

Eligibility of professional specialist degree holders for taking teaching positions in professional study programmes in the Republic of Croatia

Ivo Ivančić, Tel: +385 91 4825 918, e-mail: ivo.ivancic@vern.hr

Zrinka Gregov, Tel: +385 91 4825 920, e-mail: zrinka.gregov@vern.hr

Mirna Varlandy - Supek, Tel: +385 91 4825 951, e-mail: mirna.varlandysupek@vern.hr

University of Applied Sciences VERN', Trg bana Josipa Jelačića 3, 10000 Zagreb, CROATIA

Abstract

The aim of this study was to find answers about the eligibility of professional specialist degree holders to teach in professional study programmes in the Republic of Croatia. Secondary sources included legislation, foreign and domestic scientific and professional literature and higher education data bases. The interview method was applied in order to collect primary data, and the interviewees included representatives of key stakeholders: 1) the Chairwoman of the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament, 2) a representative of Croatia's Ministry of Science, Education and Sports 3) a representative of regulators from the Agency for Science and Higher Education, Croatia, 4) the president of the Council of Polytechnics and Schools of Professional Higher Education 5) a college vice-dean teaching management in professional study courses 6) a university professor of management and entrepreneurship with experience of teaching both in university and professional study programmes, 7) and MA in economics working for an international bank and 8) a holder of a professional bachelor's degree (PBD) in entrepreneurship economics completing a graduate professional specialist course in entrepreneurial management and working for an international foundation. The results of the study suggest that students in professional study programmes in the Republic of Croatia are unable to reach the highest professional teaching title of *college professor* as it is practically impossible for them to enrol in graduate doctoral studies at universities. In order to make this possible, it is necessary to allow their enrolment in graduate university studies and/or introduce professional doctoral studies into the Croatian higher education system.

Key words: *the Bologna Process, professional studies, teaching titles in professional studies*

1. Introduction

Croatia has a binary higher education system: academic education and professional education. Many provisions of the Bologna Declaration that were signed have been adopted; however, there are certain provisions which discriminate against students who have chosen the professional education path. For one thing, upon completing their specialist graduate professional programme they are not awarded a *master's* title, but just that of a *specialist* in a respective profession (Act on Academic and Professional Titles and Academic Degree, Official Gazette 2012). Secondly, they cannot enrol in university postgraduate (doctoral) studies directly (Polšek, 2004, p 269), which may be an impediment to teaching professional degree courses.

2. Professional and university studies in the Republic of Croatia

From the total of 185,457 students in the academic year 2009/10, one third was professional studies students (Agency for Science and Higher Education, 2012). Professional studies account for about one fifth of all accredited study programmes; however, there are 388 university graduate programmes vs. 56 professional graduate programmes (Agency for Science and Higher Education, 2014).

Before 2008 graduates with a professional bachelor degree could directly enrol in university graduate study (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2008), but since then they cannot. Even though according to the Bologna Process, the higher education system is divided into three levels (cycles): 1. baccalaureus/bachelor's degree; 2. magisterij/master's degree i 3. doktorat/doctorate (Bologna Handbook – Making Bologna Work 2008), this system has been implemented only for university studies.

At the very beginning of the Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education (hereinafter: ASAHE) it is established that "...higher education is based on the openness of higher education institutions to the public, citizens and the local community as well as on the reciprocity and partnership of members of the academic community ..." (ASAHE, Art. 2, 2013). This should also apply to the partnership between university and professional studies. According to this Act, university studies are supposed to prepare students for work related to science, higher education, business, the public sector and the society at large as well as train them for developing and applying scientific and professional accomplishments (ASAHE, Art. 69, 2013). As for professional studies, the Act only says that they offer students an appropriate level of knowledge and skills allowing them to perform professional jobs and train them for immediate involvement in the work process (ASAHE, Art. 69, 2013), thus making professional studies inferior to university studies.

