



A RESEARCH STUDY ON KONSTANTIN PRESLAVSKY UNIVERSITY OF SHUMEN STUDENTS` REALIZATION

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Abstract: *The paper presents the opinions of users, specialists and students who study at Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen. The period involved is 2009-2013. The paper analyzes the collected, processed and systematized data from two of the four questionnaires used by Shumen University – Questionnaire A3 for quality of education that is intended for employers and Questionnaire A4 that is intended for students who graduate Shumen University. <http://uninet.shu-bg.net/upravleniakachestvoto/anketi/>*

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Introduction

The marketing researches on the labour market are key elements from the Quality Management System in Shumen University. The Career Centre and lecturers who know the capabilities of companies and state institutions in the region to employ graduates carry out jointly these surveys.

The professional fields in the main structural units also support continuous and effective contacts with employers. These are in the form of meetings, discussions, consultations, assessments and recommendations. The aim is to allow educational practices and internships in a real professional environment; to enhance mediation in the process of searching work from students and graduates.

Analysis of the results of the polls

The research on the *labor market status and trends* involves:

- Assessment of staff needs within the labor market in order to optimize the academic profile of Shumen University;
- Improvement of quality of education – to specify the knowledge, skills and competences required according to the market rules;
- Enhancement of opportunities for students` realization.

The users' profile is determined and recorded in several ways:

- by direct contact with representatives and experts from leading companies and public institutions and by discussion of opportunities for internships and practical training of students. Moreover, it is also discussed the environment in which business works and its requirements to students' training;
- by collaboration with regional employment offices, Directorates of Labour, „Students' Work” units and other units of the Employment Agency;
- by periodic surveys of representatives of companies, institutions and organizations, including Regional inspectorates of education and other state institutions.

The following table provides information on the range of interviewers in respect to different institutions involved and different profiles of personnel required:

Table 1 Interviewed Employers according to the Type of Institution (2009-2013)

Institution/Company/Organization	Number Interviewers
Regional Inspectorates of the Ministry of Education	28
Companies	47
Eparchies	15
Primary Schools	32
Kindergartens	41
Secondary Schools	122
Sports Schools	6
VIIIth Grades Schools	254
High Schools, Vocational Schools and Specialized Schools	125
Special Schools	10
Total	680

Shumen University establishes and maintains *effective contacts with employers* to ensure successful training and professional development of its graduates. There are also close links with experts from ministries and other departments, as well as with the Regional Inspectorates of the Ministry of Education and Science, with Principles of schools and kindergartens, with non-governmental educational organizations, with local and state administration, with heads of companies and enterprises, with bishops from Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

As it was mentioned above, there are contacts established with employers and there is a system available that allows students to achieve professional realization (courses, internships, career development centers, preliminary contracts etc.).

The University Career Centre is the mediator between employers, academic staff and the students. Its *mission is:*

- to assist young people in their professional orientation and development including those from disadvantaged groups;
- to promote the development of relations and cooperation in the field of vocational training and career development between educational institutions and business organizations, public administration and other representatives from social and economic life;
- to monitor the trends within the labor market and to inform the academic management about labour market requirements. It allows more flexible adaptation between the majors offered and the actual needs of the economy;
- to enhance the professional realization and career development of Bachelor, Master and Doctoral Degree students and graduates;
- to provide information and to consult undergraduate and graduate students in relation to programs funded at national and European level in the fields of education, training and leisure.

The aims, objectives and forms of supporting the career development of students, as well as the possibilities of their realization and internships offers are available on http://careercenters.staj.bg/?uni_id=315. There is a mail-group of students that allows quickly and effective dissemination of opportunities available. The University Career Centre assists students in preparing the required documents and in establishing contacts with the employers.

The University Career Centre organizes meetings and presentations with leading companies and organizations from the public and private sectors. These events aim at presenting to students the opportunities for professional and career development. There are discussions organized between companies' representatives and Shumen University students and bilateral protocols are worked out.

The Career Centre expands its information and consulting activities and deepens its cooperation with employers' organizations, regional employment offices etc.

The interaction process with employers is dynamic through registrations available that allows employers to offer internships, practical trainings and vacancies. The Career Center periodically organizes surveys that analyze employers' attitude towards students' internships and trainings.

