



Effective Education for Employment: Warsaw, Poland Interview Series



Dr Malgorzata Bonikowska

Dr Bonikowska juggles a busy career as Advisor to the Centre for Human Resources Development, running a publishing and consulting company and continuing her academic career as a researcher, lecturer, tutor and education project manager. She has a wealth of international experience and has worked for the Prime Minister's Office and a number of Government departments in Poland.

In this interview Dr Bonikowska outlines the critical challenges facing the Polish education system in the 21st Century; her views are summarised below:

Key Points

- Poland is currently the biggest recipient of the European Social Fund (ESF), with a considerable part of the budget for subsidising training and post-graduate studies.
- Whilst positive for the country in many ways, European subsidies for education have created a distortion of the educational services market in Poland.
- There is insufficient dialogue between Ministries on how to use ESF funds for the education of Polish citizens with a clear focus on employment opportunities.

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- A Master's degree requires extra years to learn knowledge which is not necessarily of much use in a work environment.
- The private sector contributes significantly to information technology programs for schools and teachers.
- Educational and professional success in Poland is affected by:

Life-long learning: *“We have to understand that life-long education is a permanent thing in our lives.”*

The ability to select and filter knowledge: *“We live in a world in which we are flooded by information and knowledge from numerous sources.”*

The capacity to multitask: *“Contemporary people are quick and impatient. They are bored by linearity and repeatability.”*

Interview Summary

There is a great need to develop education policy away from the traditional “sectoral” way of Government in Poland:

“Ministries are their own kingdoms. There are no structures to facilitate planning and implementation of projects shared by numerous ministries. There is an exchange of information, but nothing more.”

There are poor links between the university education system and job opportunities:

“Many people in Poland study non-business related fields, such as languages. Not all of them plan

to be translators or literature experts... and many of them join the business sector. However, the curriculum does not prepare them for this.”

Insufficient involvement of professional practitioners in teaching has a profound effect on the quality of the educational experience as perceived by learners.

“After the course is over you have to take what you know and put it into practice... If you don't know how (how to do this), it is as if you learned a language but not the ability to speak it.”

“Regardless of the field of studies, the need for a global mindset in higher education is rarely recognised.”

The right balance between innovative and classical approaches to teaching requires a conceptual shift:

“Education has to become a complex offer that empowers students to continuously discover and learn by themselves.”

The Ministry of National Education is urging teachers to incorporate ICT and multimedia into teaching:

“...This (issue) widens the gap between teachers and students who perfectly understand new technologies and Internet resources. Teachers don't have this knowledge and lose authority.”