When the Bologna process was first being introduced, it was only the polytechnics and colleges (schools of professional higher education) that were supposed to provide professional studies, and universities were supposed to provide university studies only. However, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia allowed universities to provide professional studies as well (*Decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia No. U-I-1707/2006*, according to Rajčić, 2008). The decision was explained by the fact that university education incorporates professional education as well, so every university meets requirements for the organisation, execution and implementation of professional studies. Inversely, professional studies do not incorporate university education, so no polytechnic or college meets the requirements for the organisation and implementation of university studies including doctoral studies.

Requirements for teaching title appointment in institutions providing professional studies are regulated by the law (ASAHE Art. 98), decisions of the Rectors' Conference (Rectors' Conference 2011) and decisions of the Professional Council of Polytechnics and Schools of Professional Higher Education. The requirements for the title of lecturer (Art. 1) include the requirement to have "*a master/university specialist degree or a professional specialist degree (completion of at least 10 semesters of higher education studies)*" (Professional Council of Polytechnics and Schools of Professional Higher Education 2011, Art. 1). For the senior lecturer appointment (Art. 2), only those with a master/university specialist degree and masters and PhD degrees can apply, which repre-

sents discrimination against professional specialists. Professional specialists can apply only if they have already been appointed lecturers and have met some other requirements. However, the appointment to college professor (Art. 3) explicitly requires the candidates to have a PhD. On the other hand, according to the Statute of the Register of Scientists (Official Gazette 2010), only individuals with a PhD can be entered in the Register, which creates obstacles for professional specialists to engage in scientific work.

3. Research methods

As sources of secondary data, the following were used: legislation and other regulations pertaining to higher education, foreign and domestic scientific and professional literature as well as various higher education data bases. Primary data were collected using the method of semi-structured interviews with individuals selected as representatives of key stakeholders (Table 1). The subjects were asked 11 questions on the following: a) the application of the Bologna Process in Europe and Croatia, b) the differences between professional and university studies, c) the level of knowledge and the possibilities to become involved in the teaching processes, d) vertical mobility and the possibility of introducing professional doctoral studies in Croatia.

Table 1. Participants in in-depth interviews, representatives of key stakeholders

| INTERVIEWEES | WHO THEY REPRESENT |
|--|--|
| Chair of an EU parliamentary committee | Honorary PhD, the Chairwoman of the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament; |
| Ministry representative | Teacher, Head of the Department of Higher Education Institutions Operation, Division for Business Operation and Student Standard, Higher Education Administration, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia; |
| Agency representative | Teacher, Head of the Research and Development Department of the Agency for Science and Higher Education; |
| Council President | University professor, PhD, president of the Council of Polytechnics and Schools of Professional Higher Education of the Republic of Croatia and Dean of the Polytechnicum Zagabiense |
| College Vice Dean | PhD, college professor, Vice Dean of Academic Affairs of a business college |
| University professor | University professor, PhD, Faculty of Economics, University of Zagreb, former lecturer at the University of Applied Sciences VERN' |
| Master's Degree Holder | Holder of an MA in economics, deputy director of the Directorate of Sales Support at the Business Sector of the Erste & Steiermaerkische Bank; |
| Holder of the Bachelor of Professional Studies degree | Holder of the BPS degree in economics of entrepreneurship, finishing a specialist graduate professional study course in Entrepreneurial Management at the University of Applied Sciences VERN', co-ordinator of projects run by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation |

4. Results and discussion

All interviewees agree that the European higher education system has mostly or completely followed the Bologna recommendations (Table 2). The implementation of the Bologna Process in Croatia has been facing many problems, the most conspicuous being the issue of mobility from professional to university studies.

