

# Developments in Vocational Education and Training

Selection of Texts  
by the National Team of Experts  
for Vocational Education  
and Training

## Developments in Vocational Education and Training. Volume II

Selection of Texts by the National Team of Experts for Vocational Education and Training

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# Introduction

In April 2021, the Foundation for the Development of the Education System launched the Team of Experts for Vocational Education and Training (EVET). Its composition is determined each year by the Ministry of Education and Science. In 2023, it comprised eighteen education and seven higher education professionals. In their everyday life, they are educators, examiners, public officials, researchers and academics closely involved in various fields of vocational training. Representatives from the business sector were also included. The activities of the Team of Experts are an integral part of the Erasmus+ work plan. EVET experts advise on how to effectively apply EU tools that support the learning mobility of vocational trainees, ensure the recognition of competences and qualifications and enable the monitoring of graduate outcomes in this sector. The Team works to improve the quality of vocational training and develop collaboration between vocational and technical schools and employers.

These objectives are achieved in cooperation with the institutions involved in implementing the Erasmus+ programme (in the fields of Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education) and the Europass, Euroguidance, EPALE, and WorldSkills Poland initiatives.

Experts provide substantive advice to Erasmus+ beneficiaries and to institutions active in the vocational education and training system in Poland. They also participate in thematic events organised by the Polish National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme and the European Solidarity Corps: conferences, seminars, workshops, training courses, lectures, debates, study visits and analytical work.

The results of EVET experts' work are compiled as publications and information material which can be downloaded from the website: [www.ekspercivet.org.pl](http://www.ekspercivet.org.pl). This publication presents the key articles produced by the experts in 2022 and 2023.

Read on to learn more!  
Europass, Euroguidance and EVET Team  
Foundation for the Development of the Education System

## *National Team of Experts for Vocational Education and Training*

### Education sector (2023 appointees):

- Piotr Bartosiak, Ministry of Education and Science
- Magdalena Wantoła-Szumera, Ministry of Education and Science
- Lech Boguta, Ministry of Education and Science
- Arleta Chorąży, KGHM Polska Miedź S.A.
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- Jędrzej Stasiowski, Educational Research Institute (IBE)
- Robert Wanic, Regional Examination Board in Jaworzno
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- Magdalena Wyczańska-Jabłkowska, Wincenty Witos Agricultural Training Centre School Complex in Samostrzel

### Higher education sector (2022–2027 appointees):

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- Dr hab. Jakub Brdulak, SGH Professor, SGH Warsaw School of Economics
- Dr Jacek Lewicki, SGH Warsaw School of Economics
- Dr hab. Lilla Młodzik, UZ Professor, University of Zielona Góra (UZ)
- Dr Robert Musiałkiewicz, PANS Professor, State University of Applied Sciences (PANS) in Włocławek
- Dr Katarzyna Olszewska, University of Applied Sciences in Elbląg
- Hanna Reczulska, Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange

# From Ideas to Actions The Role of Employers in the Vocational Training System



## Krzysztof Świerk

*Polish Chamber of Automotive Industry*

President of the Management Board of Promet Trans, Managing Director at the Polish Chamber of Automotive Industry, member of the Automotive Sector Competence Council (including electromobility). He has held the positions of headmaster of a technical school and head of practical training for many years. He authored and coordinated international projects on improving the quality of vocational education and training and supporting pupils from small towns to activate them in the labour market. He has initiated activities aimed at developing marketable qualifications and additional professional skills. The founder of the Qualification Centre in cooperation with nationwide employers' organisations and the first licenced Precision Agriculture Centre in Europe. From 2022 to 2023, he represented the education sector on the National Team of Experts for Vocational Education and Training.

In many European countries, the tradition of involving employers in the vocational training system has resulted in an educational offer tailored to the needs of the labour market, which directly translates into the employability of graduates. An excellent example of such cooperation is, among others, the German system, in which the chambers of industry and commerce are responsible for validating the competence acquired by students directly with employers as part of the dual education system. Introducing similar measures in the Polish system would be challenging. Despite the considerable activity of employer representatives at the national, sectoral or regional levels, there are no organisations focused on cooperation with the education sector which employers would be required to join. The presence of entities that could take responsibility for vocational training would allow for quicker development of cooperation between employers and the central government.

However, some German solutions have been successfully adopted in Poland. For several years now, cooperation based on practical vocational training by students at the employer's premises, similar to the dual education system, has been developing intensively. Efforts to adapt vocational training to the needs of the labour market are also underway. Many of the measures taken are yielding encouraging results, but there is still a long way to go before the education system is fully aligned with labour market needs.

### *Meeting the Challenges of a Modern Economy*

Programmes to improve the competitiveness of Polish enterprises during the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic aim to develop an economy based on modern knowledge, innovative and flexible skills, and social competence in tune with labour market requirements.

Further economic growth requires a significant improvement in the general and professional competence of the Polish population. Improving education quality must involve higher education, which provides employers with suitably prepared engineers or master's degree holders, and vocational training, which produces well-qualified technicians, craftspeople and workers who increase production and service potential.

Employers mainly expect appropriate tax exemptions for the costs of providing further practical vocational training for trainees at their workplaces.

Admittedly, education laws allow employers to reimburse the salaries and training allowances of practical vocational training instructors, as well as the costs of working clothing and footwear or personal protective equipment (Article 9(2) of the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 22 February 2019 on practical vocational training). However, as a general rule, the funds allocated for these activities must be provided by the schools' governing bodies, which do not always give their head teachers permission to incur practical training costs with the employer.

### *New Opportunities to Link Education with the Labour Market*

The labour market situation (shortage of skilled workers) and strong international competition are forcing Polish entrepreneurs to develop their plants more dynamically. This translates into a greater awareness of the importance of employers' involvement in the vocational training of young people. Legislative changes introduced in recent years have provided opportunities for labour market representatives to participate in education. However, entrepreneurs point out that the regulations do not fully support them.

Among the activities undertaken by employers or their organisations are measures aimed at improving the quality of vocational education and training, implemented jointly with the school and its governing body. These include:

- developing training programmes for selected professions, including additional vocational skills programmes,
- supporting the further equipping of school laboratories and workshops,
- providing traineeships and placements for pupils in enterprises, enabling teachers to undertake traineeships in the workplace and employees of enterprises to take up additional employment at school,
- organising enterprise-based centres authorised by the Regional Examination Board to conduct examinations confirming vocational qualifications,
- providing dual education for pupils, which to date has been available mainly to juvenile employees and required cooperation with chambers of crafts, providing further training of employees of enterprises as part of free vocational qualification courses,

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*Many factors influence the quality of the vocational training system, and one of the key ones is the involvement of employers.*

- establishing company-sponsored classes, cooperation in educational projects, support in career counselling, etc.

However, the system's challenges are much greater. One prerequisite for creating a high-quality vocational education and training system tailored to the labour market's needs is the precise identification of the competence needs of future jobs. Employers' involvement in the study of needs and the analysis of the current occupational profiles prevailing in enterprises will make it possible to accurately indicate the directions of education development, the rapid creation of new jobs, and even the development of the offer of lifelong learning and its increased importance in improving the competence and retraining of employees in line with the current needs of the labour market.

### *Advisory, Apprenticeship and Human Resource Development Activities*

Stable economies that have developed a culture of vocational training have seen considerably strong involvement of employers, public administrations, and schools, guided by experts, in promoting vocational training. This is a key factor in deciding on a future career tailored to the aptitude of the individual pupil. Adequate support in choosing a career path positively impacts the motivation to acquire professional competence and develop skills in the chosen area. In the long term, this will induce changes throughout the system, as pupils who are satisfied with their choice of educational pathway will increase the quality of their formally acquired qualifications.

Poland urgently needs closer cooperation between public administration bodies and representatives of the employer community in this field so that a vocational guidance system can be developed in primary and secondary schools. The actions taken so far should be considered a step in the right direction, but the benefits of vocational training must be promoted more effectively among both pupils and parents.

It is worth emphasising that the changes introduced in the Polish vocational education and training system have increased employers' influence on the development of the occupational profile of secondary school graduates. Labour market representatives can support schools in creating new training courses as part of an educational experiment and partially modify the curricula for a given occupation. Experimentation enables, among other things, the launch of a training course not listed in the regulation on practical vocational training. This process must involve a scientific unit. A favourable opinion from the provincial or district labour market council, an economic self-government body or other economic organisation relevant to the occupation, and an opinion from a scientific unit or professional association relevant to the occupation must also be obtained. The next step is to comply with the other regulations contained in Article 45 of the Act of 14 December 2016 – Education Law and obtain the approval of the minister responsible for education.

On the other hand, modifying existing curricula, through which employers, in cooperation with the school, can shape additional vocational skills of pupils as a form of specialisation of its graduates, relevant to the local labour market, requires less red tape. An additional skill learning period depends on the training course and the qualifications involved, but it averages about 300–400 hours. During this time, pupils can be prepared for the particularities of working in specific companies, which will also translate into increased employment for graduates.

It is also not insignificant that employers support a career counselling system for primary and secondary school pupils. At these stages of education, little attention is usually paid to the choice of development path or analysis of its consequences. Sometimes, the decision on the type of secondary school and the training course is taken without an in-depth analysis of the situation and developments in the labour market. The choice of a degree course is still considered to be crucial for a future career. This is a significant weakness of the career counselling system, which has failed to support the creation of career awareness in primary school pupils and their parents over the years.

The quality of the education system also depends on the competence and skills of the vocational education workforce. The education law divides it into teachers of theoretical vocational subjects and teachers of practical vocational training. In reality, this division is sometimes artificial, as it is not uncommon for the same teachers to handle both.

Improving the competence of educators is particularly important in this regard, and cooperation between schools and employers opens up new opportunities to improve the practical skills of teaching staff. Commercial training, in particular, is of great importance, e.g. in modern industrial technologies. It is not uncommon for school head teachers to be unable to allocate adequate resources for such in-service training of teaching staff. An appropriate solution to this problem could be involving employers in developing new forms of support for training teachers in a particular vocational area.

