TEACHING OF UNIVERSITY-LEVEL ACCOUNTING IN COLLABORATION WITH THE ENTITIES CERTIFYING THE ACCOUNTING PROFESSION – THE EXAMPLE OF THE FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GDANSK

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper: The aim of the paper is to present the scope and the results of the cooperation between the Faculty of Management at the University of Gdansk and two professional institutions awarding the qualifications and the certificates used by accountants: ACCA, i.e. a professional self-government associating statutory auditors in Poland, authorized to award qualifications for auditing financial statements. This work verifies the validity of adjusting the educational programs, in the context of possible facilitation of the Finance and Accounting graduates in acquisition of: a professional qualification awarded by ACCA and a certificate authorizing to audit financial reports. In this context, the work is meant to answer the questions: (1) Does the learning content at specialized majors meet the requirements of ACCA and NCSA? (2) Did collaboration with ACCA and NCSA have any significant impact on the students’ choice of the study major? (3) How do the students finishing the didactic cycle benefit from the University's collaboration with ACCA and NSCA?

Design / methodology / approach: The methods used to achieve the aim of the article involved: (a) studying the source materials on the functioning of the “Statutory Auditor” and the “ACCA Accounting” specializations, as part of the Finance and Accounting major at the UG Faculty of Management, (b) a group interview with the preparers of these studies, focused on the issues involving the activities related to launching the studies, (c) questionnaire surveys distributed to the students completing the “Statutory Auditor” and the “ACCA Accounting” specializations. Additionally, a review of the literature on the subject was carried out.

Main findings: The results of the research show that: (1) majority of students see the benefits of cooperation with ACCA and NCSA, (2) the collaboration was important for most students during their selection of the study, (3) the learning content at specialized majors meets the requirements of ACCA and NCSA.

The study indicates the need for: (1) collaboration between universities and the units certifying or awarding professional qualifications, (2) placing the content being taught in an international dimension and creating an international network of contacts with partner institutions.

Research limitations / implications: The questionnaire study was carried out among part-time and full-time students of the “Statutory Auditor” and the “ACCA Accounting” specializations. In consequence, the conclusions formulated concerned only this group of students. Further studies should be aimed towards verification of the conclusions, based on a wider population.

Originality / the value of the research: The research conclusions allow assessment of the validity of the University’s collaboration with the organizations associating accounting professionals. In this context, they provide an indication for the activities undertaken by the educational staff creating and conducting programs at the universities that are involved in adjusting the educational offer to the employers’ requirements and expectations.

Keywords: ACCA, certified auditor, collaboration between university and professionals, degree course finance and accounting, KiBR, University of Gdansk, study evaluation, professional certification.

1 INTRODUCTION

The future of Europe is determined by the quality of the human resources and the ability of the Europeans to continually improve their competencies and qualifications [16]. For this reason, the need for vocational education and training at a sufficiently high level, which would fit the current challenges associated with globalization of economic processes, has been increasingly emphasized (e. g. [1].
The knowledge, the skills and the competencies acquired during vocational education and training should allow development of a career and enable one to play an active role in social life [23]. Higher education, due to having adequate resources, is especially predestined to provide a suitable educational offer for the present and the potential participants of the economic life (e.g. [12], [15], [22]). The vocational training provided by higher education institutions should meet the current and the future requirements for skilled workers, with consideration of the need to adapt to the growing global competition, to the employment structure and to the constant development of information technologies [6]. Synergy and cooperation between schools, training facilities, research centers, enterprises, associations and self-governments of professionals is necessary to overcome the lack of openness of the educational system as well as to get rid of the discrepancies between knowledge, competencies and the requirements of the labor market [7].

The results of the research clearly show that a professional component is required at each competency level to ensure acquisition of real professional skills (e.g. [8], [13], [18]). Achievement of this will only be possible, if the partnership cooperation between the entities from the so-called practitioner area and the educational institutions results in provision of adequate competencies and the possibilities of their application at a workplace [17]. This conclusion was an inspiration for the educators at the Faculty of Management of the University of Gdansk (UG) to undertake cooperation with two professional institutions awarding the qualifications and the certificates used by accountants:

1. an international organization associating specialists in finance, accounting and management – Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA),
2. the National Chamber of Statutory Auditors (KIBR) – a professional self-government associating statutory auditors in Poland, authorized to award licenses for auditing financial statements.

