



## Effective Education for Employment



*“As human beings we like stability, but the only thing that is stable now is permanent change.”*  
Anna Świebocka-Nerkowska

# Polish Interview Series and Workshop

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Poland is the only EU country that avoided recession in 2009; a remarkable testament to the success of the country’s transition to a largely market-driven economy. Education is recognised globally as key to economic success, and Poland is no exception.

As part of the ongoing international *Effective Education for Employment* project, Edexcel International and Pearson Education commissioned qualitative research into Poland’s education system with a view to better understanding key issues facing employers, educators and learners.

This research consisted of a workshop and interview series in Warsaw with key stakeholders from industry, education and Government, and the findings outlined in this report testify to the importance of education reform to continued economic growth.

# Introduction

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

Dr Małgorzata Bonikowska



*“Employers should be involved in shaping curricula for vocational schools and universities and participate in teaching activities.”*

Witold Wozniak

Participants in the Effective Education for Employment research are ultimately charged with understanding the emerging integrated global marketplace and developing strategies to ensure future employees are suitably equipped to thrive in this increasingly complex world. They express concern that the gap between employment and education is yet to be fully understood and addressed, with an accompanying conviction that employers and industry need a more significant role in communicating their skills requirements to the education sector if Poland is to continue on its upwards trajectory.

Our work has identified an urgent need for developing a shared, long-term vision for education in Poland, which would serve as the catalyst for the modernisation of teaching and learning techniques. Additionally, *The National Centre for the Support of Vocational and Continuing Education* is also concerned that many continue to see vocational education as a negative choice alongside academic study; a problematic situation as more high quality vocational training and education is clearly needed in Poland. This interview series includes practical examples of how industry is helping to develop an innovative education sector in Poland, as well as the thoughts of participants on how these efforts can be built upon.

The passion and vision of those we have spoken to is testament to the progress made by numerous stakeholders towards achieving key advances such as experiential teaching techniques that foster skills of analytical thinking and problem though the use of simulations and games; moving from traditional to multimedia approaches that interactive ways, positioning the teacher as the mentor and guide, not the source of knowledge.

Our findings highlight that there is much work to do, and that a considerable effort underway to ensure that 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and competencies are embedded into the learning experience of each and every child in Poland. Those we spoke to – as with their counterparts around the world – are conscious of the distance between the needs of the market and current education provision, and stress the importance of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, knowledge and behaviours which are needed more and more in the Polish economy.

# Key findings



- There are concerns that the traditional education system is not designed to respond to the needs of the Polish marketplace. Groups such as PARP and CRZL are developing and implementing a strategy to make necessary changes.
- Participants questioned whether there is too much focus on the acquisition of knowledge in the Polish education system and a lack of focus given to obtaining skills and competencies required by employers. Employers need to be working more closely with policy makers and educators on this issue.
- There are a growing number of excellent examples of private sector investment in, and public-private partnerships around, education design and delivery in Poland. *Business Process Outsourcing* projects and *Business Councils* have sprung up, and informal discussions are taking place between educational institutions and significant regional employers.
- European subsidies for education subsidising training and post-graduate studies – while positive in many ways – have created a distortion of the educational services market in Poland. Prior to this huge injection of funding, competition within Poland’s education sector was driven by quality rather than price. Today, the situation is reversed.
- There are concerns over a lack of a cross-ministerial shared vision for education in Poland brought about by a lack of structures between ministries to facilitate communication and develop shared goals.
- There is a pressing need to challenge public perception of the value of vocational education. *KOWEZiU* is concerned that vocational routes to employment have a stigma of being a ‘negative

choice’ attached to them, an option students choose when they think they are unable to successfully complete a more academic education.

- Many stakeholders in Poland are committed to developing a more inclusive vocational education system that will offer opportunities around validation of informal learning and won’t exclude those who lack the formal education associated with specific competencies.
- There are a number of existing barriers to attracting high quality teacher trainees in Poland. Chief among these are concerns over salary levels and the status of the teaching profession. In spite of these barriers, thousands of existing teachers are proactive in seeking out ways of improving their own teaching, and are willing to develop new skills.

*“High-performing employees typically have a number of features in common.”*

Witold Wozniak

- National bodies such as the Centre for Education Development are developing and implementing programs that will incorporate modern teaching methods, including mentor and moderator roles into the process of education.
- The ‘*Scholaris*’ portal created by the *Ministry of National Education* is an excellent example of growing number of initiative for schools that provide teachers with educational content, supporting new ways of teaching based on multimedia methods.

# Conference Workshop

The Effective Education for Employment conference in Warsaw brought together high-level individuals from industry, human resources and the education sector, including bodies involved in the development of Polish educational strategy and policy, to discuss issues and priorities around the delivery of education for employment in Poland.

During the lively discussion participants shared findings from research into vocational education in Poland, outlining the achievements and remaining challenges for educational reform in Poland.

Looking to the future, they outlined a vision for 'education portfolios' that would provide continuity between formal and workforce education; an innovation that could make a significant contribution towards the important goal of lifelong learning.

There was consensus that Poland's education system would be greatly enhanced by blended learning opportunities and that policy makers, teachers and parents have to understand how factors including technology and globalisation are influencing education design and delivery.

## Participants agreed on two key statements during the session

- Education design must be driven by and react quickly to the needs of industry
- Advanced techniques such as blended learning, must drive the future of education delivery in Poland.

## Key Issues Raised

- Participants explained that comprehensive visions for the future of education in Poland are reaching conflicting conclusions.
- Participants expressed concerns that the ranking system for universities in Warsaw very weakly reflects the success of graduates on the labour market upon leaving higher education.
- Parents in Poland always want to send their children to the "best" primary, secondary, university based on these rankings.
- With so many students leaving the education system with a degree since the transition period, participants feel higher education qualifications have become devalued for the individual.
- Today's Generation "Y" is made up of "digital natives", children who don't react to teaching through blackboards.

## The Need for Employability Skills

- The number of graduates in Poland has increased rapidly in recent years. There is a corresponding increase in competition for places at the highest rated universities.
- Participants stated that whilst higher education qualifications have become devalued for the individual, a degree in many cases is a must have, basic requirement for many employers.
- One participant described academic qualifications as "additional" to employability skills.

## Recommendations from the Workshop

- Clearly define the economic and social objectives of education.
- Define and continuously refine the learning outcomes including the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and qualities.
- Develop a common language for describing, assessing and certifying soft/employability skills that will be recognised by all employers within specific industry sectors.
- Develop 'virtual classrooms' and exploit technology/digital platforms to provide compelling blended learning opportunities to students.
- Incorporate more simulation techniques into the classroom to bring learning closer to the real world.