Capital Assessment project resulted in several thematic reports which focus on problems such as the relation between the youth and experience, opinions of employees about the labour market, education, work, entrepreneurship and employers' expectations towards future employees.

Based on the data published in those reports, the situation of students on the labour market can be presented. The most general conclusion drawn from the data is that higher education graduates enjoy a significantly better situation than those without a higher education degree; however, the situation in both categories has slightly worsened. Specific figures follow in the table below.

Table 1

Professional situation (according to BAEL – Research on Economic Activity of Population) of graduates without and with higher education in 2011–2012 (expressed in %)

Professional situation	Without higher education		With higher education	
	2011	2012	2011	2012
Employed	62.6	59.0	77.6	74.3
Unemployed	15.6	21.2	11.5	11.9
Inactive	21.7	19.8	10.9	13.9

Source: Own study based on *Youth or Experience? Human Capital in Poland (Młodość czy doświadczenie? Kapitał ludzki w Polsce)* – a report summarising the third edition of the Human Capital Assessment (BKL) research in 2012, J. Górniak (ed.), BKL 2013, p. 109, 123.

¹ According to GUS, this is a person from 15 to 30 years old who graduated from a school during the last 12 months and is not continuing education.

² More information on the project on <http://bkl.parp.gov.pl/>.

Clearly the holders of higher education degrees enjoy a better situation on the labour market, however, on closer inspection of the educational profile of secondary school leavers and higher education graduates, more accurate conclusions can be drawn. The data have been displayed in the table below.

Table 2

Professional situation of secondary school leavers³ and higher education graduates (BAEL)

Educational background	Employed	Unemployed	Inactive
General secondary education	60.90%	16.20%	22.90%
Technical secondary education	74.40%	14.00%	11.70%
Secondary education in craft vocations	68.30%	19.30%	12.40%
Vocational secondary education in services	52.30%	18.30%	29.30%
Bachelor's degree	63.80%	16.90%	19.30%
Engineer	76.50%	12.30%	11.10%
Master's degree	80.70%	10.30%	9.00%
Master of Engineering	85.30%	10.10%	4.60%

Source: *Youth or Experience? Human Capital in Poland (Młodość czy doświadczenie? Kapitał ludzki w Polsce)*, a summary report on the third edition of the Human Capital Assessment project (BKL) in 2012, J. Górniak (ed.), BKL 2013, p. 138.

The data confirms the clearly stronger professional position of holders of a higher education degree; however, within this group significant differences emerge as well. In terms of the level of education, master's degree holders and masters of engineering perform best, engineers slightly worse, and bachelor's degree holders are considerably outperformed by both graduates of technical secondary schools and graduates of secondary training in a craft vocation. Workers with vocational training are likely to find relatively well-paid employment easily, provided that their profes-

³ In the case of secondary school leavers the following division of education profiles was adopted: 1. general education – having graduated from general secondary school; 2. specialised education – having graduated from specialised secondary school; 3. vocational training (post-secondary school or other); 4. technical – technicians and other professions of medium level technical staff; 5. other after technical school – other professions trained in a technical school such as office or service staff; 6. secondary education in craft vocations – qualified craft professions acquired in basic vocational school; 7. other after secondary education in craft vocations – professions belonging to a group of farming professions, operators, assemblers, unqualified workers; 8. vocational secondary education in services – service professions after basic vocational training.

sion is demanded by the labour market. The biggest professional instability is linked with vocational training in services where the statistics point to the lowest employment rate, the highest rate of professional inactivity and relatively high rates of unemployment. It is noteworthy that among higher education graduates further education mainly benefits bachelor's degree holders, as engineers perform well on the labour market.

The graduates' situation also varies, depending on whether they complete traditional studies or the so-called strategic, ministry-sponsored field of studies.

Table 3

The unemployed, professionally inactive and employed against the total number of graduates according to the type of studies completed (%)

	Graduates below 30		Graduates over the last 10 years*	
	Ministry-sponsored field of studies	Other field	Ministry-sponsored field of studies	Other field
Employed	81.7	75.4	88.5	83.8
Unemployed	9.6	12.5	6.3	8.1
Inactive	8.7	12.1	5.2	8.1
Total number	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

* The authors of the Human Capital Assessment (BKL) understand the term 'graduates during the last 10 years' as people who completed their first major no later than 10 years ago and presently are not continuing their education.

Source: The Human Capital Assessment, Population Research (BKL, Badanie ludności) 2010–2012, graduates below 30, N = 2,581, graduates over the last 10 years, N = 4,864.