The purpose of this article is to present the scope and the effects of this cooperation. This paper verifies the validity of adapting the curricula, in the context of facilitating the Finance and Accounting students in acquisition of the professional qualification awarded by the ACCA and the certificate of entitlement to audit financial statements.

The results of the work are described in two contexts: (1) analysis of the program structure of the specializations dedicated to particular certificates, (2) analysis of the impact the studies have on the students' professional plans. The paper is aimed to answer the following questions:

Does the curriculum content at specialized majors meet the requirements of the ACCA and the KIBR?

Was the fact of cooperation with the ACCA and the KIBR a significant factor in the student’s choice of the study major?

How do the students finishing their educational cycle benefit from the cooperation of the university with the ACCA and the KIBR?

2 METHODOLOGY

The methods used to achieve the aim of the article involved:

1. studying the source materials on the functioning of the “Statutory Auditor” and the “ACCA Accounting” specializations, as part of the Finance and Accounting major at the UG Faculty of Management,
2. a group interview with the preparers of these studies, focused on the issues involving the activities related to launching the studies,
3. questionnaire surveys distributed to the students completing the “Statutory Auditor” and the “ACCA Accounting” specializations. Additionally, a review of the literature on the subject was carried out.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions, 8 of which were related to the topic of the paper.

To conduct detailed research, a method of a purposeful selection of the students at the “Finance and Accounting” major at the University of Gdansk was chosen. The questionnaire was composed of closed questions, which involved indication of one or few answers, depending on the nature of the question. The questionnaire was filled out by a total of 452 students, including 152 full-time students and 300 part-time students of the second-degree master’s studies.
3 RESULTS

3.1 The ACCA accreditation at the UG Faculty of Management

As a result of an internal discussion, it was decided that the university will try to obtain the ACCA certification for the new specialization offered for the students holding a bachelor’s degree obtained after completion of the F&A major. This specialization is called “ACCA Accounting” and is realized as part of the F&A major at the full-time second-degree studies [3].

Two issues needed to be considered while constructing the structure of the curriculum for the new specialization, completion of which would provide the graduates with the possibility for faster and easier acquisition of the ACCA qualification:

1. the need to realize the assumed educational outcomes at the F&A major,
2. inclusion in the curriculum content of the knowledge covering the requirements determined by the ACCA.

Realization of the first objective was not a problem, because the assumption during creation of a new specialization was to include a broader knowledge base in the curriculum content within a larger number of major specialization subjects, as opposed to a standard course organized as part of the F&A major. The constructed and applied description of the assumed educational outcomes for the F&A major is quite general in nature, which allowed proper formulation of specific outcomes at the level of individual subjects (communicated via syllabuses) [2].

By adapting the arrangement of the courses to the issues involving the subject matter of the ACCA examinations, the total content of the curriculum was contained in the subjects, whose linkage to the ACCA modules is presented in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACCA module/exam</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F-5 Performance management</td>
<td>1. Cost accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Managerial accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Budgeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-6 Taxation</td>
<td>1. Fundamentals of the taxation system and indirect taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Direct taxes and social security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-7 Financial reporting</td>
<td>1. Reporting of financial institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. International Financial Reporting Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Consolidation of financial statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-8 Audit and assurance</td>
<td>1. Examination of financial statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-9 Financial management</td>
<td>1. Financial management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Corporate finance</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The structure of the subjects does not take into account the first four ACCA examination modules, because the curriculum content of these modules overlaps the subjects taught at the first-degree F&A major. Thus, a student beginning studies at an “ACCA Accounting” specialization is exempt from the F1 through F4 modules (“fundamentals”) as a graduate of bachelor’s degree at the F&A major [3].

When creating syllabuses for the individual subjects designed to fill the curriculum of subsequent ACCA modules, attention needed to be paid to the accents present in the content described by the ACCA or by the institutions cooperating with it and creating the textbooks intended to prepare the students for the exams. The general observation in this field is that the ACCA emphasizes practical, professional application of knowledge. Knowledge of a more general nature is referred to when it is justified.
for acquisition of the skills necessary to apply it in practice. However, when constructing the study curriculum, it should be borne in mind that studying at a higher education institution, particularly at a university, should be universal, not only vocational.

