

Croatian Employers' Perception of the Knowledge, Skills and Competencies of PR Students or Graduates

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Abstract: The main research question was to what extent are employers satisfied with students' education in public relations (PR), which they rated with average grade. The professional knowledge formally taught at universities is not a crucial factor for getting a job in public relations in Croatia. Employers as more important factors rate personal and social competences (74%), student's personality (56%) and experience in PR (55%) whereas professional knowledge is on the fourth place (37%). Employers claim most important qualities for students are good writing and reading skills, verbal and presentation skills and teamwork skills (social intelligence and interpersonal skills). In employers' opinion graduate PR students are more capable to work in profession than undergraduates. University curricula are not in line with the needs of the labour market, given that 18% of employers said that they teach students insufficiently and 97% that PR students require further training at work. Cooperation between universities and employers in Croatia is insufficient as only 25% of companies/organisations and 30% of the participants cooperate with PR universities personally. Employers comment on students' insufficient competences, knowledge, proactivity, motivation, as well as their excessive expectations from work, which translates into an issue in retaining them at the job.

Keywords: public relations; employers' perceptions; knowledge and skills of public relations students; cooperation of employers with public relations universities

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Percepcija znanja, veščin in kompetenc študentov oziroma diplomantov odnosov z javnostmi s strani hrvaških delodajalcev

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Povzetek: Glavno raziskovalno vprašanje je, v kolikšni meri so delodajalci zadovoljni z izobraževanjem študentov odnosov z javnostmi. Strokovno znanje na univerzah formalno ni ključni dejavnik za zaposlitev v odnosih z javnostmi na Hrvaškem. Delodajalci kot pomembnejši dejavniki ocenjujejo osebne in družbene kompetence (74%), osebnost študentov (56%) in izkušnje v odnosih z javnostmi (55%), profesionalno znanje pa je na četrtem mestu (37%). Delodajalci trdijo, da so najpomembnejše lastnosti študentov dobre veščine pisanja in branja, verbalne in prezentacijske veščine ter veščine timskega dela (socialne inteligencije in interpersonalne veščine). Po mnenju delodajalcev so diplomanti podiplomskih programov odnosov z javnostmi bolj sposobni za delo v poklicu kot diplomanti dodiplomskega študija. Univerzitetni učni načrti in programi niso skladni s potrebami trga dela, saj 18 % delodajalcev trdi, da so študenti nedovoljno izobraženi, 97 % pa da študenti odnosov z javnostmi iščejo dodatno usposabljanje na delu. Sodelovanje univerz in delodajalcev na Hrvaškem ni zadostna, saj samo 25 % podjetij / organizacij in 30% udeležencev osebno sodeluje s fakultetami.

Delodajalci komentirajo nezadostno usposobljenost študentov, znanje, proaktivnost, motivacijo, kot tudi njihova preekomerna pričakovanja od dela, kar se odraža na njihovo vztrajnost pri delu.

Ključne besede: odnosi z javnostmi; percepcija delodajalcev; znanje in spretnosti študentov odnosov z javnostmi; sodelovanje delodajalcev s fakultetami za odnose z javnostmi

JEL klasifikacija: I29

1. Introduction and review of literature

European literature reveals that along with the skills, knowledge and personal attributes being predominant areas of research within public relations (PR), practitioners' competencies - a concept that is more abstract - receive less research attention. Despite at times overlapping terminology confusion, there is a pattern of how skills, knowledge and personal attributes lead towards broader competencies. Knowledge can be defined as what practitioners (are required to) know in order to do their job/role effectively. Skills are the things practitioners are able to do to perform their job/role effectively (Gregory, 2008); identifying them is a complex process. Personal attributes are separated from competencies and they can determine how well a competency is performed. Also, competencies can be taught while personal attributes are modelled or fostered (Jeffery and Brunton, 2011, p. 69 in Tench et al., 2013b, p. 113). Competencies are sets of behaviours a person can perform. These behaviours are based on the application, combination and potential integration of knowledge and skills (Gregory, 2008; Jeffrey and Brunton, 2011).