### *Solutions Developed in Collaboration With Employers*

New approaches to involving employers in vocational training are at the heart of the Ministry of Education's agenda. New tools developed in recent years, such as the Sectoral Qualifications Framework, make it easier to track labour market trends. They describe the range of knowledge, skills and social competence at each career level in several industries. The Sectoral Qualifications Framework enables comparison of employer requirements for employees, identification of competence gaps, and decisions to change or supplement qualifications. Using the Framework, it is also possible to track the development of occupations taught in secondary schools and the requirements for new positions emerging in the given sector. The involvement of employers in creating this tool is an important contribution to the development of the vocational training system and the forecasting of key occupations and qualifications for the economy.

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan includes the launch of 120 Sectoral Skills Centres (SSCs) nationwide. The new infrastructure is intended to ensure the development of modern vocational training delivered at secondary and tertiary levels.

These SSCs will operate in close cooperation between school governing bodies and representatives of employers, local economic authorities or other economic organisations. The SSCs will provide sector-specific training for vocational training teachers, university lecturers, and vocational training instructors who conduct classes with pupils at employers. The SSCs will also provide schools, universities, and employers with the teaching and learning facilities necessary for activities in many fields. In practice, they will become a space for establishing cooperation between the worlds of business and education, supporting innovation in vocational training, analysing the demand for occupations and skills in a specific sector, developing the offer of practical training for young people, upskilling and

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*The infrastructure of the Sectoral Skills Centres will ensure the development of modern vocational training delivered at secondary and tertiary levels.*

reskilling adults, examining for sectoral qualifications or validating skills acquired non-formally and informally.

Each SSC will also provide career counselling tailored to the specific sector supported. The creation of these SSCs started in 2022 and will take three years. When analysing the areas supported by the Sectoral Skills Centres in improving the quality of vocational training, it should be stated that they cover all identified problems affecting vocational training and the development of cooperation between schools and the economic environment. Hopefully, this will be the next huge step in integrating the potential of vocational training with the needs of the labour market.



# Services Supporting Better Links Between Vocational Education and Training and the Labour Market



## Jędrzej Stasiowski

*Educational Research Institute (IBE)*

Sociologist, analyst, member of NESET and assistant in the Educational Research and Analysis Team of the Educational Research Institute (IBE), where he is co-responsible for developing a system for monitoring the careers of secondary school graduates. His research interests include labour market and education policies, vocational training and sociology of education. He specialises in social and evaluation research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches and education and career pathway analyses. He earned his master's and doctoral degrees from the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw.

One key challenge of vocational training is to match its structure and the competence of its graduates to the labour market's current and future needs (cf. Drzeżdżon, 2009; Osiecka-Chojnacka, 2007). Putting this into practice will never be easy, as it requires the coupling of two distinct institutional systems.

Schools and non-school vocational training institutions formulate their offerings using complex decision-making processes determined by their own – often limited – staffing possibilities and technical and teaching facilities. In practice, the training structure is also influenced by the preferences and interests of candidates choosing to study a particular profession. Their decisions are only slightly influenced by the education system's career counselling.

The labour market operates under different rules: the demand for employees is dynamic and depends on many factors. Some of these, such as the economic climate or labour costs, are influenced only to a limited extent by employers. Coordinating two such complex systems is further complicated by their time lag: graduates prepared for specific professions must be trained immediately, but the education system takes several years to train them.

Increased employer involvement in the education process is an effective way of matching vocational training with the needs of the labour market. Measures to foster this cooperation have been implemented for many years.

The link between the offer of vocational education and training and the needs of the labour market is supported by two complementary services: the forecasting of the demand for employees in vocational education and training professions, which has been carried out since 2019, and the monitoring of careers of graduates of secondary schools, which was launched in 2021 (cf. Sitek and

Stasiowski, 2022). Both solutions are systemic, and the Institute of Educational Research (IBE) is responsible for preparing the analysis results published annually.

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*The link between the offer of vocational education and the needs of the labour market is supported by two complementary services: the forecasting of the demand for employees in VET occupations and the monitoring of the careers of secondary school graduates.*

### *Forecasting Workforce Needs in Professions*

The forecast, conducted under Article 46b of the Act of 14 December 2016 – Education Law, aims to provide a rationale for shaping the offer of vocational education and training adequately to the needs of the national and provincial labour market (Notice of the Minister of National Education of 22 March 2019).

The forecast methodology is based on both statistical data and qualitative research; it intends to provide a synthetic account of various sources describing labour market trends in the context of the state and regional development strategies (cf. Proгноза..., 2023). During the preparation of the forecast, the opinions of the Sector Competence Councils and the Competence Programme Board, as well as of the ministers responsible for the vocational education and training professions, are also taken into account (cf. Proгноза..., 2023).

Drawing on the forecast results, the Minister of Education and Science publishes a notice each March on the forecast of the demand for employees in vocational education and training occupations in the national and provincial labour market. For the professions indicated in the national forecast (part II of the notice), the educational subsidy and the subsidy to employers to train juvenile employees are to be increased.<sup>1</sup> The notice also includes provincial forecasts (part III). These are 16 lists of occupations with significant and moderate demand for workers in the respective regions. Provincial labour market boards take both parts of the notice into account when issuing opinions on the legitimacy of training in a given occupation, which is requested by head teachers planning the introduction of new courses to the schools' offer. The inclusion of an occupation on the national or provincial list exempts the head teacher from the obligation to seek a second opinion after the five-year period expires.

<sup>1</sup> Increase in the educational subsidy (by approx. 20% per pupil learning the occupation at school) and increase in the amount of co-financing for employers of training costs of juvenile employees (from approx. PLN 8,000 to PLN 10,000).

### *Monitoring Vocational School Graduates*

While forecasting attempts to predict the future, monitoring educational and vocational careers shows what has already happened. It is a source of reliable information on the situation of graduates in the five years following their graduation. Career monitoring was launched in 2021 under Article 26b of the Act of 14 December 2016 – Education Law and included graduates who completed their education in 2019 and 2020. Based on the analyses, a nationwide report and more than 4,000 reports describing the situation of vocational training school graduates were produced. Their head teachers were able to view them by logging into the Educational Information System.

The nationwide report is produced from analyses carried out by IBE analysts, and the school reports are generated automatically using software developed at the IBE. A unique feature of this solution is the use of administrative data for analysis, which enables the entire population of graduates to be surveyed without the need to conduct costly field research and burden schools with it.

Introduced in 2021, career monitoring of secondary school graduates is modelled on the nationwide Polish Graduate Tracking System (ELA), which has been in place since 2015 and monitors university students.

Monitoring uses:

- Educational Information System data on secondary education,
- information from the POL-on system on the pursuit of studies,
- information on the granting of diplomas and certificates from the information systems of the Regional Examination Boards, and
- data from the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) on the activity of graduates in the labour market.

The scope of the data used and the strict rules for their processing and anonymisation are detailed in the Act of 25 February 2021 amending the Education Law and certain other acts.

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*Monitoring of education and careers is a source of reliable information on the situation of graduates in the five years following their graduation.*

Between 2014 and 2020, methodologies, IT and legal solutions necessary for career monitoring were developed thanks to projects co-financed by European funds under the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development, Priority Axis II: Effective Public Policies for the Labour Market, Economy and Education<sup>2</sup>

During this time, it was possible to ground the monitoring in administrative resources, automate the solutions developed and entrust the development of monitoring results to the Educational Research Institute. These activities will continue after the end of the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development funding in 2023.

A second edition of the monitoring is currently underway and will also cover 2021 graduates. Reports describing the situation of graduates of technical secondary schools, vocational schools and vocational colleges will be supplemented by studies intended for head teachers of general secondary schools. In addition to the nationwide report, sectoral and regional monitoring results will be generated and targeted primarily at labour market institutions. In parallel, IBE researchers will organise workshops and working meetings to help better tailor the presentation of the results to the needs of different audiences.

More information on the career monitoring system is available at [bit.ly/48D7sbY](https://bit.ly/48D7sbY).

<sup>2</sup> For example, the system project "Monitoring of education and careers of graduates and young adults (POWR.02.15.00IP.02-00-004/16) and the parallel competition project "Monitoring of vocational school graduates – 2nd edition (Fate 2)" (POWR.02.15.00-IP.02-00003/19).

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# District Support Network for School Career Counsellors in the Kędzierzyn-Koźle District



**dr Ireneusz Wiśniewski**

*Centre for Vocational Training in Kędzierzyn-Koźle*

He graduated from the University of Economics in Katowice, where he defended his doctoral dissertation in labour market economics. He serves as director of the Centre for Vocational Training in Kędzierzyn-Koźle and is also a member of the Council of Head Teachers of Vocational Schools to the Minister of Education and Science. From 2022 to 2023, he represented the education sector on the National Team of Experts for Vocational Education and Training. District Support Network for School Career Counsellors in the Kędzierzyn-Koźle District

The employer requirements for employees working in the many sectors of the knowledge-based (and dynamic) economy present the modern education system with new, previously unknown challenges while imposing the need to prepare the younger generation for life in a globalising world. A modern education system should impart vocational knowledge and skills to students and foster multidirectional, flexible, creative and ethical thinking. The right qualifications, knowledge of work principles and the right motivation can help young graduates adapt more smoothly to the rules of the new type of economy, which, while transforming jobs, is also changing the nature of other areas of social and cultural life. Wrong career choices from a labour market perspective negatively impact the graduates and the economy in general.

Wrong decisions can increase structural unemployment, which is caused by a mismatch between graduates' qualifications and the labour market's needs.