Students are duly informed about internships and trainings available for gaining specific skills and competences that are required by the specific needs of the labour market: http://careercenters.staj.bg/?page_id=168. Student can register online on the Web site of the University Career Centre. At the same time, there are lists of contacts of Shumen University graduates that allow getting feedback for their realization ([http://careercenters.staj.bg/?page_id=183, 199](http://careercenters.staj.bg/?page_id=183,199)). There are joint meetings and festive organized with Shumen University graduates. Some of the graduates participate as employers. The graduates' career development is documented in the film „Shumen University – University of Shumen City”

The links with business representatives could be illustrated by the fact that some of them work as part-time lecturers at the University and others participate in University Quality Management Committee and Faculties Quality Management Committees.

The following measures are taken in response to the critical evaluations about the practical training of Shumen University graduates:

- the internships organization is optimized;
- the aims, responsibilities and activities of the participants (students, academic staff, specialists) are updated;
- the quality of performance of internships with their specific stages is increased;
- documentation about organization of different internship programs is available;
- criteria for evaluation of practical trainings and internships of students are updated, as well as those in regard to awarding credits;
- instructions for conducting internships included in the curricula allow students to be introduced to professional environment;
- the specialists are selected and precise financial security within internships is implemented;
- the connections between lecturers, specialists at different departments and specialists are optimized;
- effective indicators for enhancing the practical training and internships are implemented. The aim is to upgrade the system of competencies of students related to their professional qualification and their motivation for realization and career development;
- students' psychological, pedagogical and social training is supported;
- there are established inter-institutional networks with basic institutions and non-governmental organizations.

As a result, the professional skills of students have increased, which had a positive impact on the assessment of the internships, practical trainings and

workshops held. In addition, it is important to say that the positive assessment is due to the practical skills hours included in the curricula (especially in pedagogical and technological majors). The contact hours are about 42,5% of the total workload, which is comparable with European standards.

It can be supposed that the information about the system for evaluation of the knowledge and skills of students available in the curriculum and the student`s set, as well as the correct formulation of the assessment criteria implied in examinations form the students` attitude towards the education process and affect their motivation during different seminars and workshops organized.

The results from the surveys in regard to students' opinion about the methods of practical training are periodically analyzed and published. This is the way to get feedback from students and academic staff. The educational content of „Bachelor” and „Master” degree programs are periodically upgraded according to the needs of the practical training and internships. There are initiated negotiations with employers for new internship possibilities. New contracts are signed with employers from state, private and non-governmental organizations.

There is a feedback system developed in *Konstantin Preslavsky* University being a part of the system to ensure the quality of academic activities. That very system includes collecting of information for the realization of graduates in terms of quality of their professional and scientific training, as well as database with various names and contact details of employers and students. There are tools developed (inquiry cards, questionnaires, interviews) that allow to collect information about graduates` realization and their employers` satisfaction.

There is a database for the realization of students after the first, the third and the fifth year of their graduation. That system takes into account 8 indicators - directly employed in a major graduated, not directly employed in the major graduate, employed in another field, researchers, teachers, unemployed, etc.

In order to monitor the realization after the first, the third and the fifth year of graduation The Evaluation and Quality Management Committee at Shumen University together with the University Career Center have developed a system of methods and forms that allows collection, processing and analysis of the data received. The system is developed in accordance with the criteria system implemented in institutional accreditation procedure and set by the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation.

The information about the realization of graduates of Shumen University divided into professional fields is presented in Table 2:

Table 2 Students` Realization According to the Data Received by the Main Structural Units and the University Career Centre

Main Structural Unit	Professional Field	Realization in %
Faculty of Education (FE)	1.2. Pedagogy	54,1
	1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching	48,9
	3.4. Social Activities	61,4
Faculty of Natural Sciences (FNS)	4.2. Chemical Sciences	55,1
	4.3. Biological Sciences	20,4
	6.2. Agricultural Sciences and Plant Protection	54,1
	4.1. Physical Sciences	32,5
	3.9. Tourism	62,2
	1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching..	33,7
Faculty of Humanities (FH)	2.1. Philology	64,8
	2.2. History and Archeology	65,4
	2.4. Religion and Theology	79,1
	1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching	63,1
	3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences	67,9
Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics (FMI)	4.5. Mathematics	88,5
	4.6. Informatics and Computer Sciences	78,7
	3.8. Economics	73,1
	1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching	82,5
Faculty of Technical Sciences (FTS)	5.3. Communication and Computer Technologies	85,5
	5.7. Architecture, Construction and Geodesy	75,3
	5.13. General Engineering	67,1
	9.1. National Security	84,8
College in Dobrich (College)	1.2. Pedagogy	64,7
	4.6. Informatics and Computer Sciences	71,4
	6.2. Agricultural Sciences and Plant Protection	52,4

Surveys within employers analyses their attitude towards staff training, job performance, as well as their attitudes towards preferred forms of cooperation

with the university. Information from these surveys allow improvement of the relationship University - users and support the development of policies for a smooth and successful transition from academic studies to the realization of the labor market.

