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CORRELATION BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN CREATING COMPETENT GRADUATES AS AN ELEMENT OF REGION DEVELOPMENT

4.1 INTRODUCTION

According to recent surveys, level of vocational education is very low – the main reason is detachment of vocational education system from professional market (employers and craftsmanship organizations) and the education system which does not allow to acquire necessary skills (education time, professional training, multi-job groups, adaptation of educational offer to the needs of a local professional market, school financing system have the biggest influence on current situation). That is why most surveyed employers is convinced that when employing a vocational school graduate they will be forced to carry the burden of preparing the future employee for his professional career almost from scratch. Because of that, many companies resign from accepting students as apprentices which has further negative consequences – they also abandon their membership in craftsmanship organizations (guilds). They are not interested in profits from the membership (e.g. legal assistance, accounting, training etc.) and they perceive those organizations only as cost generating (mandatory membership fees are a huge cost for small manufacturers). As a result, craftsmanship organizations gather only those who, being idealists, are willing to educate new generations of craftsmen [11].

Employer trainings are not popular in small and private firms as they are perceived as additional costs not a long-term investment. That is caused by employers' apprehension about the lack their workers' loyalty after being sent for training. In the professional market such an employee becomes more competitive and he may change his company to one offering higher wages. There are not many company schools, apprenticeships are becoming a thing of the past. That is why students do not have contact with real work done in real life conditions not in school workshops. There used to be company schools and regular ones [11].

Growing importance of knowledge and the speed of changes in progress make employers training a necessity. Trainings improve qualifications, broaden knowledge, increase work efficiency, enable to receive certificates and open possibilities of promo-

tion. Thus it is not strange that we need to educate ourselves, our skills and abilities constantly [1].

4.2 SECONDARY EDUCATION REFORM

In order to enable employers to increase their qualifications and make them able to react quicker to professional market needs, secondary vocational education was reformed on 1 September 2012.

The secondary vocational system had been, up till then, considered to be ineffective, stretched over a long period of time and not fulfilling the needs of both potential employees and employers who found it hard to find qualified personnel in many sectors of the professional market. That situation would escalate with the future increase of population decline. It was necessary to alter the education system both for young people and adults in order to create more chances to adapt education in vocational institutions to the changing situation in the professional market. What was also crucial was a higher degree of employers involvement in creating more effective correlations between professional education and education provided by vocational schools [3].

4.3 STRUCTURE OF THE REFORMED VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

The new model of vocational and lifelong education, introduced on 1 September 2012, changed the education system structure. Young people will be educated on the secondary level (concerning professional education) in 3-year vocational schools, 4-year technical school or a school for the ones with secondary education degree.

Adults will be able to achieve their certificates only after specialized professional courses. They will still be able to improve their general education level in four types of schools:

- primary school for adults,
- middle school for adults,
- high school for adults,
- post-secondary school for adults.

Since 1 September 2011 the secondary education comprises:

- 3-year professional school with a professional certificate after final exams, it allows students to continue their education in the second year of high school for adults,
- 3-year high school – conditions unaltered,
- 4-year technical school – with a professional certificate after final exams and the “Matura” exam,
- post-secondary school – for people with secondary education degree, after final exams students receive a professional certificate,
- 3-year special school – conditions unaltered.

After graduating from the middle school students will have to opportunity to continue their education not only in a public or independent post-secondary schools

but also with an employer as part of professional training. According to the amendment, middle school graduates will also be able to continue their education by attending professional courses as stated in the Ministry of Education regulation from 16.07.2012 concerning cases when it is possible, for public and independent schools for adults, to accept 16 and 15-year-old students or cases when a middle school graduate may continue his/her education on professional qualification courses (Dz. U. z 2012 r., poz. 857). However it will not be possible to continue education during extracurricular activities which will not allow to take professional qualification exams [3].

