



Effective  
Education for  
Employment:  
Warsaw,  
Poland  
Interview  
Series



## Sylwia Waśniewska

In her role as Deputy Director of Economic Development Department, Ministry of Economy, Sylwia Waśniewska is charged with the preparation and monitoring of medium-term strategies and programs of economic development in the fields of competition, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

In this interview Mrs Waśniewska explains her passion for promoting education for innovation and creativity.

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### Key Findings

- A yearning to learn and independent thinking are key qualities employees need to succeed in the modern workplace.
- Poland's policy makers are tackling some key challenges in their attempt to design a 21<sup>st</sup> century education system.
- An emphasis on abstract knowledge persists throughout the Polish education system.
- Structural links between what is taught and what the economy needs are not yet effective enough in Poland.
- There is an important socio-political context to consider when looking at the development of creative and innovative capacities in Poland.

*"I love people who come to me and say 'I can see a way that we can do things differently'."*

*"I prefer a person who doesn't know but wants to learn, than a person who knows but doesn't want to learn."*



**The key qualities employees need to succeed in the modern workplace:**

*The basic thing is intelligence, but what is really important is readiness and an enthusiasm to learn. I prefer a person who doesn't know but wants to learn, than a person who knows but doesn't want to learn.*

**An ability to think independently is crucial:**

*I want them (my staff) to see the big picture, be able to operate on their own and not simply want to be directed. They need to think one, two, three steps ahead – then they can come up with new ideas.*

**There is a socio political context to nurturing creativity and innovation in Poland:**

*During the Communist era, nobody was expected to think innovatively – independent thinking was considered ideologically dangerous.*

**Critical and creative thinking processes need more attention in education:**

*At school, nobody expected me to think innovatively. But as soon as I started work, I was expected and incentivised to be innovative - there were clear career benefits for being so.*

**School curriculums should avoid being overly theoretical and have as practical a focus as possible:**

*If you are just taught to remember facts, with no link to the real world, you don't learn -you forget. This is lost knowledge.*

**There is a new attitude to educational research emerging in Poland:**

*Structural links between what we teach (at higher level) and what the economy needs are not effective enough. We are working on changing this, but it may take 10 years or more to achieve.*

**Parents have a responsibility for their child's education:**

*We have many good teachers in Poland but effective education requires parents taking a bigger role in their children's education, so I should assume that I need to nurture and protect the innovative potential of my children.*

*"If you are just taught to remember facts, with no link to the real world, you don't learn – you forget."*

**The ideal educational experience would look like this:**

- **Shorter lessons:** *All the research shows that young children can only focus for a short period of time... perhaps 15 or a maximum of 30 minutes...*
- **Relate knowledge to the real world and avoid too much detail:** *I'm not sure little children need to learn the structure of DNA... They may need to start early if they want to go to medical school, but early specialisation can be difficult.*
- **Improve the status and quality of teaching:** *We need to choose the best people to become teachers, but how can you do that with the low salaries teachers are paid?*
- **Delivering a more personalised experience will unlock the potential of more children:** *I wouldn't say the education system got the best of me. We need small classes, individual treatment... and a lot of sports! This would be pretty close to ideal for me.*