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*One reason for the mismatch between demand and supply of skills is that young people are not sufficiently interested in indemand occupations.*

On the one hand, anticipating (mega)trends and meeting the needs of a competitive labour market are becoming crucial at virtually every level of the education system. On the other hand, adapting educational programmes to the demands of the economy has always been a problem that policymakers must solve for the good of society as a whole if it is to achieve high levels of development and consumption. An active state policy for balancing the demand and supply of qualifications should involve developing tools to support rational career choices for schoolchildren. For example, educational institutions can use existing legislation to carry out activities to raise pupils' career awareness. In vocational training, one of the prerequisites for economic growth is to meet the demand

for skilled workers. Employers' organisations point out that the skilled workforce is ageing and that there are few or no recruits. The situation in the Opole region is a case in point. One of the most important economic pillars here is the chemical industry. However, the main obstacle to its development is the lack of workers with the proper training and specialised skills.

### ***Counselling in Vocational Training***

One reason for the mismatch between demand and supply of skills is that young people are not sufficiently interested in in-demand occupations, and as a consequence, there are insufficient numbers of people training in these specialities. This is because pupils and their parents are not well informed about the specifics of the local and regional labour market, including ignorance of its employment needs and the region's development prospects. Pupils often do not know which career path to choose to become professionals in their desired field or what a particular profession entails and how it differs from others. The changes introduced

in the vocational education and training system in 2012 and 2019 were accompanied by a clear shift towards promoting vocational skills. During this time, the importance of educational institutions, which are increasingly willing to help pupils and their parents make the right choices, has increased. It was also observed that career pre-orientation, which enables a rational choice of life path, should be provided in primary schools, and training at the first stages of education should involve career-oriented preparation.

However, current legal arrangements do not allow for career counselling in primary schools. In small schools, the counsellor is employed part-time. This role is often filled by a teacher of another subject who has obtained counsellor qualifications. Staffing shortages are accompanied by a lack of appropriate tools: precise information, research results, and scenarios for interesting activities. Therefore, systemic support and coordination of counselling activities at the local level are necessary, especially in such cases.

### *Support Network for School Career Counsellors*

As educational institutions, vocational training centres can act as an external support platform for schools, pupils and their parents. In order to provide effective career guidance, such institutions should cooperate with businesses, universities and legislative bodies at various levels, including local government, central government and, in some cases, the media.

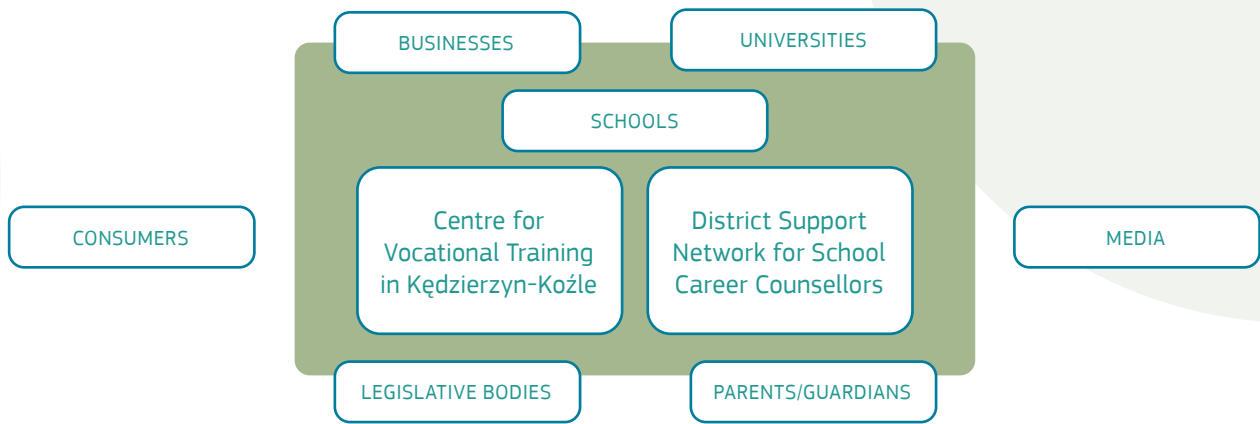
Such a solution has been in place in the Kędzierzyn-Koźle District since 2014: a District Support Network for School Career Counsellors has been set up at the Centre for Vocational Training (CVT), which deals with such matters as:

- identifying those involved in educational and career counselling in the district's schools, as well as developing cooperation and taking action to integrate this environment,
- initiating and organising activities enabling the exchange of information and experience for those interested in educational and career counselling in schools,
- organising training and workshops in educational and career counselling for Network members,
- providing expert and methodological support and consulting on school counselling programmes,
- facilitating contacts between primary schools and employers,
- supporting educators in providing career guidance to parents, organising counselling

activities at a local CVT and developing projects and initiatives tailored to the actual needs of schools.

The regular meetings and consultations organised by CVTs for career counsellors, school counsellors and others involved in coordinating and carrying out career counselling in the district help in the regular diagnosis of problems. Thanks to the ongoing cooperation between educational establishments and companies, it is also possible to organise annual career exploration visits. They allow young people to learn about opportunities in a particular job and support them in making educational and career decisions.

**Figure 1. Stakeholders of the Support Network for School Career Counsellors at the Centre for Vocational Training in Kędzierzyn-Koźle**



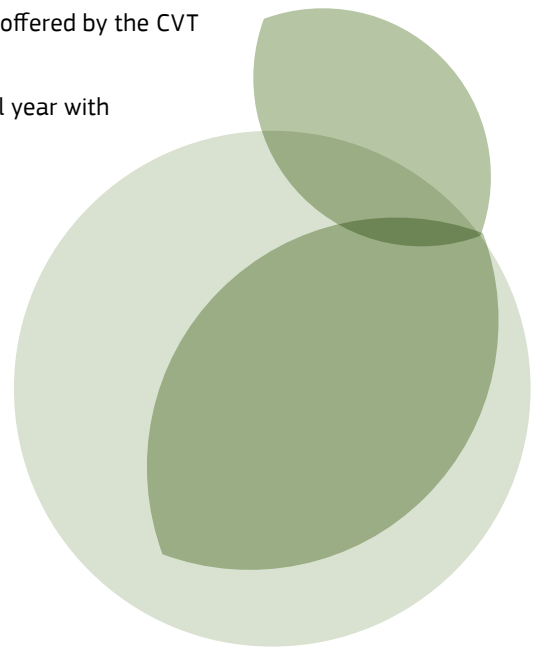
Source: author's own elaboration.

In addition, the CVT has initiated a "Career Week" campaign, which is of great interest to schools, pupils and parents. It enables individuals to learn about all the careers included in the local education offer. Pupils in the final grades of primary schools in the district can learn about the specifics and working environment of a particular profession by taking part in school workshops, practical classes conducted in CVT workshops or by visiting the practical training workshops located in the district's technical and vocational schools. This way, pupils on the threshold of transitioning to the next stage of education get the information necessary to make an informed decision about their educational and career path, which helps offset the effects of random and ill-advised choices.

### *Good Practice for Development*

This cooperation model between the education sector and the labour market produces satisfactory results. At present, 32 institutions are cooperating as part of the District Support Network for School Career Counsellors in the Kędzierzyn-Koźle District. In addition, the CVT evaluates its activities to monitor needs and adapt to changing expectations or the characteristics of the labour market. Some of the development activities to date have covered the following:

- Demand from schools and institutions for CVT counselling support in the 2020/2021 school year due to working under a sanitary regime;
- School counsellors' use and evaluation of the various forms of support offered by the CVT in the 2020/2021 school year;
- Evaluation of the CVT career counsellor's work in the 2019/2020 school year with a particular focus on remote learning;
- Visits to companies to learn about particular careers in the 2019/2020 school year as effective support for the district's primary school pupils in making educational and career decisions;
- Evaluation of CVT's counselling activities in the 2018/2019 school year regarding external support for schools in the pursuit of career counselling tasks, taking into account the perspective of implementing the new Regulation of the Ministry of Education of 16 August 2018 on career counselling.



The foundation of the District Support Network for School Career Counsellors in the Kędzierzyn-Koźle District has made it possible to collect data needed to analyse the local labour market and regional occupational specialisations, measure the level of unemployment or forecast economic and development needs. It would be worthwhile to discuss these issues in classes with the school career counsellor in the near future. Youth trips to companies or meetings with labour group representatives can inspire rational thinking about future careers. Such career-orientated activities support the balancing of employers' demand for trained employees and, as a result, contribute to the provision of jobs for graduates and harmonious economic growth in the region.

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*In the two editions of "Career Week", 1,080 students from the Kędzierzyn-Koźle District participated in dozens of vocational workshops.*

Young people's choices result from access to information acquired in the family home, from peers, at school, in non-school institutions and even via the media. The soundness of life choices depends on which of these sources prevails. Raising the career awareness of pupils and their parents in educational institutions is essential for properly shaping the regional economic future.