Tench et al. (2013b, 120) concluded that there is a paradox that public relations practices face in Europe today. On one side is a clear need for a European theory of communication management and a framework to support the professionalization and ethical development of communication practitioners. On the other side is a diversity of conditions, performances and effects of public relations work in different parts of Europe.

A report by the Commission for Public Relations Education (CPRE, 2015) examined employers which are the five most important skills and knowledge that communications experts should possess. They outlined writing skills, social intelligence, ability to use new technologies, analytical skills and knowledge, as well as knowing the techniques and tools of communication since they demand very specific and concrete communications skills that can be immediately applied. Academics indicated different skills: broader knowledge, public speaking skills, writing skills, social intelligence, creativity at work, the ability to use new technologies and ethics.

In an earlier project, European Public Relations Body of Knowledge, participants found key skills to be "listening and writing on the one hand and management skills on the other hand" (van Ruler et al., 2000, p. 7), which also reflect the 'managerial' and 'technical' aspects of PR job.

Education is the key to the professionalization of communication management and public relations. Academics, practitioners, and professional associations have long argued about it, but despite collaborative efforts with higher education to meet the market demand for competent professionals, in the last two decades it is still an unfulfilled expectation (Moreno et al., 2017, p. 110).

Kruckeberg underlined the necessity for professionalization in the US for public relations profession: "as a distinct professional occupation requiring a specific professional curriculum of study" (Kruckeberg, 1998, p. 245). L'Etang concluded that the attempts to impose a rigorous system of entry by qualification in the UK failed also because "experience remains a tradable commodity" and ensured the importance of education which "had the potential to increase respectability and status which practitioners desired and to provide theoretical knowledge to underpin a specific expertise" (L'Etang, 1999, pp. 283-4). More recent studies emphasise the limited coordination between professional bodies, accredited universities and private education institutes to provide formal and common qualifications in Europe (Tench et al., 2013; Tench, Verhoeven & Juma, 2015)

Professions and qualifications are often discussed together as essential cornerstones in professionalization. With regard to the development of communication management in the last two decades, this is especially important because the field is not only being deeply affected and transformed by the global changes in economy, politics, and

culture, but at the same time practitioners hold positions as central stakeholders of this change for every kind of organizations - whether private, public, governmental or NGOs.

Tench, Verhoeven and Juma (2015) researched skills, knowledge and competencies of communication practitioners and identified gaps in both theory and practice. They highlighted writing skills and critical thinking (also including problem solving, analytical skills or strategic thinking) as two key skills that a future practitioner should have. New emerging skills like cultural awareness, the ability to analyse volumes of data and strategic use of social media, are gaining greater importance. They quoted an earlier Corporate Communications Institute's (CCI) study, *Corporate Communication Practices and Trends 2005*. Among the listed 23 separate skills that form a "skill set necessary for success as a corporate communicator in a global business environment" writing was rated as the core skill with "thorough knowledge of the company and of business principles nominated as essential" (Goodman, 2006, 203). These two skills and knowledge were confirmed later in the work of Goodman (2006), Oughton (2004), Brown & Fall (2005), McCleneghan (2006), Jeffrey & Brunton (2011) and Sha (2011). DiStaso et al. stated: "Writing skills continued to be the top ranked outcome required for entry-level hiring but also the first ranked hiring problem" (2009, p. 269).

Tench et al. also discussed personal attributes (also known as "soft skills" or "employability skills") and competencies and quoted Ahles (2004) who defined them as employability skills and divided them into three groups: (1) general professional skills; (2) human relations and (3) general work habits. His research, based in the US, showed that 60 per cent of respondents ranked human relations skills as the most important skills set. Probably that is due to the particular importance of networking and maintaining good relationships with clients and communities within the profession. Also, a study by Jeffrey and Brunton (2011) identified adaptability as the most personal characteristic, and it covers common sense, empathy, flexibility and the ability to take criticism (Tench et al., 2015, p. 98).