4.4 PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION COURSE

The amendment to the education system made it possible to create additional extracurricular forms of education such as professional qualification courses. Those courses will be led on the basis of a given profession curriculum. Graduation from a course will enable students to take professional qualification exams (organized by provincial examination boards). Details for organization and conducting professional qualification courses are presented in the MoE regulation from 11.01.2012 concerning lifelong education in extracurricular forms (Dz. U. z 2012 r., poz. 186) which was introduced on 1.09.2012. Those courses may be conducted by:

- public schools with professional education in which they specialize in;
- independent schools, with entitlements of public schools, with professional education in which they specialize in;
- public and independent institutions of lifelong education, professional training institutions, vocational development institutions and training centers;
- professional market institutions mentioned in article 6 of the act from 20.04.2004 about promotion of education and professional market institutions with education-training activities (employment agencies, training institutions or public employment services);
- legal and natural persons conducting educational activities mentioned in article 83, act 2.

The new lifelong education form is to be a more effective and easier way, for adults, to deskill and obtain jobs currently required by the professional market. A larger number of institutions offering such an education form will be the chance to reach more people potentially interested in developing or gaining new skills.

The professional qualification course is one of extracurricular forms of lifelong education meant for adults interested in gaining and improving their general knowledge, skills and professional qualifications. For people under 18 years of age education is compulsory – after middle school – it is realized by attending public or independent post-secondary schools and also, according to particular regulations, by professional training with the employer. Exceptions when a middle school graduate can be educated during a professional qualification course are indicated by the regulation of the Ministry of Education.

A professional qualification course may be attended by a person who did not graduate from a middle school if he/she is at least 18 years old. Underage students may attend professional qualification courses if they graduated from a middle school and comply with requirements for realizing their education in this form [3].

Number of participants necessary to organize a professional qualification course is defined by a regulation concerning lifelong education in extracurricular forms. The regulation defines the minimum number of participants of professional qualification courses conducted by public schools, institutions and centers – i.e. 20 people. The number of students may be lower than 20 when approved by authorities. The regulation does not concern other subjects organizing professional qualification courses (e.g. independent schools and institutions) [3].

4.5 CLASSIFICATION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONS

Polish reform the vocational education system is presented in Figure 4.1. Professions mentioned in the classification of vocational education professions are qualifications of level 1, 2 and 3 described by symbols K1, K2, K3 respectively (Fig. 4.2). The classification includes 95 level 1 professions – taught mainly in basic vocational schools. Level 1 professions are also the ones taught in technical schools and post-secondary schools whose proper ministry is the ministry of health, ministry of social policy, ministry of transportation, ministry of marine economy.

Professions taught in technical schools are dominated by level two and three qualifications. Their base qualification is usually the one meant for professions taught in basic vocational schools which form a content-related and curricular framework for further, higher professional qualifications (characteristic for professions taught in technical schools) [3].