In addition to synchronizing the curriculum content between the major specialization subjects and the ACCA modules, another important element requiring synchronization was the manner of conducting examinations. This harmonization, according to the ACCA requirements, concerns the form, the structure and the time frame of the examinations. As a consequence, the manner of examining the students on the subjects associated with the ACCA modules is very close to the requirements used by the ACCA during its examinations. It seems that adapting the exams to the ACCA requirements is an advantageous change, because it means that departure from traditional, written test forms towards knowledge verification that is based on case analysis and on solving tasks that are closely related to economic practice.

3.2 Competencies of a statutory auditor in the context of the curriculum content taught at the UG Faculty of Management

A statutory auditor is a Polish qualification in the field of accounting, allowing performance of financial auditing.

The conditions to exercise the profession of a statutory auditor are [4]:

1. completion of higher education (graduation) as well as using spoken and written Polish;

2. passing 10 exams in the following fields:
   - the theory and the principles of accounting;
   - the principles of financial report preparation, including consolidated financial statements;
   - international financial reporting standards;
   - financial analysis;
   - cost accounting and managerial accounting;
   - risk management and internal control;
   - financial revision;
   - financial revision standards;
   - professional ethics and independence of a statutory auditor;
   - the legal requirements for examining financial statements, for statutory auditors and the units qualified to examine financial reports.

3. obtaining a positive mark at the final exam checking practical application of the theoretical knowledge;

4. completing an internship in the field of accounting – the following can be considered as an internship in this field: a year-long practice in accounting in an EU country and at least a two-year-long apprenticeship in an entity authorized to examine financial statements and registered in an EU country, under supervision of a statutory auditor or under supervision of a statutory auditor registered in an EU country; or a three-year-long apprenticeship in a unit authorized to examine financial statements, registered in an EU country, under a supervision of an auditor or under supervision of a statutory auditor registered in an EU country.

Such high requirements result from the fact that a statutory auditor is expected to perform financial revision activities with a sense of responsibility, in accordance with the possessed competencies and the professional knowledge, reliably and carefully, according to the law and the applicable standards of financial auditing, being guided by impartiality, independence and autonomy, without disclosing the information obtained during examination of financial statements to third parties [19]. An auditor should abide by the principles of autonomy and be guided by reason [24]. At the same time, statutory auditors are subject to particular expectations of the participants of the capital market, in terms of its safety and the transparency of the information available in financial statements [5].

Current regulations allow students to pass the exams for a statutory auditor without needing to pass them at the KIBR. There are two possibilities [4]:

1. the university can offer a “Statutory auditor” major, where there is a possibility to pass all the examinations;
2 selected subjects correspond to the scope of the knowledge necessary to obtain the qualifications, while students can pass individual exams based on the exams passed during the course of the study.

The UG Faculty of Management chose the solution involving introduction of a “Statutory auditor” major. This means that a statutory auditor candidate is obliged to apply to the Examination Commission for passing individual exams on the theoretical knowledge, if he/she had passed university exams or other equivalent exams. Additional conditions involve conducting written exams, while at the time of submitting the application 3 years cannot have expired from the graduation. As a result, the program at the “Statutory auditor” specialization has been prepared as to pass 6 examinations:

1. taxation law (part I),
2. financial accounting,
3. taxation law (part 2),
4. cost accounting and managerial accounting,
5. financial reporting and its analysis,
6. financial revision.

While developing the curriculum content as part of individual subjects, tables of compliance with the curriculum content that is required to pass the exams for a statutory auditor have been developed and are presented in table 2.