European Communication Monitor (ECM) is the biggest research that explores current practices and future developments of strategic communication in companies, non-profit and other organisations including communication agencies across Europe. According to ECM over the last years, linking business strategy and communication, building and maintaining trust, and coping with the digital evolution and the social web have been consistently the three most important issues for communication management practitioners (Tench et al., 2017, pp. 120-123). The 2017 ECM survey (Zerfass, Moreno, Tench, Verčič, & Verhoeven, 2017) showed that practitioners in Europe think even that coping with the digital evolution and the social web will remain among the top challenges in the next three years, which suggests the required future skills.

In order to advance the profession, it is necessary to have a theoretical consensus about the necessity of a body of knowledge and specialized skills for professionalization. The academic and professional fields of PR and communication management are currently engaged in developing standards of education to advance the profession (Moreno, Tench & Okay, 2017, p. 120).

Moreno, Tench & Okay (2017) researched how European communication management practitioners achieved their current competences to perform their roles. Results reaffirm L'Etang's statement from nearly two decades ago (1998) about the over-reliance on experience being the system to acquire the competences to perform in the profession. Surprisingly, universities and high schools were more frequently credited for the acquisition of personal attributes than they were for the accumulation of knowledge. Nevertheless, experience was not acquired in isolation: the support of formal and informal ways of mentorship and coaching whilst on-the-job emerge as the most acknowledged means of acquiring knowledge, skills, and competences.

In Croatia, higher education system is divided into two categories: universities and institutions for higher vocational education (universities of applied sciences, often private) which both offer B.A. and M.A. degrees in PR. However, there are no common quality standards and shared curricula between the diverse courses offered in communication management and public relations – just as in other European countries (Molleda, Kochhar & Moreno, 2015).

So far, two related researches on PR education were conducted in Croatia: Jugo, Ciboci and Alavanja (2017) and Hajoš (2017). Jugo, Ciboci and Alavanja compared the attitudes of academics and practitioners working in the field of public relations in Croatia to the knowledge and skills necessary for students to be able to work independently in practice. They emphasised the need for more cooperation between educational institutions and the labour market through joint round tables and conferences for the exchange of experiences and knowledge. They also indicated an equal ratio of

theory and practice in the study programs, involvement of PR practitioners in the teaching process of study programs, primarily in practical subjects and students' work placements with employers (2017, p. 1004). Hajoš (2017) found that essential for the students to get a job in the profession are work experience in PR, informal knowledge and skills, relationships and acquaintances and only then formal knowledge taught at university. Senior students responded that their studies gave them good communication skills, teamwork skills, good writing and reading, while their studies gave them less knowledge of computer skills, analytical and problem-solving skills, and foreign languages.

Looking towards the future of public relations, its viability relies on the urgency and ability of professionals to adapt to the evolving roles of the practice. Therefore, as stated by Wang (2004), an important objective of public relations education is not just to meet the current demand, but also to conduct the profession to a higher-level for the next generation.

The most popular needs for the future communication professionals are related to social media (Moreno, Tench & Okay, 2017). Also included is an increased need to monitor and analyse; to contribute to communications through this channel; to target and reach individuals rather than groups (with tailored messages) to be able to capitalize on visual media in order to relay impactful communication. One of the most interesting aspects that emerged in this new area of social media is the radical relevance that listening, a traditional skill of public relations, acquires through monitoring, analysing, critically assessing and filtering information on social media. Runners-up by importance among competences are cross-cultural competences in our global world. They can be obtained in virtual teams or in-situ learning during a prolonged work abroad through organized students exchange or internship programmes. Therefore, the development of PR curricula in Croatia should pursue this direction.

2. Research methods

A survey among employers in the public relations industry in Croatia and experts in human resources (HR) departments was conducted with the aim of analysing their perception of the quality of students' education and of the knowledge, skills and competencies which PR professionals must possess in order to be employable. The main research question was to what extent are employers satisfied with students' education in PR. The following hypotheses emerged from the research objectives:

- H1. Employers consider the study programs in which future PR experts are taught as being inadequate for the future employment in PR industry.
- H2. Employers grade more PR students of graduate studies compared to undergraduates.
- H3. Professional knowledge related to PR is the most important knowledge for employers when employing new employees.
- H4. Cooperation between universities and employers is insufficient.