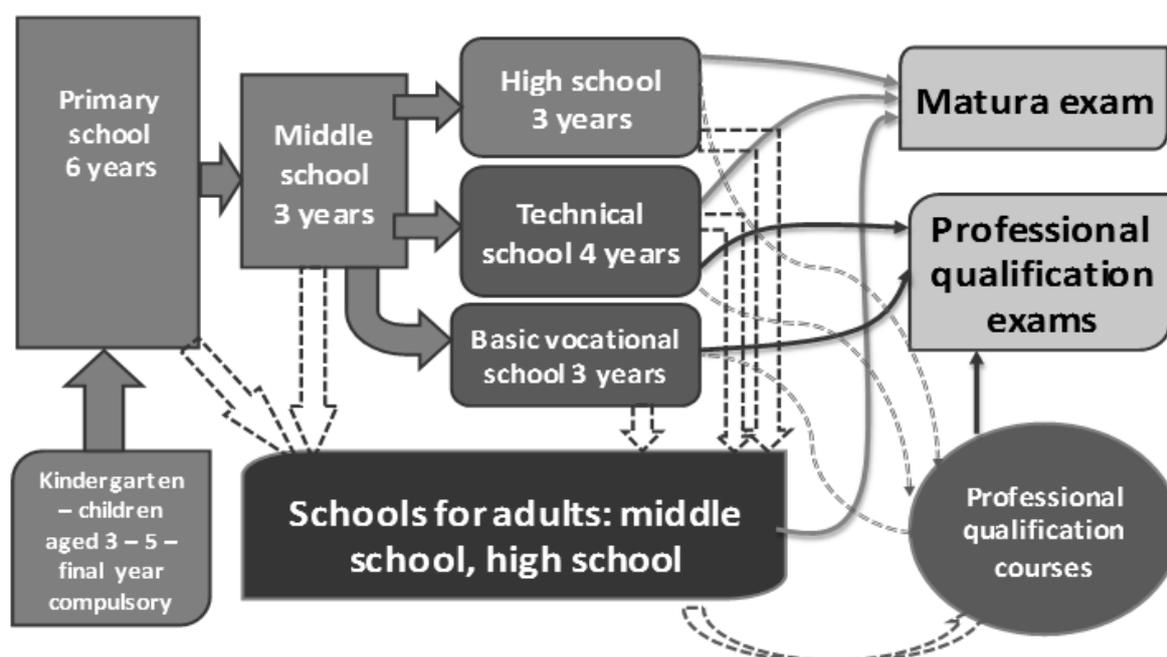


Fig. 4.1 Reform of the Polish vocational education system - Wrocław, 8 April 2011

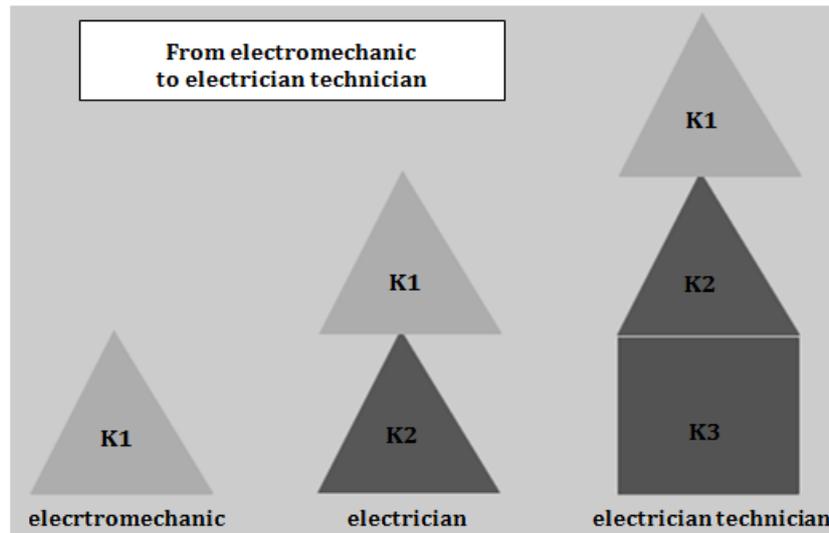


Fig. 4.2 Reform of the Polish vocational education system - Wrocław, 8 April 2011

4.6 FINANCING PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION COURSES

In case of schools and educational institutions run by local governments, costs are one of, not the only one, the basis for organizing courses. It is important to take care of potential students who are given a chance by this kind of vocational education to succeed on the professional market [10].

Financing PQCs (Professional Qualification Courses) in schools and institutions run by a county is its educational task (art. 5a, par 2b of the education system act from 19 August 2011).

Financial means for organizing professional qualification courses by public schools and institutions run by a local government and subsidizing public schools run by subjects which are not part of local governments and independent schools with public school entitlements are part of the education general subsidy. The amount of subsidy will be determined by a planned number of a course students presented in the Education Information System according to a status from 30 September in a year preceding the one which a subsidy is counted for.