Table 2. Implementation of the Bologna Process in Europe and Croatia

| INTERVIEWEE | QUESTION 1: Do you think that the European higher education system has followed the Bologna recommendations? | QUESTION 2: What are the three most significant problems in the higher education system in Croatia? |
|---|---|--|
| Chair of an EU parliamentary committee | Mostly. | Low mobility. More investment and research work required. |
| Ministry representative | Mostly. | Investment stagnation. Low mobility. Insufficient infrastructure. |
| Agency representative | Mostly. | Insufficient funding. Low competitiveness. Low recognisability in the EU. |
| Council President | Completely. | Money, discrepancy of evaluation criteria between private and public higher education institutions, parallel undergraduate programmes in university and professional studies. |
| College Vice Dean | Mostly. | Insufficient investment in research. Private higher education institutions not supported by the state. No vertical mobility from professional to university studies. |
| University professor | Mostly. | Study programmes in discordance with the labour market, only theoretical knowledge in the first three years, no straightforward mobility from professional to university study programmes. |
| Master's Degree Holder | Mostly. | Lack of adjustment to the labour market. Professional and university studies differ too much in formal terms. |
| BPS Degree Holder | Completely. | University teachers teach too few classes. No horizontal and vertical mobility. Incompatibility of educational programmes and labour markets. |

As for the differences between professional and university studies (Table 2), all but the Agency representative think that professional and university studies should be equally valued. They differ mostly in the type of knowledge they provide: university studies provide predominantly theoretical knowledge, whereas professional studies provide predominantly practical knowledge.

Table 3. Differences between professional and university studies

| INTERVIEWEE | QUESTION 3: Should today' professional and university studies be equally valued in Europe and in what way? | QUESTION 4: What are the biggest differences between professional and university studies? |
|---|---|---|
| Chair of an EU parliamentary committee | Yes. | University studies mostly focus on the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, and professional studies on practical. |
| Ministry representative | Yes. | Knowledge, skills and competences. |
| Agency representative | I don't know. | Professional: learning outcomes should be directed at the labour market. University: learning outcomes should be directed at theoretical knowledge and scientific skills. |
| Council President | Yes. | Professional: prepare students for applying knowledge to the economy. University: for scientific work and work in higher education, but also for working in the business world. |
| College Vice Dean | Yes. | Professional: provide theoretical and practical knowledge. University: provide theoretical and general knowledge. |
| University professor | Yes. | Professional: should provide knowledge and skills for working in specific professional areas and for dealing with repetitive jobs. University: should enable students to do creative jobs and deal with creative problems. |
| Master's Degree Holder | By the quality of teaching. | Professional: prepares directly for the world of business, practical knowledge, no doctorate possible. University: primarily educate for academic careers, theoretical framework, open vertical mobility including doctoral studies. |
| BPS Degree Holder | Yes. | Professional: prepare students for business careers, work-applicable programmes, more efficient studying. University: mostly theoretical knowledge, programmes less suited to a business environment, studying takes too long and is inefficient. |

Most interviewees agree that BPS degree holders are better prepared for the challenges of the business world (Table 3), while opinions differ when it comes to academic/teaching careers. Representatives of both the Ministry and the Agency are not sure whether students of university and professional studies should be treated equally in terms of their rights and possibilities to teach, while others believe they should.

Table 4. Level of knowledge and eligibility for taking teaching positions

| INTERVIEWEE | QUESTION 5: There is a lot of public criticism from the business world about the knowledge and qualifications of bachelor's degree holders. Which students, i.e. holders of bachelor's degrees are better prepared for the challenges of the business world, and which for academic/teaching careers: those with a degree from university studies or those with a degree from professional studies? | QUESTION 6: Should students in university and professional study programmes be treated equally in terms of their rights, including their eligibility for teaching? |
|---|--|---|
| Chair of an EU parliamentary committee | Equal. | Yes. |
| Ministry representative | For the business world, those with a degree from professional studies. I'm not sure about teaching careers | I don't know. |
| Agency representative | I cannot say with certainty. | I don't know. |
| Council President | BPS degree holders for the business world, both for teaching careers. | Yes. |
| College Vice Dean | BPS degree holders for the business world. University graduates for teaching at university. Graduates from professional study programmes for teaching at schools with professional study programmes. | Yes. |
| University professor | For the business world, those with a degree from professional studies. University graduates for academic careers. | Yes. |
| Master's Degree Holder | BPS degree holders for the business world. University graduates for academic careers in university study programmes and Graduates from professional programmes for teaching at schools with professional study programmes. | Yes. |
| BPS Degree Holder | BPS degree holders for the business world, both for academic careers. | Yes. |