For the needs of this paper, a research was conducted on the attitude and perception of employers in Croatia about the knowledge and skills acquired by PR graduates and students whilst studying, their capability to work in practice and perception of the quality of public relations studies' curricula in Croatia. The research was conducted in March 2018 with sample of 101 experts in communications and marketing agencies (government and local government, corporate communications, SMEs and public institutions) who either cooperated with or mentored graduated students.

3. Results

Of the participants in the research, 53% had public relations interns at undergraduate or graduate level in their company/organisation whilst 47% did not. Among the employers who had interns, 37% had undergraduate PR students (bachelor' degree) and the same percentage (37%) had graduate students (master's degree). One in five employers (21%) had both groups of interns.

The majority of students are interns with PR consultancies (agencies) (46% undergraduates and 35% graduates), followed by larger companies (24% undergraduate and 22% graduates), state administration and regional self-

government (5% undergraduate and 22% graduates), small and medium enterprises (8% undergraduate and 8% graduate) and PR departments of marketing agencies (5% undergraduate and 5% graduate).

A relatively high percentage of employers employ PR students. Over the past five years, 32% of employers employed (permanent or part-time) a person with a graduate or undergraduate diploma and plan more hirings, while another 17% had employments but plan no more. The following 17% have employment plans, while 3% did employ but had a negative experience and plan no more employments.

The remaining 32% had or have no plans of employment or had no need to employ PR professionals. Similar to internships, the majority of employers are PR consultancies, and 73% hired someone and plan more; they are followed by 38% of marketing agencies, 31% of state administration/local and regional government bodies, 20% of SMEs and 10% of large companies. In general, employers expect proactivity and/or enthusiasm from young PR professionals (11 out of 30 open comments), curiosity and desire for learning (6), responsibility (6), flexibility (4) and creativity (2 comments).

According to employers, PR students of graduate studies (31% of employers) have more capability to work than undergraduates, 26% think they are equal, whilst the remaining 43% do not know or cannot decide. Research participants in the corporate sector, public institutions and marketing agencies give small advantage in employment to graduate students.

Employers consider the PR students being to a larger extent capable to work in the PR industry than those of other studies. This matches with an earlier survey of PR students, who mostly (71%) think that they will have more success in finding a job if they complete public relations studies (Hajoš, 2017).

Employers rated the capability of public relations students to work in PR with the score of 2.9, and the students of other courses with the score of 2.4 (on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest score) (Table 1).

Table 1: Employers assessment of students' background and capable to work in the PR

	Insufficient	Sufficient	Do not know or cannot decide	Very good	Excellent completely	Ponder
PR students	17%	19%	26%	36%	3%	2,89
Students of other fields	31%	17%	36%	15%	1%	2,38

Also, according to the opinion/experience of the majority (42%) of employers, equally prepared to work in PR are students of private and public universities. However, 17% of employers are more prone to hiring private university students, while 11% prefer students from public colleges and universities. The remaining 31% did not know or could not decide. Participants from corporate sector gave small advantage to employing students of private universities.

Nearly all employers (97%) answered that PR students require further training at work (always 77%, in most of the cases 17%, sometimes 3%, do not know 2%, and only 1% think they do not need it).

According to the opinion of employers, the most important skills and knowledge for young PR professionals are writing skills (good literacy and reading skills) (99%), communication skills (oral and presentation skills) (99%), teamwork skills (social intelligence and interpersonal skills) (99%), ability to adapt and work in new situations (98%), and knowledge of English (96%). Slightly less important to them are planning and organizational skills (prioritization, multi-tasking and similar) (94%), knowledge of social media communication and digital PR (97%), professional knowledge related to PR (96%), analytical skills and problem solving skills (91%), text and data processing and drafting of presentations on a computer (87%), numerical skills and the ability to convince and influence (74%). The least important to them is the knowledge of several foreign languages (45%), while they could not assess the ability of leadership (inspiring and motivating other people).