# Pupil Traineeship in Education Law



## Piotr Krzywda

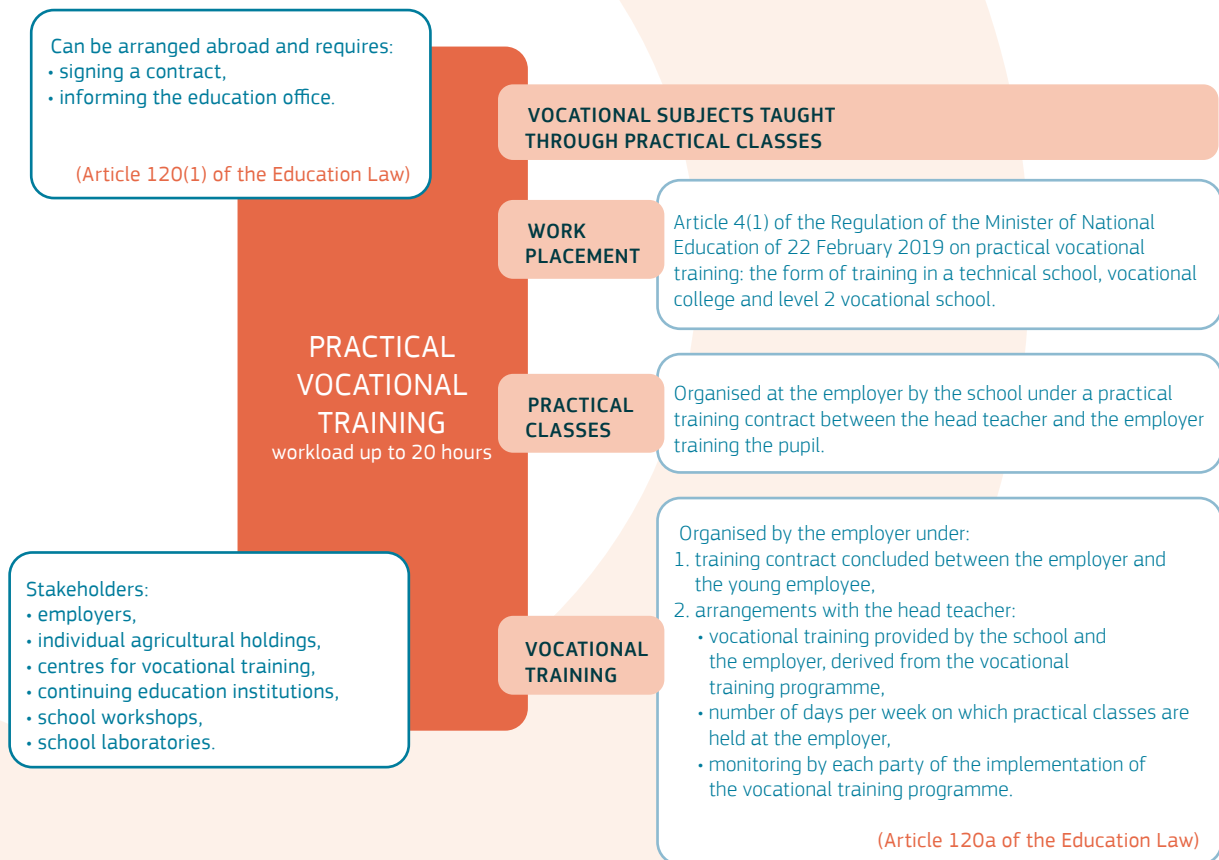
### *Education Office in Wrocław*

School inspector, coordinator for vocational training at the Education Office in Wrocław, Branch Office in Wałbrzych. He teaches vocational subjects at Wałbrzych University of Management and Entrepreneurship. From 1994 to 2017, he taught vocational subjects in the automotive sector, served as deputy director for vocational training, and was head teacher of School Complex No. 5 in Wałbrzych. He is chairman of the "Invest in Edu" Education Cluster in the "Invest-Park" Wałbrzych Special Economic Zone and a vocational subject examiner at the Regional Examination Board in Wrocław. In 2009, he was awarded the Medal of the Commission of National Education; in 2014, he received the award of the Minister of National Education; and in 2017, the award of the Lower Silesian Education Superintendent. From 2022 to 2023, he represented the education sector on the National Team of Experts for Vocational Education and Training.

**V**ocational training teaches pupils the knowledge and skills they need for a profession in industry, agriculture, livestock farming or the broader service sector. At the final stage of learning, the learner can validate their qualification by passing a vocational or apprenticeship exam.

Practical vocational training holds a central role in the education process, complementary to vocational theory. As specified in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 3 April 2019 on framework teaching plans for public schools in formal vocational training, schools draw up weekly timetables in such a way that, in a technical school, the number of hours allocated to practical classes is not less than 50% of the hours allocated to vocational training, and in a level 1 vocational school – not less than 60%.

**Figure 1. Organisation of Practical Vocational Training**



Source: Author' own elaboration

Practical training may take the form of laboratory classes held in school laboratories or may take place in real working conditions at employers (Article 120(1) of the Act of 14 December 2016 – Education Law). Figure 2 shows the existing legislative arrangements governing the organisation of practical vocational training.

Employers who hire graduates highly value work experience, which is often a barrier for young people entering the labour market. That is why it is so important to enable pupils to prepare a professional portfolio based on knowledge derived from the core curriculum and skills acquired in real working conditions. During training, this is made possible by

- traineeships under the Erasmus+ programme validated by the Europass Mobility document,
- traineeships under the programmes funded by the European Social Fund,
- pupil traineeships.

It is worth remembering that the pupil traineeship described in Article 121a of the Education Law is not the same as practical vocational training, as defined in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 22 February 2019 on practical vocational training. Pupil traineeship primarily responds to the low level of "practicality" of education perceived by employers. In technical schools, pupils only come into contact with real working conditions during work placements, usually for 280 hours in the five-year education cycle.

The experience of European countries such as Germany, Austria and Denmark shows the positive effects of implementing a dual vocational education system in which two partners – a business and a vocational school – share the responsibility of training pupils. The school imparts theoretical knowledge, and the business teaches practical skills. In Poland, a similar model is used to train young employees, while other pupils at technical schools and level 1 vocational schools can gain experience under real working conditions in the vocation in which they are training.

### *Pupil Traineeship Principles*

Analysis of Article 121a of the Education Law leads to the following conclusions:

- During the traineeship, the pupil learns all or selected contents of the practical vocational training programme implemented in their school or contents related to the profession but not covered by the programme.
- A natural person, a legal person or an organisational unit without legal personality, hereinafter referred to as the "pupil traineeship provider", concludes a written traineeship agreement with the pupil or the parents of the minor pupil, which specifies:
  - parties to the agreement,
  - location of pupil traineeship,
  - name and address of the pupil's school,
  - traineeship occupation,
  - traineeship period,
  - amount of cash allowance (in the case of a paid pupil traineeship).
- In addition, a pupil traineeship agreement:
  - may not involve the performance of particularly hazardous work within the meaning of Article 23715 of the Labour Code Act of 26 June 1974,
  - may not exceed the duration of study at a technical school or level 1 vocational school,
  - may be terminated in writing by either party by giving 14 days' notice.

If the trainee ceases to be a pupil before the agreement expires, the head teacher notifies the traineeship provider, and the pupil traineeship agreement lapses.

A similar procedure applies to the subject, pupil or parent of a minor pupil towards the head teacher. In addition, if termination is necessary, the reason for termination is notified (Article 121a(16) to (20) of the Education Law).

In an appendix to the agreement, the traineeship provider and the head teacher, in agreement with the pupil or the parent of the minor pupil, determine the content to be taught and the daily and weekly length of the traineeship. A date for its completion is also indicated. The head teacher may partially or fully exempt a pupil who completed traineeship from the obligation to undertake practical vocational training.

Pupil traineeships may be paid, therefore Article 16(1)(57) of the Corporate Income Tax Act of 15 February 1992 adds a provision on a cash allowance for pupil traineeships referred to in Article 121a of the Education Law. The monthly payment may not exceed the value of the minimum wage referred to in the Minimum Wage Act of 10 October 2002. However, the parties to the agreement may stipulate that the traineeship is unpaid. Allowances paid to pupils by employers may be deductible.

Other pupil traineeship characteristics:

- it can be held during winter break or summer holidays;
- this form of practical training is not covered by the Labour Law, except for the following: Articles 183a–183e, Article 131(1), Article 132(1), Article 133(1), Article 134, Article 151, Article 204 and Article 232, subject to paragraphs 12–14;
- a daily traineeship for pupils up to the age of 16 may not exceed 6 hours and for older pupils 8 hours;
- in the case of pupils with disabilities aged 16 or older, the number of hours may be reduced to 7 per day. In that case, the length of the activities carried out at school and during the traineeship must not exceed 8 hours,
- and the total weekly time of both activities must not exceed 40 hours.

During the traineeship, the pupil is supervised by a member of staff designated by the traineeship provider. It can be a person who has no criminal record or who is not banned from activities related to the education, treatment, training or care of minors. Fulfilment of this condition is confirmed by a relevant declaration.

The responsibilities of the traineeship provider include:

- making available a workstation equipped with necessary devices, equipment, tools, materials and technical documentation complying with OSH requirements and conditions specified in separate regulations concerning the prevention of hazards connected with work at a given position (e.g. personal protective equipment),

- providing a room for storing clothing, work footwear and personal protective equipment,
- providing sanitation and hygiene facilities and living quarters,
- providing subsistence allowance as agreed with the ship operator (in the case of traineeship on seagoing and inland vessels),
- providing benefits under the rules for ships' crews (in the case of pupils on traineeship on seagoing and inland vessels who are disembarked abroad as a result of an accident or illness).

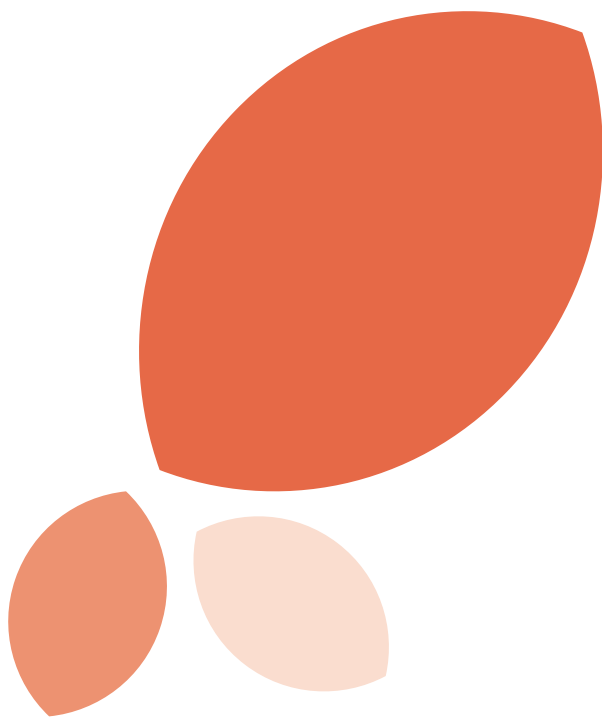
After the pupil traineeship, its provider must issue a written certification. It states the traineeship period, the types of tasks performed and the skills acquired. On this basis, traineeship can be counted towards the employment period and reduces the time needed to acquire rights attached to employment. A pupil traineeship is beneficial if all parties to the agreement are fully committed to its organisation.