Public post-secondary vocational schools and public institutions run by local governments may also organize PQCs by order of employers and county employment agencies. In other cases, according to art. 40 of act. 2b from 20.04.2004 concerning promotion of employment, professional market institutions (Dz. U. from 2008 nr 69, pos. 415, with later changes) a county prefect may commit organization of a professional training to an institution created and run by the prefect him/herself. In that case, sources for financing PQCs may come from the Labour Fund or programs financed by the EU.

Public schools organizing PQCs by a legal entity which is not a local government or by a natural person and independent schools with public school entitlements will be given a subsidy from a county budget for each student that passed a professional exam within a given qualification. The amount of a subsidy may not be lower than the amount for one student of a PQC in the part of the education subsidy for local governments [5].

Financing professional courses by other entities may only be realized by [8]:

- payments from course participants,
- payments from employers ordering such courses,
- financial means from the Labor Fund or the EU programs and funds.

On recent years, the accessibility of structural funds have allowed regional and local governments to get involved in the process of changes in vocational education more actively. Some voivodeship governments have taken a role of a coordinator for modernization of vocational education in their area [6].

4.7 PROPOSED ACTIONS SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE COOPERATION WITHIN THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION REFORM

Effective cooperation between vocational schools and businessmen is beneficial for employers, schools and students. Employers have a possibility of educating their future employees with expected skills, personal and social competence necessary to start work. Students may familiarize themselves with modern technology, gain practical skills to operate the latest equipment, they also have the opportunity to develop such skills as team work, stress and time management.

Contemporary surroundings are becoming a maze of networks and organizations are less able to participate alone in the competition, The need to act in face of changing demands of the market favors creating relations with surrounding entities which can decide companies' development of even survival [2].

Clusters

When speaking about rules of mediation and establishing cooperation between schools and businessmen it is important to mention industrial clusters. The concept of a cluster is becoming very popular as an effective form of cooperation and a platform facilitating interactions between entities creating it. Clusters are an elastic form of cooperation between 3 groups of entities: companies, educational institutions and research entities (science institutions, research institutions) and public authorities, thus they create possibilities for cooperation between education and the world of business.

The main characteristics of a cluster is its competition (competition as well as cooperation between entities, a strategy of mutual creation of values and competition with common goals and endeavors of a given sector, branch or region). The most important areas of a cluster activity around knowledge transfer are [6]:

- benchmarking groups (platforms for analyzing processes and practices employed by own company compared with practices employed by other companies, considered the best in an analyzed area, being a standard)
- research centers specializing in education, training and cooperation programs
- trade institutions (associations, organizations) with a goal to initialize and coordinate actions leading to improvement of particular areas within a cluster.

New educational clusters with connection to industrial ones may be a very interesting solution for the educational market. Zespół Szkół Zawodowych, Powiatowe Cen-

trum Kształcenia Ustawicznego and Centrum Kształcenia Ustawicznego in Wodzisław Śląski are an example of good cluster-based cooperation.

Financing according to a German model used in construction business

In countries like Germany and Austria, where the vocational system is mainly dual, training realized with an employer is very important. In companies, students gain professional experience and are prepared for future work. This connection is considered a benchmark all around Europe and is the key factor for Austria's success as an important education and industry center. It is worth to note that the unemployment level among young people in Austria is only 9% and is one of the lowest in Europe. What is important is the fact that in those countries it is the employers who take the financial burden of preparing young people for the professional market [6].

The construction business in Germany utilizes a fund created by all companies called SOKA-BAU. The fund, apart from its vacation compensatory branch (ULAK – *Urlaubs und Lohnausgleichskasse der Bauwirtschaft*) and additional retirement branch (*Zusatzversorgungskasse des Baugewerbes*) uses its sources for educating students in professions connected with the construction business. The compulsory deduction is 2% of a social fund of construction companies (those with at least 50% of their production/turn over in the sector). The fund finances educational centers (supra-regional institutions developing practical skills), livelihood of students in those centers, scholarships.