Table 2: The most important knowledge and skills for employers

	Not important at all	Not important	Do not know or cannot decide	Very important	Most important	Ponder
Writing skills (good literacy and reading skills)	0%	0%	1%	13%	86%	4,85

	Not important at all	Not important	Do not know or cannot decide	Very important	Most important	Ponder
Communication skills (verbal and presentation skills)	0%	0%	1%	25%	74%	4,73
Teamwork skills (social intelligence and interpersonal skills)	1%	0%	1%	34%	64%	4,6
Ability to adapt and work in new situations	0%	1%	2%	36%	61%	4,57
Knowledge of English	0%	0%	4%	38%	58%	4,54
Planning and organizational skills (prioritization, multi-tasking and the alike)	1%	0%	5%	43%	51%	4,44
Social media communication	0%	2%	1%	53%	44%	4,39
Professional knowledge related to PR	0%	3%	1%	56%	40%	4,32
Analytical skills and problem-solving skills	1%	2%	6%	48%	43%	4,3
Advanced word processing and data analysis and presentation making	0%	2%	12%	51%	36%	4,2
Numerical skills	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	4
Ability to convince and influence	2%	6%	18%	44%	30%	3,94
Knowledge of several foreign languages	1%	21%	32%	40%	5%	3,27
Ability to lead people (inspiring and motivating others)	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	3

In comparison with their US counterparts (Commission for Public Relations Education Report, 2015), Croatian employers give more emphasis to verbal and public speaking skills as well as to versatility and ability in adapting to new situations, and less emphasis to specific expert PR skills and ability to use new technologies and social media, and skills of digital communication (Table 2).

Table 3: Personal attributes of young PR employees appreciated by employers

	Not important at all	Not important	Do not know or cannot decide	Very important	Most important	Ponder
Conscientiousness	0%	1%	0%	36%	63%	4,61
Personal integrity (ethics, honesty, moral values)	1%	3%	1%	28%	67%	4,57
Tolerance to stress and emotional stability	0%	1%	6%	40%	53%	4,45
Taking responsibility for job/project	0%	4%	3%	38%	55%	4,45
Proactive attitude, entrepreneurial spirit and ambition	1%	1%	0%	51%	47%	4,42
Openness to new experiences and intellectual curiosity	1%	2%	2%	47%	49%	4,4
Creativity	0%	2%	2%	56%	40%	4,34
Independence (ability to work without supervision)	0%	5%	7%	52%	36%	4,19

Employers who had some experience with PR graduates were asked to describe in their own words their advantages: preparedness for specific communication tasks and use of PR tools (35% comments), enthusiasm (30%), knowledge of digital tools and generational communication (15%) and creativity (15% of comments). When asked to describe their shortcomings, they answered that they mostly lack modesty, sense of reality, respect and motivation (40% comments), lack of experience/practice (33%), professional knowledge (20%) and literacy (10%), as well understanding the role and complexity of public relations (10%).

Table 4: The most important motivation factors and satisfaction at work for PR graduates

	Not important at all	Not important	Do not know or cannot decide	Very important	Most important	Ponder
<i>Work-life balance</i>	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	5
Career advancement possibilities	0%	1%	12%	43%	43%	4,29
Challenging job, achievements and success	0%	2%	13%	51%	34%	4,16
Possibility of personal development at work	0%	3%	16%	42%	38%	4,15
Working conditions	1%	2%	12%	57%	28%	4,08
Good relationship with superiors	0%	2%	21%	47%	30%	4,05
Wages and perks	0%	1%	20%	58%	22%	4
Good relationship with associates	1%	5%	24%	40%	30%	3,93
Management recognition	0%	3%	27%	47%	23%	3,9
Job security	0%	13%	33%	39%	16%	3,57

If employers need new employees for PR in their company/organisation and were given the opportunity to choose, they would employ mostly: experienced employees with three or more years of experience in PR, 36%; younger employees with up to three years of work experience in PR, 34%; PR graduate, 13%; person with a degree in other studies, 8%, experienced people who did not work in PR but want to shift their career to PR, 3% and not important, 7%.

Unlike other employers, employees of national and local authorities give somewhat greater advantage to recruiting younger employees with up to three years of experience in PR.