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*The template for the certification of pupil traineeship is given in the Regulation of the Minister of Education of 12 August 2019 ([bit.ly/44vDNOo](https://bit.ly/44vDNOo)).*

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# New Learning Agreement for Erasmus+ Student Mobility Projects



**Dr Robert Musiałkiewicz, PANS Professor**

*State University of Applied Sciences in Wrocław*

University lecturer with practical experience. He is the rector of the State University of Applied Sciences in Wrocław, where he works as a professor.

He holds the professional title of legal adviser and a diploma from the Minister of the State Treasury, entitling him to hold positions in state-owned enterprises. For many years, he was self-employed or served on the governing bodies of companies. He has coordinated projects on the transfer of knowledge from science to the economy. He is the President of the Conference of Rectors of Public Vocational Universities. He has also authored and co-authored several monographs and dozens of research articles.

Erasmus celebrated its 35th anniversary in 2022. Since 1987, it has provided opportunities to develop cooperation between universities and higher education institutions throughout Europe, building on a structured and integrated system of cross-border student exchanges. Over time, the programme has developed new forms of action and opened up to new groups of beneficiaries. It has been operating under the new name Erasmus+ since 2014 (Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021). Today, the EU's largest education programme provides a broad framework for educational activities that brings together various initiatives to promote transnational cooperation and mobility regarding education, training, youth and sport in Europe. The cornerstone of Erasmus+ is still providing opportunities to study or gain work experience in another country, but mobility is now open to learners of all ages: pupils, students, young people, trainees, and apprentices, as well as educational staff: lecturers and university staff, teachers, trainers, youth workers, sports coaches, employees of educational institutions, and NGOs.

It is estimated that some 12.5 million people have benefited from the programme's various activities by 2022. In 2021 alone, despite travel difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic, around 648,000 learners and educators participated in learning mobility (European Commission, 2022). During this time, more than 33,100 students came to Poland and almost 37,700 students left Poland for studies and placements in foreign universities (Erasmus+ in Poland in 2021).

Erasmus+ has a very significant impact on university cooperation in Europe and beyond and on the harmonisation of European higher education standards. The programme's success has contributed to closer cooperation within the Bologna Process. With the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the diploma supplement and the division of education into two or three levels, it has become possible to compare achievements in higher education. The next step was the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The result of many years of internationalisation of the study process in the EU Member States is also a uniform and transparent way of describing courses and other educational components carried out by students during mobility abroad. This allows courses completed abroad to be counted towards the study programme at the home university.

### *Conditions for Student Learning Mobility*

According to the Erasmus+ guidelines, the aim of student mobility is to achieve at least one of the following outcomes:

- better academic performance,
- increased employability and improved career prospects,
- enhanced sense of initiative and entrepreneurship,
- empowerment and increased self-esteem,
- improved language skills and digital competence,
- increased intercultural awareness,
- more active participation in society,
- building positive relationships with people from different backgrounds,
- broadening knowledge of European projects and the values of the European Union, and strengthening motivation to participate in formal or non-formal forms of education after returning from mobility abroad (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2023).

In Poland, student mobility can be organised by higher education institutions which have been granted an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE).<sup>1</sup> Universities must also have their mobility project application approved and sign an agreement with the Polish National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme and European Solidarity Corps.

Exchanges are open to students from any course and study cycle (bachelor's, master's, supplementary master's and doctoral). The essence of the programme is to transfer the learning outcomes of study abroad into the curriculum of the home university. Therefore, mobility courses must be coherent with the courses pursued at home and in line with the student's study cycle, curriculum, and personal development needs.

Learning mobility abroad can last up to 12 months in one study cycle. This means that it is possible, for example, to study abroad for 12 months during a bachelor's programme and then for another 12 months during a supplementary master's programme. In the case of long-cycle master's programmes (e.g. medicine, architecture, law), mobility may not exceed 24 months. This is called long-term mobility.

There is also the possibility of short-term mobility (under 12 months), which can be partially carried out remotely. Virtual

<sup>1</sup> For more on ECHE, see [bit.ly/47Iychu](https://bit.ly/47Iychu)

learning is the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competence through information and communication technologies.

In this case, students or doctoral students go abroad for 5–30 days and complete the rest of their mobility locally, taking advantage of the various collaboration opportunities or tools the foreign university provides (e.g. online courses, access to library resources). In countries belonging to the European Higher Education Area, the academic year is converted into 60 ECTS credits earned by attending classes (in countries outside the EHEA equivalent units may be used). Proportional participation in courses according to the learning agreement is recommended for mobility shorter than one academic year.

For example, a one-semester exchange should result in the acquisition of 30 ECTS credits. Student exchange can also include a traineeship or practical activity in a company, research institute, laboratory, organisation, or other workplace. Work placements abroad can be undertaken during any study cycle or immediately after graduation. Furthermore, this type of mobility may include participation in research projects funded under Horizon Europe. The purpose of the stay should be consistent with the study programme at the home university, and the trainee's working time at the receiving organisation should be full-time.

Erasmus+ mobility involves a whole set of procedures that require cooperation between the sending and receiving universities during the preparation and course of the exchange. The most important of these include:

- agreement signed by both universities as part of the Erasmus+ programme,
- sending by the home university a list of students declaring their intention to go to the receiving university,
- in case of acceptance of arrivals: preparation and signing of a learning agreement between the student and the two universities,
- arrival of the student, start of mobility and confirmation of this by the receiving university,
- end of mobility and confirmation by the receiving university of the date of departure,
- sending by the home university a transcript of records to the sending university.

### *Learning Agreement*

To ensure that the courses taken at the foreign institution are coherent with the study programme of the home institution, both institutions must agree with the students on the learning activities they undertake during mobility and set these out in the learning agreement. This document specifies the length and form of courses or work placements abroad. The agreement, which must be approved before the exchange begins, should cover all the learning outcomes the student intends to achieve during the stay. All parties

to the agreement commit to the arrangements to ensure the student can pass the course or traineeship.

In practice, this document consists of several sections:

- general details of the student, the sending and the receiving institutions,
- field and level of study (ISCED<sup>2</sup> code and European Qualifications Framework level), e.g. short-cycle tertiary education (level 5); bachelor's or equivalent (level 6); master's or equivalent (level 7); doctoral or equivalent (level 8),
- European Student Identifier, an individual number assigned to each exchange student,
- language competence level in the primary language of instruction that the student already has or intends to achieve before departure.

In addition, the document should indicate the duration of the mobility (e.g. specific months or academic year) and specify the programme of activities (e.g. study or traineeship).

The short-term mobility agreement should specify the scope of all activities, including those carried out virtually, and describe the rules for their recognition by the home university. In the case of long-term mobility, the courses the student will take are listed, together with the number of ECTS credits assigned to them. In addition, it indicates which courses will be credited at the sending institution, how ECTS credits will be converted, and by what date the recognition of achievements will be completed. In exceptional circumstances, amendments to the learning agreement are allowed but require the approval of all parties.

<sup>2</sup> The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is used to collect, collate, analyse and compare data on education systems in many countries. Levels 5–8 of the European Qualifications Framework correspond to ISCED levels 5–8

### *Digital Collaboration for Mobility*

As part of the European Student Card Initiative and the promotion of environmentally friendly practices in the Erasmus+ programme, the learning agreement is gradually shifting from paper to digital form. As such, it is referred to as an online learning agreement (OLA). Study mobility organisers are already signing the first documents of this kind, and traineeship organisers in European countries will soon start using them.

The European Student Charter Initiative is of great importance in promoting the participation of pupils and students in educational and cultural endeavours. It will also be one of the key activities undertaken by the end of 2025 as part of the creation of the European Education Area. The initiative has three components:

- European Student Card, which will replace the documents issued separately by each university,
- Erasmus+ App, a mobile app that will support programme participants in administrative activities before, during and after their return from mobility,
- Digital Erasmus+, a set of functionalities that will connect the university mobility management systems.<sup>3</sup>

Both students and universities have access to the OLA platform ([learning-agreement.eu](https://learning-agreement.eu)), which facilitates signing an online learning agreement. This allows all parties to complete, comment and sign documents in real time.

The signing of an online agreement can be initiated by both the sending institution and the student. In the first case, the university posts the list of students qualified for learning mobility on the OLA platform. They will then receive a notification that they can set up a personal account, through which they can monitor their progress in preparing for the departure. Once the students have provided the required information (e.g. indicating the courses at the receiving institution) and signed the agreement, the Erasmus+ coordinator at the sending institution receives notification that the university is ready to sign the agreement. If defects are detected

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*Both students and universities have access to the OLA platform ([learning-agreement.eu](https://learning-agreement.eu)), which facilitates signing an online learning agreement. This allows all parties to complete, comment and sign documents in real time.*

<sup>3</sup> For more, see [bit.ly/3KSM08J](https://bit.ly/3KSM08J)

at this stage, it is possible to reject the content entered by the student and send comments to the student. Once the home university has approved the agreement, the notification is sent to the programme coordinator at the host university, who can initiate the electronic signing of the document by authorised persons. Each of the three parties can monitor the progress of this process on the platform in real time.

Otherwise, the student creates a mobility application on the OLA platform, signs it and sends it to the programme coordinator at the home university. The next steps in signing the learning agreement are as described above.

### *Final Thoughts*

The learning agreement is a key element in the recognition of academic achievement and the transfer of learning outcomes acquired outside the home university. It is also, to some extent, a manifestation of the synergy of programme content in the sending and receiving universities. It is not a standardised document, so there is no single template, but it certainly requires the student to do comparative work – to look for content in the foreign study programme that is consistent with the home programme and to reflect on their own professional development and educational needs. The online agreement speeds up the paperwork, ensures a good exchange of information, and contributes to achieving sustainable development goals.