**Table 2. Linage between the KIBR curriculum content and the subjects realized at the “Statutory auditor” specialization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detailed scope of the theoretical knowledge</th>
<th>The subject containing a given curriculum content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost accounting</td>
<td>Cost accounting II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The concept of cost and synonymous concepts</td>
<td>Cost accounting II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The place of cost accounting in an enterprise’s information system, the targets and the tasks of cost accounting, evolution of cost accounting.</td>
<td>Cost accounting II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification of costs, for the purposes of financial accounting.</td>
<td>Cost accounting II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs vs. organizational structure of an enterprise.</td>
<td>Cost accounting II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost account cross-sections vs. the layout of the profit and loss account, adjustment of the cost records to the needs of a unit, simplifications in cost accounting.</td>
<td>Cost accounting II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The essence, the subject, the types and the methods of cost calculation.</td>
<td>Cost accounting II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs of ancillary activity and its settlement</td>
<td>Cost accounting II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) The criteria for selection of activity centers.</td>
<td>Cost accounting II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) The stages of cost accounting of ancillary activity, the issue of reciprocal benefits (reimbursable) and own-needs benefits – the ancillary activity center Information on settlement of ancillary services in management.</td>
<td>Cost accounting II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting cost account.</td>
<td>Cost accounting II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal cost accounting, the justified part of indirect production costs. Calculation of manufacturing cost in normal cost account.</td>
<td>Cost accounting II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard cost accounting (normative, postulated).</td>
<td>Cost accounting II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification of costs for management purposes.</td>
<td>Managerial accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable cost accounting.</td>
<td>Managerial accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs as a result of deliberate use of the resources, cost objects. Cost controlling.</td>
<td>Managerial accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity cost accounting and its implementation in enterprise management.</td>
<td>Managerial accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of managerial accounting in decision making.</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) The purpose, the essence and the scope of managerial accounting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) Development of managerial accounting.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Measurement of the costs and the benefits in managerial accounting.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) The schemes of the decision-making process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) Cost measuring issues in decision making, the manner of approach in problematic accounts.</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>Short-term decisions based on analysis of the cost–production volume–profit relation, analysis of sensitivity to the changes in revenues and costs, security margin, the concept of multi-level account and a segment margin, decisions in the presence of limiting factors, price decisions for special orders.</th>
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<tr>
<th>Decentralization of management, responsibility centers, measures of assessing the effectiveness of the responsibility centers’ activity.</th>
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<tr>
<th>Planning, budgeting and assessment of budget execution:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) planning and control in management, significance of internal reports informing about execution of the intentions and about the deviations between the planned and the actual volumes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) main budget (leading), its elements and the manner of preparation, operational budget and financial budget, flexible budgets;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) reports on execution of budgets;</td>
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<tr>
<td>d) budgeting with the use of cost accounting activities.</td>
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<th>Account of the efficiency of long-term decisions:</th>
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<tr>
<td>a) types of investments,</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) capital budgeting,</td>
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<tr>
<td>c) methods of assessment of the efficiency of investment decisions,</td>
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<tr>
<td>d) the risk associated with making long-term decisions.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Modern systems of measuring and assessing business performance, application of the management systems using non-financial measures of achievement, Balanced Scorecard.</th>
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</table>

Within the scope of the specialization, in addition to the possibility of applying for passing selected examinations during the recruitment procedure for a statutory auditor, students gain specific skills. First and foremost, they acquire extensive knowledge on finance and accounting and its place in the system of economic sciences as well as understands its relation to other social sciences. The “statutory auditor” specialization graduates possess detailed knowledge in the fields of: the Polish balance sheet law, the international standards of financial reporting, consolidation of financial reports, taxes, managerial accounting (controlling), including budgeting and revision of financial statements. At the same time, they understand and can properly interpret basic economic phenomena, in terms of finance and accounting, as well as basic phenomena involving other social sciences. They can use the acquired knowledge to solve various problems involving finance and accounting, which emerge during economic practice. This means that they can work, inter alia, in commercial enterprises, banks and insurance institutions, local government units, tax offices, fiscal control offices, consulting companies, and most of all in own auditor offices (after receiving appropriate qualifications).

### 3.3 Results of the questionnaire survey

The surveyed students assessed which professional qualification available in the field of accounting they are familiar with and whether these qualifications are useful in a professional career. Based on the research carried out, it has been found that the most well-known professional qualification is the statutory auditor. 450 students exhibited familiarity with this qualification, which constitutes 89.6% of the researched, including 130 full-time students (constituting 85.53% of the full-time students) and 275
part-time students (constituting 91.67% of the part-time students). The higher percentage among the
part-time students can result from the fact that these persons work, in majority, and they have
encountered this qualification during their professional work. The second reason may be that such
specialization is available as part-time studies and not full-time studies. The next most recognizable
qualification is the tax advisor, acknowledged by 89.6% of the surveyed students and the ACCA
acknowledged by 62.51% of the surveyed students. It should be noted that recognition of the ACCA
qualification among full-time students is 83.55%, while among the part-time students only 52%. This
discrepancy, as in the case of a statutory auditor, can result from the fact that there are special ACCA
groups at full-time studies, while there is none at the part-time studies. Additionally, due to the fact,
that the ACCA qualification requires good knowledge of English, the most interest is among the
persons speaking English, mainly the full-time students. The least recognized qualification was the
CIMA (the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants), which only 13.94% of the surveyed
students are familiar with. Only 2.43% of the surveyed students stated that they do not know any of
the mentioned qualifications.