Table 5: the most usual manners in which employers employ are:

Through colleagues' recommendation (word of mouth)	65%
Job ad in web portals/printed media	57%
Among their interns	41%
Publishing the vacancy on their social media	35%
Among former job applicants	30%
By contacting professional organization (CPRA)	21%
Will contact head-hunting company	6%
Other	10%

Employers in the national and local authorities more often publish vacancies, while agencies and corporations rely more on recommendations, with agencies also relying on ads in their social media networks.

Table 6: The key factors for getting a job in PR industry

Personal and social competences (communication, teamwork, problem solving skills ...)	74%
Student's personality (enthusiasm, curiosity, factor X, chemistry ...)	56%
Experience in PR	55%
Professional knowledge (formally taught at universities)	37%
Recommendations	29%
Other	5%

As crucial factors for getting a job in PR industry employers' rate personal and social competences (communication, teamwork, problem solving skills) 74%, student's personality (enthusiasm, curiosity, factor X, chemistry) 56%, experience in PR 55% and as only fourthly professional knowledge (formally taught at universities) 37%.

The majority, 83%, of employers agree with the importance for PR (graduated) students to undergo internship and gain some work experience in PR (82%). As far as professional knowledge is concerned, considerably fewer employers, only

41%, believe that PR graduates have the knowledge and skills necessary to work in public relations, 30% think they do not have the knowledge and skills to work in public relations, while 30% do not know or cannot assess. One in four employers said that it is important that PR graduates either participated in student exchange programs or studied abroad, whereas 43% of employers said this was not important while 32% cannot evaluate.

According to the employers' opinion, the most appropriate starting salary in public relations is HRK 4 - 5,000 for 54% of employers, then slightly above HRK 5 - 6,000 for 29%, HRK 3 - 4,000 for 8% and over HRK 6,000 for 8% of employers.

Table 7: The greatest constraints for hiring young PR experts

Insufficient level of awareness of Croatian employers about the importance of PR	71%
Lack of candidates with relevant knowledge, skills and competences	48%
Economic crisis	26%
Inadequate wages	19%
Difficult job/workload	18%
I do not know/cannot assess	1%
Other	7%

There are substantial differences among the largest groups of employers: for agencies (PR agencies and PR departments in marketing agencies), the greatest constraints for employment are: shortcoming of candidates with relevant knowledge, skills and abilities - 77%, insufficient level of awareness of Croatian employers about the importance of PR - 53%, inadequate salaries - 30% and difficult job/workload - 30%.

For employers in corporate communications, the greatest constraints are insufficient level of employers' awareness of the importance of PR - 70%, shortcoming of candidates with appropriate knowledge, skills and capabilities - 40%, and economic crisis - 45%.

In national government and local authorities, the constraints are the low level of awareness of Croatian employers about the importance of PR - 94%, shortcoming of candidates with relevant knowledge, skills and abilities 44%, and inadequate wages - 38%.

Table 8: The greatest constraints to keeping young PR experts at the job once employed

Insufficient level of Croatian employers' awareness about the importance of PR	55%
Fluctuation of young PR experts due to their (too) high expectations of the job	49%
Limited possibilities for promotion	41%
Limited resources for professional training	37%
Inadequate wages	35%
Departure due to difficult job/workload	28%
High-quality young PR experts' shifting to other professions	16%
Departure of high-quality young PR experts abroad	15%
Do not know or cannot decide	8%
Other	4%

The most frequent reasons for young PR experts leaving the job in the communication agencies are: fluctuation of young PR experts due to their (too) high expectations of the workplace 57%, inadequate salary 43% and resignation of the candidate due to difficult job/workload 40%.

In corporate communication departments of large companies, they are insufficient level of employers' awareness about the importance of PR 60%, inadequate opportunities for promotion 55% and limited resources for further professional training 40%.

In national and local authorities, the greatest challenges are insufficient level of employers' awareness of the importance of PR for 81%, inadequate opportunities for promotion for 63%, fluctuation of young PR experts due to their (too) high expectations of the job for 56% and for 50% inadequate salary.

According to the employers' assessment, universities still train students well in PR, as rated by 30% of employers as being very good and for 16% sufficient, but insufficient for 18%, with 37% of employers not knowing or being undecided. The average grade by which employers rate the preparedness of students to work in the PR profession is 2.8 (good).