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# Some Tips for Reflective Vocational Learning

**dr hab. Lilla Młodzik, UZ Professor**

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### *Some Tips for Reflective Vocational Learning*

Today's world, including the labour market, is unpredictable, non-linear, incomprehensible and, in addition, fraught with crises. The labour market reflects changes in new types of careers: drifting (lacking a plan and counting on luck), exploratory (when success depends on the ability to synthesise knowledge and apply it to different conditions) or kaleidoscopic (successive crises are like spinning it) (Sikorski, 2019; Rosalska, 2022). There is also much talk about multivariate careers, bundling competence, setting indicative (rather than absolute) career goals, and the importance of assertiveness in cooperating with others. Combining opposing patterns of thought and behaviour has become valuable, and a move to a good, albeit parallel, team is considered a promotion.

The plethora of new factors means that learning in general and vocational learning in particular, have to look different than before. Self-orientation, working on one's own autonomy, and developing competence that makes one more attractive to employers (employability skills) have become necessities. However, this does not invalidate the advantages of group interaction, which will be discussed later.

The answer to the world's volatility should be agility and flexibility in combining and rapidly harnessing the existing knowledge base. This resource can be likened to a set of Lego bricks, from which you can create a lifeboat, a helicopter, and, if necessary, a spaceport. How much we build depends on our willingness to continuously expand our knowledge, our ability to apply it to different conditions and our confidence and sense of agency (a can-do attitude). Developing the so-called five disciplines (Senge, 1998) may also be helpful in terms of our performance. These include:

- systems thinking (in terms of long-term interconnections rather than short-term cause-and-effect sequences),
- building shared vision (organisational purpose and organisational identity),
- team learning (creating an atmosphere for the free exchange of ideas),
- mental models (identifying the unconscious beliefs of individuals and groups that shape their behaviour and decisions),
- personal mastery (a commitment to continuous improvement of skills).

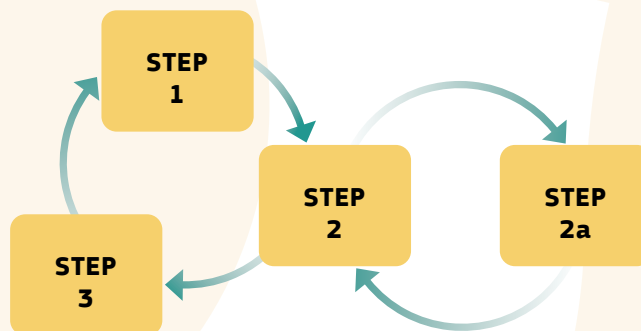
### *Overcoming Barriers Through Double-Loop Learning*

Shaping reflexivity, agility, and flexibility is also possible – and necessary – in vocational education and training. This specific type of education, in which theory and practice are combined, should lead to the acquisition of expert knowledge that is adequate for changing conditions.

Readiness for constant reflection is one of the tenets of a strategy referred to as double-loop learning. This method emphasises the modification of existing solutions, procedures, goals or objectives. In this view, a person is not a machine carrying out procedures but a subject capable of critical analysis who wants to understand the causes of the state of affairs and adapt their action strategy accordingly.

Double-loop learning (Fig. 1) involves four steps. The first involves carefully monitoring, examining and sensing the signals coming from the environment. Step two is to relate the acquired information to the operational standards (in the case of vocational training – these could be the curriculum and the teaching methodology). Step three – the key one – involves identifying significant differences and deviations from these standards or facts that impede the achievement of the goal. The final step is to initiate corrective action when contradictions are found.

**Figure 1. Double-Loop Learning**



**Step 1** - sensing, examining and ongoing monitoring of the environment.

**Step 2** - comparing the information gained in Step 1 with operational standards.

**Step 2a** - challenging the suitability of operational standards.

**Step 3** - initiating appropriate action.

Source: author's own elaboration based on G. Morgan (2022), *Obrazy organizacji*, Warszawa.

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*Successful adaptation to reality depends not only on the right attitude and learning strategy. We must also constantly analyse what we learn and what we teach.*

However, certain aspects of the education system prevent the popularisation of this strategy among pupils and students. Firstly, educational institutions often impose a fragmented way of thinking on their pupils (students) so that they cannot analyse things independently, and the flow of knowledge and information – instead of being free – is restricted. Consequently, individuals or teams act using different perceptions of the situation of the group as a whole and may pursue their own partial goals. Moreover, the education system encourages pupils and students to adopt and maintain a predetermined position and rewards them for doing so. This is the opposite of double-loop learning, where testing and challenging existing standards is important.

Secondly, the pupil's fear of responsibility may hinder the use of the aforementioned method. Apprentices do not want to be seen as the ones who invent problems or get it wrong when trying to solve them. So they find ways to divert attention and present various issues in a better light. Taking a defensive stance involves simplifying reality and being complacent – hoping that perceived difficulties will disappear and believing that it is only worth taking an interest in problems whose solution is close at hand. Thirdly, pupils' and students' readiness for critical reflection decreases when they see discrepancies between what their teachers say and do. Despite clear signals from those around them that things are not going according to plan, teachers often want to convince others – and themselves – that anything can be managed. This conscious or unconscious behaviour aims to divert attention from challenging problems. As people look up to authority figures, it is hard to expect pupils to be able to face challenges when others avoid them.

Critical reflection on reality, which is at the heart of double-loop learning and leads to constant modification of strategies to achieve goals, will only be possible if the education system:

- Supports and values openness and reflexivity, enabling individuals to deal with uncertainty meaningfully (a legitimate mistake is a potential lesson, not an opportunity to place blame);
- Accepts different points of view and allows for discussion between proponents of competing views (other pupils and teachers);
- Avoids "bending" operational patterns to existing organisational arrangements and systems. This can lead to difficulties in adapting to a changing environment;
- Clearly identifies situations to be avoided, increasing the room for potential action within critical limits;
- Makes it possible to manage career paths and develop the competence and attitudes that will allow reacting adequately to changes;

- Diagnoses professional competence, including all attitude components (cognitive, affective, behavioural) and checks the understanding of reality, for instance through clusters and competence matrices. Classic knowledge or personality tests are no longer sufficient.<sup>1</sup>

### *Building the Competence of the Future*

However, successful adaptation to reality depends not only on the right attitude and learning strategy. We must also constantly analyse what we learn and what we teach. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the competence related to new technologies, i.e. digital competence.<sup>2</sup> Rosalska (2023) identifies digital competence, information and communication competence (critical review of sources), and functional competence (determining how much information a student is able to extract from what they have access to). However, the author points out that being digitally competent is not about knowing as many programs or apps as possible. It is important to know the ones you will be able to use in your work and then develop this competence.

In the future, however, there will be entirely new professions for which it is difficult today to define the scope of the necessary hard skills.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the focus should be on building the overall capacity to take on new professional roles and challenges, which should consist of:

- Developing a greater tolerance for uncertainty. A sense of lack of professional knowledge and skills reduces confidence and alters attitudes towards new challenges. We have to learn to live with these emotions;
- Shaping an instrumental attitude towards different cultural patterns. With this knowledge, the future employee is capable of exercising rational control over their own cultural habits, gaining distance and objectivity, being more flexible and willing to innovate, freeing themselves from cultural stereotypes;
- Recognising knowledge as a fundamental determinant of an organisational culture of professionalism. This is linked to self-esteem and fosters ambition and a desire for professional development.

1 For example, the MBTI personality test proves to be inadequate today due to polarity. Rather than combining extreme types, it needs to be remodelled, as diverse types seem more accurate (Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner, 2005; Włodarski, 2016)

2 The classification of employability skills (which influence a candidate's attractiveness for the labour market) places digital competence in the category of methodological competence alongside cognitive and social competence. Learning, decision-making and self-management skills, among others, belong to the same group.

3 According to Kwiatkowski (2018), the emergence of new professions will be driven by the trends of economic development, demographic change and increased quality of life.

In his opinion, new professions will be related to the search for alternative energy sources, the use of IT technologies and techniques (artificial intelligence – automation and robotisation of production and services), comprehensive home care for the elderly, care at home and in specialised centres for people with various disabilities, rehabilitation of the elderly and people with disabilities, dietetics, cosmetology and aesthetic medicine, various types of counselling or organisation of leisure time.

### *Collaborative Learning*

Based on the above considerations, those who are able to apply their knowledge in an inclusive labour market and increasingly manifold relationships are more likely to succeed in their careers. And if so, we should pay more attention to the interaction already mentioned at the beginning of this piece.

In its broad, general sense, collaboration means "acting, working together with someone, including helping someone in some activity, providing support" (Słownik języka polskiego, 2006, p. 768). Cooperation is a near-synonymous term defined as "work done jointly with someone, joint work, activity carried out jointly" (Słownik języka polskiego, 2006, p. 792).<sup>4</sup>

Considering its purpose (Pszczółowski, 1978, p. 590), there are three types of collaboration:

- cooperation, or positive cooperation,
- competition, or rivalry,
- struggle, or negative cooperation.

Only positive cooperation is associated with organised collective action (Kozuch, 2021; Mises, 2007). It should be noted, however, that in special cases, competition can also be regarded as constructive and increase team effectiveness (Kotarbiński, 1999, p. 46).

According to M. Sulk (2010), cooperation and struggle belong to the real sphere, while rivalry to the regulatory sphere. According to the author, actual social life is thus a synthesis of struggle and cooperation in different fields and, to a different extent, defined by rivalry (Sułek, 2010, p. 70). All three differ in variables and, therefore, different performance measures (Table 1).

Cooperation is a positive-sum game in which all participants benefit. These benefits can be tangible (material, monetary) and/or intangible (expressed in qualitative terms, e.g. trust, commitment, reciprocity, or knowledge and experience). The opposite of cooperation

<sup>4</sup> Despite the significant similarity between the two, there is a semantic difference. It is indicated that collaboration is a broader concept than cooperation, referring to long-term activities involving the implementation of a programme rather than a project (Kozuch, 2021). Both collaboration and cooperation imply a permanent interpenetration of the activities of different people and institutions, the creation of different types of dependencies and links between individuals and groups pursuing common goals (Kozuch, 2021).