It transpires, however, that not all the strategic majors enable smooth entry into the labour market. Among the graduates of majors such as environmental protection, chemistry and environmental engineering, the unemployment rate is relatively high (8.9%, 10.3% and 9.3% respectively). Was it, then, worth spending substantial amounts, if the unemployment rate differences are negligible? Perhaps certain efforts should have been made earlier in the education process, on the middle or secondary education level, in order to arouse greater interest in the pure sciences and other fields which are in demand on the labour market. Later on, this paper will elaborate on the main reasons that motivate young people to choose a given educational path.

What mainly drove students to choose a specific school was to find a job in keeping with their interests, to find any job at all, and to find a well-paid job. A table showing motivations according to school types can be found below.

Table 4

Motivation behind choosing profession/specialisation in vocational schools, secondary and post-secondary schools and higher education institutions according to the type of school

	Total	Basic vocational school	Secondary/postsecondary school	Higher education institution
To develop competences/get promoted	8.94	0.86	7.18	17.97
To find a job more easily	18.52	32.01	18.28	6.36
To find a well-paid job more easily	17.98	17.18	20.01	16.85
To find a job in keeping with my interests	34.66	26.13	34.52	42.64
To evince and develop my non-work interests	4.65	1.67	3.99	8.00
To continue family traditions	3.57	5.52	3.45	1.88

Source: Own study based on: *Educational Path Choices and the Professional Situation of Poles (Wybory ścieżki kształcenia a sytuacja zawodowa Polaków)*, GUS, Informacje i opracowania statystyczne, Warszawa 2013.

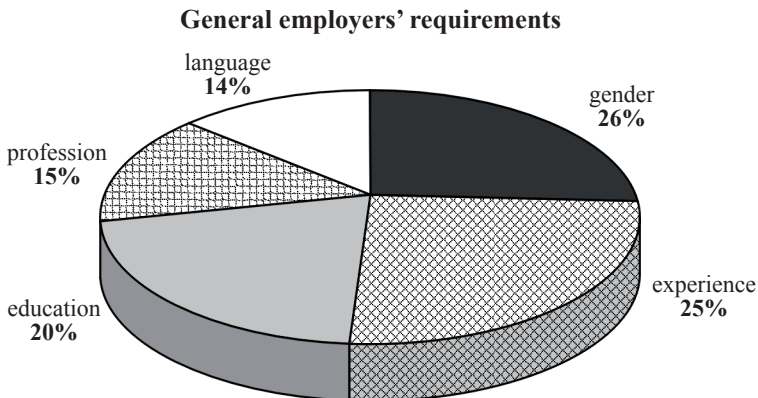
In the above mentioned study, nearly 90% of respondents answered that they took the decision about their educational path independently (94.47% in the case of high education institution and 78.32 in the case of basic vocational school) and only a small fraction mentioned the influence of their peers (family, friends). However, it needs to be remembered that all decisions, even if declared independent, are subject to some external factors. Interestingly, significantly more people cited finding a job related to their interests (particularly in the case of higher education institutions) as the reason for their school choice, and significantly fewer people were driven by a possibility of a well-paid job (again in the case of higher education institutions). The motivation to find any job at all explains the choice of vocational schools.

On the one hand, developing competences and qualifications in keeping with their interests is of great importance, but on the other hand the matter of employers' expectations needs to be taken into consideration. Comparing employers' needs with the work force supply, some of the areas where potential problems in the labour market may lie can be singled out. Many employers quote the employees' inability to meet requirements as the main difficulty in the recruitment process. This particularly concerns the range of competences required, mainly professional ones (job-specific depending on a post), self-organisational (work self-organisation, showing initiative and keeping deadlines) and interpersonal (dealing with other people). When looking for employees for a specific job, employers

specify requirements encompassing not only a set of competences but also their level. The situation in which a candidate fails to satisfy the employers' expectations in that respect is defined as the skills gap or skills mismatch, as the competences are, for example, either too low for a given post or different from what the employer expects for a given position. In the case of already-employed people, the term competency deficit is used. Both situations lead to upsetting the balance of the labour market, which then affects both the employers – by pushing up costs, for instance as a result of training schemes – and employees who are forced to accept jobs for which they are overqualified (Górniak, 2013, pp. 17–18).

The third edition of the Human Capital Assessment carried out in 2012 resulted in a report called *Employers about the Labour Market (Pracodawcy o rynku pracy)*. It indicated that the main requirements established by employers for the candidates include: gender and professional experience, measured by the length of service on a similar position. The gender criterion mattered, as for some jobs women were preferred (services, sales workers) and men for others (craft jobs), there were also jobs where gender was irrelevant (office workers). Education was another factor.