Table 9: Employers proposals to Universities for improving the employability of PR students

Include mandatory internship in the curriculum (if not already included)	78%
Include case studies in their courses	65%
Invite practitioners to give lectures	65%
Make curricula more relevant for employers and link the curricula with employers' needs	61%
Hire career advisers who would help students in finding internship/job	23%
Do not know/cannot assess	4%
Other:	7%

Table 10: The best manners for employers to cooperate with the educational institutions

Student internship	85%
Guest lecturers in PR education	59%
Organization of student awards for a case study	41%
Participation in round tables, discussions and similar, organized by universities and educational institutions	40%
Collaboration and co-mentoring in the students' drafting of final theses	32%
Participation in research and surveys	30%
Collaboration with career advisers in universities and educational institutions	16%
I do not know/cannot assess	10%
Other	2%

A total of one in four companies/organizations (25%) cooperate with the educational institutions in PR, 44% do not cooperate, and 19% do not cooperate but would like to, while 13% do not know. Mostly cooperating are agencies (40%) followed by large companies (25%), whilst national and local authorities cooperate the least (none of respondents) but 31% of them would like to.

On a positive note, 30% of participants participate in teaching or in other kinds of cooperation with educational institutions (provide internships or mentor students), 21% use to participate but no longer do, 22% do not participate but would like to, and 27% of participants do not cooperate with educational institutions.

In their open answers, respondents most often commented on the insufficient practical teaching at universities and the necessity to better link PR studies with practice - 44% (14 out of 32 open answers), 25% on insufficient students' competences, knowledge, proactivity, motivation and overwhelming expectations - 25% (8 out of 32), and to a lesser extent the importance of writing comments and trends - social media communication - 9% (3 comments each).

4. Discussion of results

It is evident that PR students have the place in the labour market and that the number of such employees increases, because 32% of employers recruited in the past five years (for indefinite period or part-time) a PR graduate or PR student, and plan more hiring, while 17% hired but have no further plans of hiring.

Hypothesis H1. that employers consider the PR study programs inadequate for the future employment in PR industry is confirmed. The results of the survey suggest that educational institutions' curricula are not in line with the needs of the labour market, given that 18% of employers said that they teach students insufficiently and 97% said that PR students require further training at work.

Hypothesis H2. is confirmed since 31% employers said that graduate PR students are more capable to work than undergraduates.

Hypothesis H3. that the professional knowledge (formally taught at universities) is crucial factor for getting a job is refuted. Employers as more important factors rate personal and social competences (74%), student's personality (56%) and experience in PR (55%) whereas professional knowledge is on the fourth place being rated crucial for 37% employers.

Hypothesis H4. that cooperation between universities and employers is insufficient is confirmed since only 25% of companies/organisations cooperate with universities and 19% do not but want to. Also, 30% of the participants collaborate personally with educational institutions (lecturers or mentors) with another 22% not participating but wanting to. Therefore, there are many spaces to improve it.

5. Conclusion

The greatest constraints in employing young PR professionals, according to the employers' opinion, are insufficient level of awareness of Croatian employers about the importance of PR (71%) but also the lack of employees with appropriate knowledge, skills and abilities (48%) what signals students' insufficient competences, knowledge, proactivity and motivation. Also evident is the issue of students' excessive expectations from work, which translates into an issue in retaining them at the job (for 49% of participants). We believe this is a general characteristic of the millennial generation.

Employers said that the most important qualities for students are good communication skills in writing (good writing and reading skills), communication skills (verbal and presentation skills), and teamwork skills (social intelligence and interpersonal skills). Evident herein is also the correlation with the self-evaluation of the knowledge and skills acquired whilst studying, because students rated best their communication skills (3.86), teamwork skills (3.69) and writing and reading skills (3.65) (Hajoš, 2017).

In a greater collaboration with employers and in adapting the curricula to market needs lies a "recipe" for improving the educational institutions' curricula, because for most students the study does not provide a good ratio of theory and practice (43%), whilst courses have insufficient guest lecturers from practice (32%) (Hajoš, 2017).

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