**Table 1. Three systems of action – three types of human relationships**

| Cooperation                             | Struggle                                 | Rivalry                                       |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Theory of cooperation                   | Theory of struggle                       | Theory of regulation                          |
| Economics – rational choice theory      | Art of war                               | Learning politics                             |
| Logic of cooperation                    | Logic of struggle                        | Logic of rivalry                              |
| Positive-sum game                       | Negative-sum game                        | Zero-sum game                                 |
| Truth                                   | Deception                                | Hypocrisy (duplicity)                         |
| Maximising outputs or minimising inputs | Maximising outputs and minimising inputs | Maximising sociological power (power balance) |
| Decreasing marginal utility of inputs   | Growing marginal utility of inputs       | Constant marginal utility, inputs = outputs   |
| No polarity                             | Unipolarity                              | Bipolarity                                    |

Source: author's own elaboration based on Sulek (2010).

is a struggle – no one benefits from it (negative sum), although it is usually assumed that one side wins and the other loses. A case in point is warfare, where losses may include people, territory, assets, spheres of influence, image, position, prestige, etc. Rivalry, on the other hand, is a form of regulation that involves establishing a balance between struggle and cooperation. It represents a zero-sum game, meaning that one side's gain (win) is another side's loss (loss) of equal magnitude.

What relevance does this knowledge have for learning and teaching strategies? Through collaboration, barriers, differences, and resources can be more effectively identified and combined to develop effective action schemes. Group members should be taught that collaboration is the right way to perceive, think, and feel when problems of external adaptation or internal integration arise. On the other hand, collaborative learning is a technique that weakens resistance in the learning process.

**Figure 2. Collaborative Learning**



Source: author's own elaboration..

### **Conclusion**

Today's labour market is highly dynamic. The more variables emerge in a short period of time, the more important a flexible attitude and the ability to learn from different sources, i.e. to build from a pool of existing resources, become in terms of professional autonomy. Education is more effective when it is based on collaboration between labour market representatives and the education system, as well as on mutual openness, trust, and a willingness to share ideas.

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# Evolution of the Practical Profile of Studies in Higher Vocational Training in Poland



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**D**ividing higher education into vocational and academic is not a new approach.

The first forms of education for the needs of industry and business appeared already in the 19th century, with the emergence of technical universities (Stec, 2013). The contemporary regulations concerning various forms of university education were developed with the massification of education after 1989, and then in connection with adaptation to Western trends, e.g., as part of participation in the Bologna Process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area. The essence of the Polish variant of practical higher education is that it does not relate directly to the needs of a particular profession, but is largely based on education with the participation of partners from the economic environment.

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### *The History of the Practical Profile in Poland*

In Polish higher education, the Bologna system was implemented under the Act of 27 July 2005 – Law on Higher Education. Study profiles or diverse education methods were not taken into account, even though the introduced definitions of first-cycle and second-cycle studies clearly indicated the link between education programmes and professions, e.g. Article 2(1):

- 7) *first-cycle studies shall mean undergraduate or engineering studies, enabling the acquisition of knowledge and skills in a specific field of education, preparing for work in a specific profession, ending with a bachelor's or engineer's degree;*
- 8) *second-cycle studies shall mean master's degree studies enabling obtaining specialised knowledge in a specific field of education, preparing for creative work in a specific profession, ending with a master's degree or an equivalent title.*

*(The Act of 27 July 2005 – Law on Higher Education)*

Long-cycle master's degree programme was defined similarly.

The main requirement for education was to meet the standards set by the Minister (Articles 9–10). If professional internship was included in the programme, studies could last longer than standard (Article 166).

As a result of the 2011 reform, a qualification framework for higher education was introduced into the system, the definition of studies was changed, and, above all, the curricular autonomy of universities was expanded, abolishing most education standards (Act of 18 March 2011 on amending the Law on Higher Education, the Act on Academic Degrees and Academic Title and Degrees and Title in Art and on amending certain other acts). The document also included a division into practical and general academic studies and a definition of the education profile:

- 7) first-cycle studies shall mean a form of education for which candidates with a secondary school leaving certificate are admitted, ending with first-cycle qualifications;*
- 8) second-cycle studies shall mean a form of education for which candidates with at least first-cycle qualifications are admitted, ending with second-cycle qualifications;*
- 9) long-cycle master's degree studies shall mean a form of education for which candidates with a secondary school leaving certificate are admitted, ending with second-cycle qualifications; [...]*
- 18e) educational profile shall mean a practical profile, including a module of classes to acquire practical skills by the student, or a general academic profile, including a module of classes to acquire in-depth theoretical skills by the student [...]*

*(Act of 18 March 2011 on amending the Law on Higher Education,  
the Act on Academic Degrees and Academic Title  
and Degrees and Title in Art and on amending certain other acts)*

Thus, the term "vocational studies" was abandoned, which was previously used to refer to some first-cycle studies, even though in practice the studies did not have to be related to preparation for a specific profession. At the same time, many professions required master's degree level education.

The introduction of study profiles was intended to distinguish not so much the final effect of education, but the methods of achieving it. The Act retained the principle of minimum staffing, but in the case of first-cycle studies with a practical profile, the "2 for 1" principle was introduced. According to the principle, in place of one independent scientist (professor or habilitated doctor), two people with a doctoral degree could be employed, and in place of a person with a doctoral degree – two persons with a master's degree and significant professional experience outside the university in a field related to the field of study could be employed. The number of such

employees could not exceed half of the number of persons included in the minimum staffing (Article 9a). It is worth noting that the regulations do not specify the extent of professional internships for any of the study profiles. It is only indicated that the internships are included in the study period.

Another amendment to the regulations, in 2014, clarified the definitions of study profiles (amendment to Article 2(1):

*18ea) practical profile shall mean a profile of the educational programme including modules of classes to acquire practical skills and social competence by a student, implemented with the assumption that more than half of the study programme specified in the ECTS credits includes practical classes to shape such skills and competence, including skills obtained during workshop classes run by those with professional experience gained outside the university;*

*18eb) general academic profile shall mean a profile of the educational programme including modules of classes related to scientific research conducted at the university, implemented on the assumption that more than half of the study programme specified in the ECTS credits includes classes to acquire in-depth knowledge by a student.*

*(Act of 11 July 2014 on amending the Law on Higher Education and certain other acts)*

In the case of the practical profile in first-cycle studies, a requirement of minimum working time for practitioners who were part of the minimum staffing was introduced. They could be included if employed at least on a quarter-time basis. At the same time, for second-cycle studies, practitioners were permitted to be included in the minimum staffing in the "2 for 1" formula (change in Article (9a). This was related to the increasingly frequent launch of master's studies at vocational universities. A minimum internship period of three months was also introduced for studies with a practical profile (new wording of Article 11(9).

Moreover, in 2014, the higher education system introduced two new solutions combining studies and internship: dual studies and confirmation of learning outcomes obtained outside the university. In the case of dual studies, it was generally stated that (Article 11(9):

*[the basic organisational unit of a university] could organise education alternately in the form of classes at the university and work placements at the employer, taking into account the implementation of all learning outcomes provided for in the curriculum for that field, level and profile of education.*

*(Act of 11 July 2014 on amending the Law on Higher Education and certain other acts)*

The amendment also introduced the possibility of confirming learning outcomes obtained outside the higher education system (Articles 170e–170g), but only at the stage of recruiting individuals with professional experience. Universities were obliged to adopt appropriate regulations, and the procedure was limited to fields of study positively assessed by the Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA) or – when no such assessment was performed – to units with the right to award doctoral degrees. Universities charged a fee for that procedure, and the candidate could gain up to 50% of the ECTS credits assigned to a given curriculum. At the same time, by confirming the results, it was possible to recruit up to 20% of students per year.

Sadly, that procedure turned out to be unattractive from the very beginning, especially for universities. On the one hand, it was quite a challenge to match achievements gained outside the higher education system to specific learning outcomes in the course modules; on the other hand, it was complicated to evaluate and organise the procedure. The possibility of confirming learning outcomes has been the subject of many pilot and implementation projects (see Lewicki, 2016).

It is worth noting that different descriptors of learning outcomes were adopted for both profiles in individual areas and disciplines of education, which further complicated the system (see Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 2 November 2011 on National Qualifications Framework for higher education).

**Table 1. Comparison of Studies With Different Profiles**

|                 | Practical profile                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | General academic profile                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Characteristics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Increased emphasis on practical skills and social competence sought by employers.</li> <li>→ More than half of the study programme (in ECTS credits) includes practical classes (e.g. workshops) or classes conducted by individuals with professional experience gained outside the university.</li> <li>→ The programme includes at least three months of work placements.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Increased emphasis on scientific research.</li> <li>→ More than half of the study programme (in ECTS credits) includes classes to acquire in-depth knowledge.</li> <li>→ Class modules are related to scientific research conducted in the units.</li> </ul>                                                                                                              |
| Qualifications  | <p>Granted in basic university units, regardless of whether they can award doctoral titles or not.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Granted in basic organisational units which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ are authorised to award a doctoral title in the area of education and the field to which the major is assigned, or</li> <li>→ received a positive programme assessment issued by the Polish Accreditation Committee and will begin conducting scientific research and ensure appropriate minimum staffing.</li> </ul> |

Source: Antosz (2015).