As for the possibility to obtain a doctorate and the highest teaching title at professional higher education institutions, almost all interviewees believe that this can be achieved in the EU relatively easily, whereas in Croatia it is either impossible or possible but with many obstacles. Vertical mobility is very low, from the inability to enrol in university graduate study programmes to impediments such as a large number of additional requirements (exams) they need to meet due to curriculum discrepancies (Table 4). As for the equal number of ECTS credits and equal degrees for graduates from professional and university studies, three interviewees opted for it, three were against it and one did not know. Only the chair of a EU parliamentary committee said yes but with the difference in schools being discreetly specified, which is not surprising as she comes from the German higher education system where degrees from all schools are the same but with the school's abbreviation being given in parenthesis: univ. for university studies, FH (from the German Fachhochschule) for polytechnics and professional colleges (Havelka 2003).

Table 5. Vertical mobility and the introduction of professional doctoral studies in Croatia

| INTERVIEWEE | QUESTION 7: When a student in a professional study programme wants to continue their studies at a higher academic level, vertical mobility works in the following way: | PITANJE 8: Do you think that students who complete either university or professional graduate programmes should be awarded equal degrees as they are supposed to earn an equal number of ECTS credits? | QUESTION 9: Do you see the introduction of professional doctoral studies into the Croatian higher education system as a good solution? Explain why. |
|--|--|--|---|
| Chair of an EU parliamentary committee | With many barriers | Yes, with discreetly specified difference. | Yes. |
| Ministry representative | Students first need to enrol in a lower level of university studies or take additional exams to meet enrolment requirements or they don't. | No. | I don't know (I cannot tell for sure) |
| Agency representative | Additional exams to meet enrolment requirements. | I don't know. | No. |
| Council President | Some faculties have a ban on enrolling students with a professional studies degree. | Yes. | Yes. |
| College Vice Dean | No possibility to continue studying. | No. | Yes. |
| University professor | A large number of additional exams to meet enrolment requirements. | No. | Yes. |
| Master's Degree Holder | Unnecessary barriers by requiring students to take a large number of additional exams to be admitted. | Yes. | Yes. |
| BPS Degree Holder | Unnecessary mobility barriers. | Yes. | Yes. |

All interviewees, with the exception of the Agency representative, believe that the introduction of professional doctoral studies into the Croatian higher education system is a good solution. She does not think so, while the Ministry representative is not sure as he is unable to make a sound judgement.

A professional doctorate is becoming increasingly popular with people who want to develop their business careers in the first place, but who would also like to develop as teachers (Taylor and Rosemarye, 2014). On a global level, higher education is increasingly adjusting to the needs of the labour market, so rather than putting a clear divide between university and professional studies, diversification of higher education has become a rising trend. It is taking place due to the convergence of both types of studies: university studies towards professional and professional studies are becoming more academic in their struggle against discrimination, so-called dual universities are established, where both university and professional studies are carried out, and students can choose courses from both (Coodling i Meek 2006, Gregov 2012). At all higher education institu-

tions it is of utmost importance to provide an appropriate level of quality of teaching with teachers being ethical, rational and unbiased (Morland and Mollie, 2014) as their students are in fact future teachers. Being teachers they also need to follow ethical standards and advance to the desired teaching rank exclusively on the basis of hard work, commitment and research (Subedi, 2014), and regulations should not prevent them from doing it.