Chart 1. General requirements specified by employers in search of employees in 2012



Source: Own study based on *Employers about the Labour Market (Pracodawcy o rynku pracy)*, which drew on the research carried out in 2012 as part of the third edition of Human Capital Assessment (BKL), M. Kocór, A. Strzebońska, M. Dawid-Sawicka, BKL 2012, p. 48.

It is obvious that the requirements laid down for candidates vary depending on the job applied for. However, a pattern emerged – the more

specialised the profession, the higher the requirements. What follows below is a brief outline of the general requirements that employers impose on candidates for various positions. In terms of the significance of various criteria, five professional groups can be distinguished:

- **Managers and specialists** (including technicians and middle management) – in the recruitment process, employers paid special attention to education and experience (particularly important for those who wanted to employ managers). When assessing candidates for a specialised profession, command of foreign languages was taken into account.
- **Clerical workers** – all the elements apart from experience played a significant role.
- **Service and sales workers** – employers attached the greatest weight to gender, giving preference to women.
- **Qualified workers, operators and assemblers** – in the recruitment process employers paid attention to two basic requirements: they needed to be men with similar experience in a similar position.
- **Elementary occupation workers** – here employers were basically looking for male candidates and only half of them demanded experience in a similar position (Kocór, Strzebońska, Dawid-Sawicka, 2012, pp. 50–51).

Those requirements are complemented and followed on the requirements list by so-called soft skills. The list of sought-after competences and skills is headed by professional competences (nearly 2/5 of employers). The ability to maintain contacts with people, including customers, communicativeness and good manners, and self-presentation skills ranked next. Features which complement professional competences and guarantee an adequate quality of performance are equally important, including responsibility, discipline, honesty, credibility, diligence, and also care, precision and attention to detail. The table below presents detailed data.

Table 5

Employers' expectations as to young employees' competences and skills

Competences	Per cent
1	2
Professional competences	38.3
Contact with people, customers	20.5
Responsibility, work-discipline, honesty, credibility	20.2
Communicativeness – clearly expressing his/her thoughts	14.4
Good manners, kindness, self-presentation, good image	11.0
Availability	10.6

1	2
Eagerness to work, diligence	9.5
Care, scrupulosity, precision, attention to details	9.2
Creativity, being innovative, coming up with new solutions	8.9
Team work	8.3
Qualifications, licences, driving licences	7.1
Problem solving	6.5
Entrepreneurship	6.3
Advanced computer skills	5.9
Stress resistance	5.6
Technological literacy	5.4
Punctuality	5.1
Ability to learn	5.1
Independence	5.1

Source: *Employers about the Labour Market (Pracodawcy o rynku pracy)* based on research carried out in 2012 as part of the third edition of Human Capital Assessment (BKL), M. Kocór, A. Strzebońska, M. Dawid-Sawicka, BKL 2012, p. 3

Employers stress that in most cases (85%) difficulties finding employees lay in the fact that the candidates fell short of their expectations. This referred mainly to a lack of adequate competences (36%), experience (25%) and motivation (25%) (Kocór, Strzebońska, Dawid-Sawicka, 2012, pp. 81–82). Nowadays, a lack of motivation seems unheard-of; however, in employers' view, this attitude is an impediment when employing a young person.

Taking into account the data, the question needs to be addressed of whether the Polish educational system benefits graduates on the labour market, or stands in the way of finding a job. In the article *Relevance of the Polish education system to labour market needs* the question of whether the Polish system educates people to be unemployed was concluded with an answer in the negative. However, while the situation of higher education graduates on the labour market is relatively good since the unemployment rate is not high in this group, nevertheless, it needs to be stated that they do not always work in their chosen field and –worse still – they are often overqualified for the post they hold. This is largely caused by poor information about employment opportunities after specific studies and by insufficiently long training programmes during studies. Poorly encouraged to be active, students and graduates struggle to consciously choose from employers' offers. However, it must not be forgotten that unemployment among graduates of all types of schools should mainly be put down to the existing economic situation.

Another criticism of the educational system is the inability to promote technical studies, which in the context of a large number of general secondary school graduates favours liberal arts. It seems that to a large extent it can be explained by their interests and the quality of teaching of pure sciences both in middle and secondary schools. It is to be hoped that efforts already made to change the situation (for example, the obligatory final maths exams) will result in students choosing technical and scientific studies. However, it needs to be stated that the economy also needs employees with lower qualifications, and when forecasting the needs of the labour market it is the overall socio-economic situation that should be taken into account, not only a part of the system: the knowledge-based sector. Therefore, as mentioned before, an economy always needs those who will work physically on a construction site, repair and maintain the machinery and devices designed by graduates of technical universities.