Another problem was the possibility of using the qualifications related to accounting in the realized or
the planned professional work. As much as 46.23% of the surveyed persons stated that the most
useful qualification is having a title of a diploma-certified accountant. Such a high indicator for a
diploma-certified accountant most probably results from the fact that this qualification is the easiest to
obtain and it takes relatively little time to do so. At the same time, acquisition of this qualification
requires the least financial outlays. Subsequently, the qualification of a statutory auditor (38.93%) and
the ACCA qualification (37.17%) are at almost equal levels. On the other hand, the CIMA qualification
(7.30%) is the least useful one, which can result from the fact that it is not well-known for the majority
of the surveyed students. Only 11.06% of the students stated that they do not need any of the
mentioned qualifications in their professional work. Such a low result means that students have
become increasingly aware of the fact, that the completion of higher education alone does not
guarantee acquisition of the practical knowledge that is necessary for the accounting profession. It is
interesting that as much as 50.66% of the part-time students stated that they could use the ACCA
qualification, while only 25% of the part-time students confirmed usefulness of this qualification in
professional work. Usefulness of the statutory auditor qualification (full-time students – 43.42%, part-
time students - 36.67%) has been recognized at similar levels. The superior result for the part-time
students results from the fact, that at the part-time master’s studies, there are two groups of the
“statutory auditor” specialization in the first and two in the second year.

Further, the study examined during acquisition of which qualifications the surveyed students were at
the time of the survey. It turned out that two qualifications are dominating: the ACCA qualification
(9.95% of the surveyed) and a statutory auditor (11.28% of the surveyed). A direct relation between
the realized study major and the acquisition of adequate qualifications can be observed here. There
are as much as 25.66% of the full-time students (39 persons) who are in the process of the ACCA
qualification acquisition and only 2% of the part-time students (6 persons out of the 300 of the
surveyed). Conversely, there are 16.67% of the part-time students (50 persons) and only 0.66% of the
full-time students (1 student) who are in the process of acquiring a statutory auditor qualification. This
means that the possibility of combining higher education with the opportunity to acquire specific
qualifications is the factor determining acquisition of a specific qualification. It can be particularly seen
in the case of the CIMA qualification, where the lack of such specialization in the study curriculum
results in the fact that only 1 surveyed person is in the process of acquiring this title. What is quite
disturbing is the fact that over 74% of the surveyed persons do not seek to acquire the above-
analyzed qualifications.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the studies carried out, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The university should ensure that the vocational education provides the students with specific
   professional competencies as well as with broader key competencies – including transversal
   competencies – allowing further education and training, enabling making professional choices
   and functioning on the labor market.

2. One of the key elements improving the students’ position on the labor market is cooperation
   with the organizations awarding and confirming professional qualifications. This is particularly
   true of the finance and accounting professions, due to the unequivocally positive perception of
   the significance of the employees’ certificates, on the part of the employers [21].
As a result of the cooperation between the university and the organizations awarding professional certificates, the potential of vocational education has been improving, due to the possibility to continually observe the labor market, which allows appropriate reactions to its changing requirements. Cooperation with international organizations brings an additional advantage in the form of co-participation in the global educational market as well as in the form of the possibility to use the sources of knowledge that are trans-border in nature.

Certification of the accounting profession is important for the students studying at the “Finance and accounting” major at the University of Gdansk. This means that the students are aware that entrepreneurs expect increasingly better qualified staff who will perform their professional duties reliably and properly, while the accreditations obtained by them are only one of the external indicators of teaching efficiency and assurance of the teaching quality. This application fits into a trend confirmed by research conducted among students and graduates of the faculties of Finance and Accounting (e.g. [9], [10], [11], [20]).

REFERENCES