6. Conclusions

In the Republic of Croatia students of professional studies at graduate level have been discriminated against students of university studies. If they want to continue their education in university graduate study programmes they are either banned or required to enrol in a programme at a lower level of higher education or to take a number of exams to meet enrolment requirements. If they start teaching they can only obtain the teaching title of *lecturer* and *senior lecturer*, whereas for the title of *college professor* they need to have a PhD. While most interviewees including the president of the EU Education Committee emphasise that one of the fundamental aims of the Bologna Process is increased mobility between different study programmes and different constituent units of higher education, which requires equal quality of education in professional and university studies as a key prerequisite, the representative of the Croatian regulatory agency thinks it is primarily a political decision to be made by individual countries. Modelled on a number of so-called *dual universities* worldwide, which simultaneously provide university and professional studies with students being able to choose and combine courses from both verticals themselves, there are two possible solutions: (a) facilitation of mobility, i.e. transfer from the professional to the university vertical to enable professional specialists to continue their studies in post-graduate university programmes (doctorate) and/or (b) introduction of professional post-graduate programmes (doctorate) into the Croatian higher education system in order to complete the professional studies vertical in the binary higher education system.

References

1. Agencija za znanost i visoko obrazovanje (2014). Odnos sveučilišnih i stručnih studija. <https://www.azvo.hr/index.php/hr/statistike/odnos-sveucilisnih-i-strucnih-studija> (Retrieved: 11/9/2014)
2. Bologna Handbook – Making Bologna Work (2008). Berlin, Brussels, Dublin, Greifswald, Lyon: European University Association & Raabe Academic Publishers.
3. Codling, A. i Meek, V.L. (2006). Twelve propositions on diversity in higher education. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 18(3), 31-54.
4. Gregov, Z. (2012). Višekriterijski model za selekciju i evaluaciju veleučilišnih nastavnika. Magistarski rad. Zagreb: Ekonomski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu
5. Havelka, M. (2003). Visoko obrazovanje u Hrvatskoj i europskim zemljama. Zagreb: Institut Ivo Pilar.
6. Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i sporta Republike Hrvatske (2008). <http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=2566&lang=hr-HR&upit=shema%20visokog%20obrazovanja%202008> (Retrieved: 13/8/2008)
7. Morland, C. i Mollie, P. (2014). The experience of learning: approaches to sustainability and ethics education. <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/JMD-05-2014-0043> (Retrieved: 6/9/2014)
8. Narodne novine (2010). Pravilnik o Upisniku znanstvenika. <http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?art=5492> (Retrieved: 1/6/2014).

9. Narodne novine (2012). Zakon o akademskim i stručnim nazivima i akademskom stupnju. <http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/329375.html> (Retrieved: 13/8/2013)
10. Narodne novine (2013). Zakon o znanstvenoj djelatnosti i visokom obrazovanju. public.mzos.hr/fgs.axd?id=21078 (Retrieved: 1/3/2014.)
11. Polšek, D. (2004). Visoko školstvo u Hrvatskoj i zahtjevi Europske unije. U: K. Ott (ur.) Pridruživanje Hrvatske Europskoj Uniji. Zagreb: Institut za javne financije, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
12. Rajčić, D. (2008). Propisi o znanstvenoj djelatnosti i visokom obrazovanju s komentarom. Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naknada.
13. Rektorski zbor (2011). Odluka o nužnim uvjetima za ocjenu nastavne i stručne djelatnosti u postupku izbora u nastavna zvanja s 30. sjednice održane 30. svibnja 2011. Zagreb, 2011.
14. Subedi, D. (2014) Ethics lessons for business managers, organizations and researchers. <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/CR.34724baa.001> (Retrieved: 6/9/2014.)
15. Taylor, G. i Rosemarye, T. (2014). The professional doctorate. <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/HESWBL-03-2014-0008> (Retrieved: 6/9/2014.)
16. Vijeće veleučilišta i visokih škola Republike Hrvatske (2011). Odluka o uvjetima za ocjenu nastavne i stručne djelatnosti u postupku izbora u nastavna zvanja sa sjednice održane 14. listopada 2011. Zagreb: 2011.
17. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating_countries/reviews/croatia_review_of_higher_education (Retrieved: 1/9/2014)