The employers` opinions and evaluations are largely satisfactory in terms of the training of Shumen university graduates.

550 users were interviewed and were asked to reply to the question: „Do you think that the education at Shumen University has given necessary training and skills for full realization?” The users` answers are as follows: Yes, absolutely - 88,54%; Yes, to some extent - 5,45%; I don`t know – 4,72%. The representatives of the University Career Center processed and systematized the survey data.

Another question from the survey is „Why did you hire a Shumen university graduate?” 33,2% of the interviewed replied: „because of the very good training”, 23,22% of them replied they needed „an employee with a higher education diploma in majors offered by the University”, and 11,19% answered „I have already hired Shumen university graduates and was aware of the quality of their training”. 94,58% of the users are satisfied by the fact they have hired a Shumen university graduate, 79,46% are completely satisfied with the knowledge of the graduates, and 65,36% are satisfied with the skills of the Shumen university graduates.

The summary data of 550 employers` answers on the question: „Do the Shumen University graduates possess the following competencies?” is presented in the table below:

Table 3 Types of Competencies Acquired by Shumen University Graduates

Skills / Competencies	Answers in %			
	Yes	Partly	No	Not answered
Fundamental knowledge in the professional area	96,72	1,45	0	1,83
Ability to apply knowledge in practice	89,63	9,27	1,09	0
Information technologies and Computer skills	79,27	17,81	0,90	2,02
Communication skills and ability to work in a team	86,54	10,90	0,18	2,18
Ability to solve problems	88,18	9,45	0,18	2,0
Ethics and loyalty in relations	93,09	4,72	0,18	2,0

Another question: „Which of the competences below should be acquired by young professionals in order to be successful in your organization (company or institution)? The answers are:

Table 4 Business Requirements to Build Different Types of Competences in Students

Skills / Competencies	Ranking in %						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	Not answered
Fundamental knowledge in the professional area	69,27	16,36	7,09	1,81	1,81	2,18	1,45
Ability to apply knowledge in practice	25,09	47,45	24,18	4,0	5,09	2,72	1,45
Information technologies skills	16,54	16,09	25,45	14,72	22,39	12,36	1,63
Communication skills and ability to work in a team	13,81	9,27	27,27	23,45	21,27	13,27	1,63
Ability to solve problems	21,27	13,45	17,81	22,36	29,09	34,54	1,45
Ethics and loyalty in relations	12,36	15,27	16,72	31,63	19,09	33,45	1,45

The answers of the question „Would you like to employ Shumen University students for an internship?” are as follows:

Table 5 Users` Willingness to employ Shumen University students as trainees

Answers in%					
Yes	Yes, in some cases	Rather No	No	I do not know	Not answered
76,0	15,09	2,0	1,09	3,09	2,73

Another question is: „What recommendations would you like to make in order to enhance the quality of university graduates training“ Expectations are as follows:

Table 6 Users` Recommendations to Enhance Quality of Shumen University Graduates Training

Recommendations	Answers in %
More practical training during the education process	56,36
Work in multicultural environment	10,54
Work with Information technologies	21,36
Students to be more enterprising	9,63
Foreign Language Teaching	24,18
Adaptation of curricula, according to modern educational needs	19,09
Work with bilingual children	2,72

It is 56,4% of the employers from the region that evaluate the level of graduates training with „Very good”. Others (almost 40%) evaluate the training with „Good”. Thus, they recommend their employees to focus on the Master Degree programs offered by the same university.

Employers differ in their opinion about Shumen university graduates` knowledge and skills: 69.3% believe that the graduates` knowledge and skills are „to a large extent” in accordance with the required qualification, 11.3% say graduates` knowledge and skills are „to a very large extent” in accordance with the requirements and 12.6% think, these are „to a lesser extent”. Every second employer believes that the vacancies Shumen University graduates apply for, „basically” are in accordance with the major they graduate.

The opinions regarding the practical training within Shumen University are analogous. 48.9% of the interviewed evaluate the practical training with „good”, 17% of them evaluate the training with „very good”, but nearly one in a four (24 6%) evaluate the training as „satisfactory” and this very fact proves that measures should be undertaken in this direction.