The challenges facing institutions offering the so-called mass majors, or liberal arts, studies consist of ensuring and raising awareness among their students of the possibilities of using the competences and qualifications acquired during their studies to set up and run their own company, even a niche one. This paper argues that obligatory entrepreneurship courses should be taught, regardless of the major, and students should do odd jobs or work part-time in the course of their studies, as it brings measurable benefits. Firstly, financial benefits – independent income and reducing dependence on parental support; secondly, contact with the working environment and acquiring the qualifications and skills necessary in professional life (as indicated above) such as people skills, team work, and managing and organising work. Thirdly, it is an incredibly important piece of information for the prospective future employer, who – on seeing in the CV that a young person successfully juggled work and education – may feel almost certain that they are a responsible person who manages time well and has some experience on the labour market which, when combined with education, gives this person a head start over candidates without such background.

Recapitulating all the considerations in the paper, it needs to be stated that the Polish educational system does not educate people to be unemployed; however, its current form may significantly hamper the development of the national economy in the future. Insufficient attention is paid to raising awareness among secondary school students of the needs of the labour market. There is little or no analysis of the possibilities, talents, predispositions and interests of middle school students that can be used later to specify and indicate their further educational paths. Vocational

and technical schools are underestimated, and they are often supplied with, euphemistically speaking, poor equipment, inadequate to what is offered in the working world. General secondary school leavers are underinformed in terms of knowledge and skills in technical and scientific areas, which determines their choice to study liberal arts. Higher education institutions, in turn, offer and promote practical training to an insufficient degree, especially in the field of liberal arts.

The challenges that the Polish education system faces first and foremost are the urgent need to streamline it and adjust it to the needs of the labour market. Moreover, an adequate economic policy should be implemented which will pave the way to employment-intensive economic growth. The combination of these two elements should contribute to ensuring an opportunity for the growth of the Polish economy in the future. Poland has a lot of unlocked potential, and even though its economy is trying to catch up with the most developed European states, they are not standing still waiting to be caught up. Therefore, no efforts should be spared when addressing these challenges and shaping reality instead of passively contemplating it.

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Streszczenie

W tekście przedstawiono wyzwania stojące przed polskim systemem edukacji, które oznaczają przede wszystkim konieczność jego usprawnienia i dostosowania w kierunku bardziej odpowiadającego potrzebom rynku pracy. Ponadto wskazano, co nie-

zwykle istotne, że koniecznym jest również realizowanie odpowiedniej polityki ekonomicznej, która będzie prowadziła do prozatrudnieniowego wzrostu gospodarczego. Połączenie tych działań powinno się przyczynić do zapewnienia polskiej gospodarce szansy na rozwój w przyszłości. Polska ma ogromny potencjał do wykorzystania, ale mimo że stara się zbliżyć ku najbardziej rozwiniętym państwom europejskim, to jednak należy pamiętać, że te nie stoją w miejscu. Należy więc ze zdwojoną mocą podjąć wyzwania i kreować rzeczywistość, a nie tylko biernie jej się przyglądać.

Słowa kluczowe: polski system edukacji, rynek pracy, absolwenci

Резюме

В тексте представлены проблемы, стоящие перед польской системой образования, которые, прежде всего, означают необходимость ее совершенствования и адаптации в направлении более соответствующему потребностям рынка труда. Кроме того, указано, что крайне важно, что также обязательным является осуществление соответствующей экономической политики, которая приведет к нацеленному на занятость экономическому росту. Сочетание этих действий должно содействовать обеспечению польской экономике шанса на развитие в будущем. Польша имеет большой потенциал для использования, но несмотря на попытки приблизиться к наиболее развитым европейским странам, следует помнить, что они не стоят на месте. Итак, следует с удвоенной силой принять вызов и создавать действительность, а не только пассивно к ней присматриваться.

Ключевые слова: польская система образования, рынок труда, выпускники

Резюме

В статті представлені виклики, які стоять перед польською системою освіти, і вимагають її покращення та пристосування до потреб ринку. Звернено увагу на такий аспект як реалізація відповідної економічної політики, що має забезпечити зростання зайнятості й економіки. Поєднання цих дій сприятиме розвитку польської економіки в майбутньому. Польша має високий потенціал і намагається наблизитись до рівня найбільш розвинених європейських країн. Однак ці країни не стоять на місці. Відповідно необхідно з подвійною силою працювати над підвищенням зросту економіки, а не пасивно спостерігати за ситуацією.

Ключові слова: польська система освіти, ринок праці, випускники