*During the period of introducing legal changes, the national qualifications framework for higher education and the implementation of study profiling, the new regulations were intended to increase employers' involvement in the education process and better prepare graduates for the needs of the labour market.*

During the period of introducing legal changes, the national qualifications framework for higher education and the implementation of study profiling, the new regulations were intended to increase employers' involvement in the education process and better prepare graduates for the needs of the labour market. It was pointed out that before the changes, approximately 2/3 of full-time students completed work placements (although to a different extent). Patrycja Antosz (2015) assumed that the regulations would strengthen the division between public and private universities, most of which had an occupational profile. Thus, she pointed to the lack of a mechanism for ensuring the quality of mandatory work placements in practical fields of study. Long-term work placements, which are good preparation for achieving the expected educational outcomes, require cooperation with employers ready to accept students and, above all, provide employment to graduates.

The division into two study profiles was retained in the new Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education, which significantly influenced the reorganisation of the higher education system in Poland.

### ***Practical Profile against the Background of International Trends***

Polish studies with a practical profile are part of the broad and diverse trend of higher vocational training in most European countries. According to The European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) – an organisation associating institutions dealing with higher vocational education – the basic problem is the lack of an international definition of professional higher education. In Poland, additional difficulties are caused by the lack of accurate equivalents of the English terms – professional higher education and vocational higher education.

In practice, vocational higher education can be provided by both academic and vocational universities. EURASHE (n.d.) notes that traditional universities have for centuries been providing practical education for specific professions, such as doctors or lawyers.

For the above reasons, various aspects of vocational education<sup>1</sup> help in defining that concept, e.g.:

- providing students with the knowledge, skills and competence necessary to take up work
- in a specific profession or industry,
- cooperation with employers (designing programmes, traineeships and work placements), emphasis on practical skills and experience that can be applied in professional work,
- practicality of education, flexibility of education.

### *Regulations concerning the practical profile*

The Law on Higher Education of 2018 introduced significant changes to the system. First of all, the power to conduct studies was granted entirely to universities, abolishing the institution of basic organisational units (the internal organisation of universities was left to be regulated at the level of statutes). Study profiles were defined quite simply (Article 64(2)(1–2)):

The following profiles of studies are conducted:

- 1) *practical profile, where more than half of the ECTS credits are allocated to classes that develop practical skills,*
- 2) *general academic profile, where more than half of the ECTS credits are allocated to classes related to the scientific activity of the university.*

*(Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education)*

At the same time, the required scope of work placements for first-cycle studies was increased to six months (in the case of master's studies, three months were left; Article 67(5)). Due to the abolition of staffing limits in practical studies, a requirement was adopted that at least 50% of classes be conducted by academic teachers employed at the university as their primary place of work, and in the case of general academic studies – at least 75% (Article

<sup>1</sup> EURASHE has devoted entire projects on work placements to individual aspects, e.g. "Apprentice track" and "Learn-to-work".

73(2)). In turn, education conducted with the participation of the employer was defined as dual studies with a practical profile (Article 62).

At this point, it is worth noting that the legislator, by way of regulation, only clarified the issue of the relationship between the general academic profile and research – this was determined by the participation of students in classes preparing them for scientific activities or participation in such activities (Notice of the Minister of Education and Science of 18 March 2021 regarding the announcement of the uniform text of the regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education on studies). The rules for conducting work placements or dual studies were not precisely defined. A few years after entering into force of these regulations, the Polish Accreditation Committee issued its own interpretation.

As part of the 2018 reform, the characteristics of educational outcomes were also changed, which were called learning outcomes. In this way, the differentiation of effects acquired within and outside universities was eliminated. The system was significantly simplified by standardising descriptions of knowledge areas and profiles (see Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 14 November 2018 on the second-cycle characteristics of learning outcomes for the qualification at levels 6–8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework).

Due to the linking of the right to conduct studies with, e.g. a scientific category in the leading discipline for a given field of study, universities that did have a scientific category (or with category C) could only apply to conduct practical studies (see Article 53(4)). On the Rad-On website (n.d.), which publishes data on higher education and science in Poland, it is stated that at the end of 2021:

- in academic universities, 78.5% of fields of study had a general academic profile (4,404 fields of study), and 21.5 % – a practical profile (1,203),
- in vocational universities, the corresponding figures were 4.8% (86) and 95.2% (1,693).

In connection with the evaluation of scientific activities in 2023, these proportions may turn out to be different, as some vocational universities transformed into academic universities and many academic universities obtained higher scientific categories in new disciplines.

### *Case Law relating to the Practical Profile*

The position of the Polish Accreditation Committee interpreting these provisions are available on the website of the institution<sup>2</sup>. They do not constitute law, but are only "intended to unify the views of the members and experts of the Commission on issues of understanding the law in cases causing major discrepancies in interpretation".

Issues related to the practical profile are addressed in:

- Interpretive position No. 3/2020 of the PKA Presidium of 21 May 2020 on the scope of work placements and,
- Interpretive position No. 4/2020 of the PKA Presidium of 2 July 2020 on the achievement and verification of learning outcomes assigned to work placements.

No position has been issued directly regarding study profiles; however, PKA differentiates the criteria for assessing study programmes in individual profiles. The differences in the criteria are not major, mainly emphasising the importance of work placements and closer cooperation of universities with the socio-economic environment in the practical profile. Table 2 presents the differences in the Commission's criterion 2 (Implementation of the study programme: curriculum content, schedule for the implementation of the study programme and the forms and organisation of classes, teaching methods, work placements, organisation of the teaching and learning process).

<sup>2</sup> See: [www.pka.edu.pl/baza-orzecznictwa-pka](http://www.pka.edu.pl/baza-orzecznictwa-pka)

**Table 2. Differences in Quality Standards for Individual Profiles of PKA  
Criterion 2**

| Criterion                      | Practical profile                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | General academic profile                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Education quality standard 2   | The programme content is consistent with the learning outcomes. It takes into account current knowledge and its applications in the discipline or disciplines to which the course is assigned, standards and principles, as well as the current state of practice in the areas of professional/business activity and the vocational labour market relevant to the course.                     | The programme content is consistent with the learning outcomes and, in particular, takes into account the current state of knowledge and research methodology in the discipline or disciplines to which the programme is assigned, as well as the results of the academic activity of the higher education institution in that discipline or disciplines.                                                                        |
| Education quality standard 2.3 | The teaching methods are student-centred, motivate students to actively participate in the teaching and learning process, and enable students to achieve learning outcomes, including, in particular, preparation for professional activities in the vocational labour market appropriate to the course.                                                                                      | The teaching methods are student-centred, motivate students to actively participate in the teaching and learning process, and enable students to achieve learning outcomes, including, in particular, preparation for or participation in scientific activity.                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Education quality standard 2.4 | The work placement programme, the organisation and supervision of the work placements, the choice of providers and the environment in which they take place, including infrastructure, and the competence of supervisors ensure that the work placements are carried out properly and that students achieve the learning outcomes, in particular, those related to their vocational training. | If work placements are included in the study programme, their programme, organisation and supervision, the selection of the providers and the environment in which they take place, including infrastructure, and the competence of the supervisors ensure that the placements are carried out properly and that students achieve the learning outcomes, in particular, those related to the acquisition of research competence. |

Source: Polish Accreditation Committee (2018).

The practical profile of the degree programme is conducive to learning tailored to the needs of the socio-economic environment, thus maximising the employability of graduates. The mechanism designed to serve this purpose is work placements. PKA covered the key issues relating to work placements in the aforementioned Position 4:

*The law [...] constitutes the institution of work placements as a typical element of the study programme, either mandatory or optional. [...] the study programme with a practical profile shall provide for work placements of at least:*

- 6 months, in the case of first-cycle and long-cycle master's programmes [in line with Position 3: at least 720 clock hours – from 24 to 28.8 ECTS credits].*
- 3 months, in the case of second-cycle programmes [in line with Position 3: at least 360 clock hours – from 12 to 14.4 ECTS credits].*

*There is no statutory definition of work placement. [...] [the provisions] merely indicate that the study programme determines the length, principles and form of work placements and the number of ECTS credits to be obtained by the student as part of those placements.*

*[...] As work placements are activities, learning outcomes must be assigned to them, and thus there must be ways of reviewing and assessing these outcomes. [...]*

*[These processes] should take place in a manner typical of all courses, i.e. based on the student's participation in the activities included in the programme and study plans, organised by the university, and on the review of the student's efforts by the instructor, during and after the course.*

*(Polish Accreditation Committee, 2020b)*

In addition, the Committee pointed out that work placement is not strictly defined in higher education legislation. However, it can be assumed that it consists of the student's participation in activities planned by the socio-economic environment. These activities are integrated into a framework typical of academic education (e.g. syllabuses, learning outcomes and their review).

In the case of practical profiles, placements form a significant part of the study programme. For example, a six-month placement during a first-cycle programme amounts to almost 30 credits, or about 1/6 of the study programme, which should include achieving 180 ECTS credits. For the second-cycle programme, the share of placements is similar, with a minimum of 90 ECT credits.

### Conclusions

Work placements carried out as part of a practical profile may take various forms.

Students may be assigned simple tasks or involved in broader processes implemented in organisations. Some of these activities require additional

qualifications, so the work placements may result in obtaining

a professional certificate. A well-implemented practical profile

should give students such opportunities, especially when

a given field of education includes additional certifications.

The value of a graduate who presents an additional

vocational certificate to the employer, in addition

to a diploma confirming the completion of a particular

training programme, will be greater compared to that

of a higher education institution graduate.



*A well-implemented practical profile should give students such opportunities, especially when a given field of education includes additional certifications.*

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Since 2021, the National Team of Experts for Vocational Education and Training (EVET) has operated within the Foundation for the Development of the Education System. The team comprises educators, examiners, officials, researchers and academics closely associated with various fields of vocational training at both secondary and higher education levels. Its mission is to enhance the quality of VET by supporting sectoral vocational schools and technical secondary schools in strengthening their cooperation with employers. The experts provide substantive advice to Erasmus+ beneficiaries and to entities active within the Polish VET system. In cooperation with the Polish National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme and the European Solidarity Corps, they develop information materials that can be downloaded free of charge from the official website. Continuing the series, this publication presents a selection of articles prepared by the EVET Team of Experts between 2022 and 2023.

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