The competitiveness of Shumen University graduates is highly evaluated compared to other universities graduates. It is almost the two-thirds of the interviewed (65%) that define Shumen University graduates competitiveness as „high” and every second asked employer define the skill as „very high”.

Employers` opinion is further examined by organizing annually meetings with them. These meetings discussions include:

- evaluation of the skills of the employees who are Shumen University graduates;

- creating opportunities for students` internships and practical trainings;
- framework contracts for mutual collaboration on students` practical trainings.

Meetings with employers and users are also organized when there is a need to consolidate opinions and to explore their opinions about the labor market status. During the implementation period of the projects BG051PO001-3.3.07-0002 „Students` Practices” and BG051PO001-3.1.07-0040 „Education at Shumen University serves the Knowledge Economy” co-financed by the EU OP „Human Resources Development” the meetings with employers have significantly increased. The meetings are organized individually or in a group. They held every week. The discussions are about the problems in different fields of students` education.

There are regular meetings in September held in the Regional Inspectorate of Education concerning the disciplines included in the professional field *Pedagogy of Teaching*.... The principles of different schools are interviewed during the school-based teaching practices of students.

There shall be continuous contacts (at least twice per a semester) with employers from translation companies, travel agencies, community centers, libraries, museums and other cultural and administrative institutions in connection with summer internship for students from philological majors. Joint cultural and educational initiatives (readings, anniversaries, promotions of publications and so on..) shall be organized. These ensure continuous feedback on the quality of the students' training.

In 2010 the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics organized a round table where leading experts from the Ministry of Education and Science, mentors and principals from the region participated and discussed issues on:

- the quality of students` professional practical training;
- the professional contacts the academic staff of the *Methods of Teaching Mathematics and Informatics* Department within the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics have with mentors in schools in order to both to improve the quality of vocational and practical training of students and enhance the training skills of mentors;
- the professional contacts between the University academic staff and teachers from the region in terms of enhancement the professional skills of teachers through the professional qualifications acquirement and organization of qualification courses with different durations.

The Faculty of Technical Sciences within Shumen University regularly organizes meetings with its academic staff and the management bodies of Alcomet Company, 3S COT Company, Alpha 2000 Company and PSIT 35

Company. The aims of the meetings is consulting and research on employers requirements for „System Administrator” and „Automation of Production” job vacancies. The employers` requirements are always reflected in the curricula of the disciplines included in the *Communication and Computer Technologies* professional field.

There are also regular meeting organized between Shumen University representatives and representatives of Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water – Shumen, Raiffeisen Bank, Trust Fund and etc. The meetings outline the problems that have negative impact on the education process. During these meetings the consolidation on the students` practical training is achieved.

It should be stated that the contacts established between employers, users and Shumen University enhance a favorable environment for professional realization and career development of young specialists.

The opinion of Shumen University students and graduates about the opportunities available for professional realization is reveled by surveys.

The results of the surveys among graduates are listed in the tables below. The surveys held in 2012 – 2013.

The answers of the question „*Are you employed directly in the major you have graduated?*” are as follows:

Table 7 Shumen University Graduates in % according to the type of employment

Are you employed directly in the major you have graduated?	Answers in %					
	FMI	FNS	FH	FTS	FE	College
Directly employed	33,16	22,69	17,22	22,26	22,43	24,36
Not directly employed	9,51	14,65	18,01	9,24	14,79	26,55
Employed in a sphere not connected with the graduated major	18,50	20,08	13,26	16,38	15,57	21,17
Researchers	1,02	1,80	1,98	0,00	0,29	0,00
Teachers	10,28	7,42	14,85	1,68	25,72	15,29
Not employed	6,16	8,07	5,74	23,10	4,19	4,8
Other/maternity/	3,38	1,40	5,58	5,5	2,22	3,27
Not answered at all	17,99	23,89	23,36	21,84	14,79	4,56
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

The answers of Shumen University graduates to the question „*If you work how long after graduation you have started work?*” are as follows:

Table 8 Shumen University Graduates in % according to the time they started their

If you work how long after graduation you have started work?	Answers in %					
	FMI	FNS	FH	FTS	FE	College
Before graduation	10,28	6,22	15,84	9,66	4,35	3,54
Up to the 6 th month of graduation.	44,98	35,94	39,22	20,18	49,72	56,47
Between 6 months and 1 year	8,77	21,88	9,90	0,42	24,66	15,29
From 1 year to 1.5 years	5,65	4,24	0,39	1,26	0,19	0
After the 1.5 years	1,28	0,20	0	0,42	0	0
Not answered at all	29,04	31,52	34,65	68,06	21,08	24,70
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Surveys held among the Shumen University graduates after the state exam or during the ceremony of awarding the diplomas give information after the first year of their graduation. Part of the Shumen University graduates continues their education in Master or Doctoral Degree Programs.

The realization of the Shumen University graduates of the 3rd or the 5th year is monitored by the University Career Centre and by Departments and Main structural units within the University.

The permanent monitoring on the realization and development of the graduates and the surveys held on that matter show that, despite of the unfavorable changes in the demographic and economic conditions, the majority of University graduates in the different professional fields are successful and work in state and municipal administrations, business structures. Also, some of them work as a faculty and administrative staff in Shumen University or other universities and scientific institutions. The feedback is positive which comes to prove their high professional qualification.

There is an Alumni.

There is an electronic data base available (Alumni), which has information about 4517 graduate of Shumen University. The information includes the period 2009 – 2013. Moreover, the database is constantly updating and upgrading.

The *Alumni* system provides updated information about:

- opportunities for continuing education;
- organization and conduct of scientific forums, research and sport events;

The conclusions in the analyzed term are as follows:

- There is established and maintained a system of surveys and other forms of feedback for Shumen University graduates. It is a source to make a research on the labor and the intellectual market.
- The different forms of contacts and opinion survey applied, as well as the employers' evaluation about the quality of knowledge, skills and competencies in the professional careers of Shumen University graduates are an important source of information.
- The data allow the University to form its policy about the academic and practical training of students according to the needs of the labor market and the intellectual market.
- The faculties and the departments undertake actions to update the syllabus and to achieve a perfect match between the requirements of the labor market and of the academic staff from the different professional fields that train students at the University.
- It became obvious that Shumen University has provided students with profound training which allow them to get positive feedback by the employers. The training also allows graduates to be flexible and successful in economic and social area.
- The interviewed employers gave high evaluation about the degree of qualification, competence and competitiveness of Shumen University graduates.
- The Career Center at Shumen University offers students the following advantages: contacts between employers and students by participating in the „National Career Days” events; information about paid or free group and individual internships within the European Union; building a professional community by feedback with university graduates employers and professionals in a particular field; organization of events in the form of lectures, discussions, interactive presentations, meetings with professionals, representatives of organizations, companies, agencies and their territorial subdivisions as one of the main tools for promoting business and attracting the attention of the public and business organizations; career counseling for students registered at the University Career Center.
- The Center regularly carries out surveys with graduates, employers and analyzes the results. In addition, the Centre participates in international studies about academic youth opinion within Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen.
- *The Commission of evaluation and the quality of education and the academic staff* at Shumen University and committees at the main structural units comprise of representatives of the users of staff, the business and the public sector. Their status is of permanent members.

They actively discuss the status, needs and requirements of the labor market in order to enhance the quality of education, practical training, opportunities for internships in a professional environment and qualification standards for the realization of graduates.

- The inter-institutional, national, regional and international cooperation is expanded, as well as the cooperation with scientific, educational and other organizations and structures to boost research and creative activities.
- The prestige of the University is strengthened by organization of international and national forums in the period discussed; promotion of university scientific and periodicals; training of teachers; signing agreements with foreign universities, etc.
- The process of improving the quality of education in Shumen University, intended to enhance the realization of the students, is a result both of the efforts to apply modern teaching methods and the introduction of educational technologies aimed to improve the inclusion of students in all kinds of activities - research, cognitive and practical activities. The process aims at stimulating students' „original thinking”, analyzing skills to summarize details and expressing their own opinion. Students are encouraged to strive for reduction of information in the learning process and to pay attention on development of skills such as ability to find the necessary information, ability to summarize, discuss and debate, justify their own opinion, as well as to be able to make autonomous decisions in a professional situation, etc.
- Modern teaching methods are applied: methods and techniques to collect information, discussions, games, dialogical lectures with case-studies - analysis of practical situations and etc.

Conclusion

There is a system organized within Shumen University that allows faculties to be informed on due time about the decisions taken by the Rector's Body regarding the enhancement of the quality of training. *By the end of each academic year*, each University unit analyzes the quality of education and identifies the necessary measures for its enhancement. Measures that will allow University to update its activities in accordance with National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation criteria are identified for longer periods. The effects of these measures are analyzed in self-assessment and accreditation reports made by the Rector's Body.