Training in a company

Training in a company allows students to familiarize themselves with modern management methods, work organization, utilization of modern technology. Teachers have an opportunity to update their theoretical and practical knowledge. Employers will expand school's learning materials by providing them with materials concerning introduced innovations and offered products. They will also make their products available to schools and practical education institutions to be used during classes [9].

Practical training and theoretical education will be more effective when teachers of theoretical subjects take part in the process of gaining knowledge from a company where their students improve their skills. A compliment for the gained knowledge would be a simultaneous cooperation between science centers, higher education institutions, teachers and gifted students. Introducing them to annals of a profession at universities it would be possible to organize regular meetings to broaden specialist knowledge. That is why teacher-university, teacher-employer relations should last for the duration of the education process (at least once per two weeks). At times of population decline, instead of taking popular and drastic steps like personnel reduction, it is possible to change that fact into an success engaging teachers into training on the basis of the abovementioned relations with a financial support of employment agencies. There are methods of improving teachers' and students' knowledge on the basis of short-term trainings from 1 day to 2 months. Short-term trainings not always reflect the characteristics of a position or its issues. They also leave many questions unanswered.

Time Bank

In order to compensate the financial costs the employers spend on graduates, it would be better to have a time bank rules. They would be based on a connection student – employer; employer- teacher; teacher – school; student- school.

A time bank is an informal self-help based institution, that can exchange unpaid service among its members. The contributors declare what kinds of service they can provide for the benefit of others and the coordinators head it (the service) up to those who need it, according to earlier requirement. The service provided for the benefit of the bank's customers is registered- the easiest clearing unit is an hour, regardless of the market value of the work done. Hours which were earned in such a way could be 'spent' on direct support given by the other member belonging to the system, offering us an interesting service [12].

Gaining the knowledge from people starting to retire

The workers who gained professional experience and knowledge thanks to employers and hard work, take them away at the point they retire. In this way the entrepreneur pays the costs related to introducing a new inexperienced employee. To regain some part of the invested money, for example, one year before the retirement an experienced jobholder may cooperate with the new one, in order to transfer his/her experience and knowledge. The motivation for the experienced worker could be the way of settling accounts – some parts of profits acquired by a trainee are cumulated on a special account and, under the condition a trainee passes the in-house exam, the money will go the retired (misappropriation of funds prevention). In case the intern fails, the money from the account goes to an outer company, to pay for the further schooling. The willingness to work as a retired person would result in greater commitment from both parts, because after some time another intern will have to be instructed.

Retrofitting workshops with new tech – didactic equipment

Changing technology, high costs of modernization, keeping tech-didactic base, the necessity of upgrading teachers' skills cause that vocational training needs greater amount of pecuniary than traditional education. Schools have no chances of vocational education in actual conditions, without a cooperation with employers. What is more, they cannot acquaint students with the latest and most expensive technologies. The cooperation between schools and employers, although better year by year (a lot of instances prove it), still faces a lot of barriers, even if it is advantageous to both parties. For schools, it gives possibilities to adapt the content of education to the employers' and labour market needs, better access to modern technique and technologies. For companies, it is a great opportunity to roll their products out and in further perspective, to recruit well qualified workers. The cooperation with educational environment, employers and social partners is essential prerequisite for achieving high results in vocational education [9]. In case when the occupation requires to be age-appropriate, simulators should be introduced in school workshops.

The internet edu- occupational platform

Great support for both: teachers and students, would be the access to sophisticated scientific and technological knowledge available on the company website. In this way they could get information they need in the exact occupation.

A good example could be the edu- occupational platform called 'foreman and the stuff zone' lead by Jastrzębska Spółka Węglowa S.A., (Jastrzebski Coal Company) which disposes extra resources (useful for those who accustom to mining trade), and free access to updated Polish Norms and parts of data used in a teaching process, without trespassing the companies/partners' business (Fig. 4.3).

Another example how to make use of e-learning technology is PCKU in Wodzisław Śląski. Through the introduction of e-learning classes, the traditional qualifying courses duration is shorter.

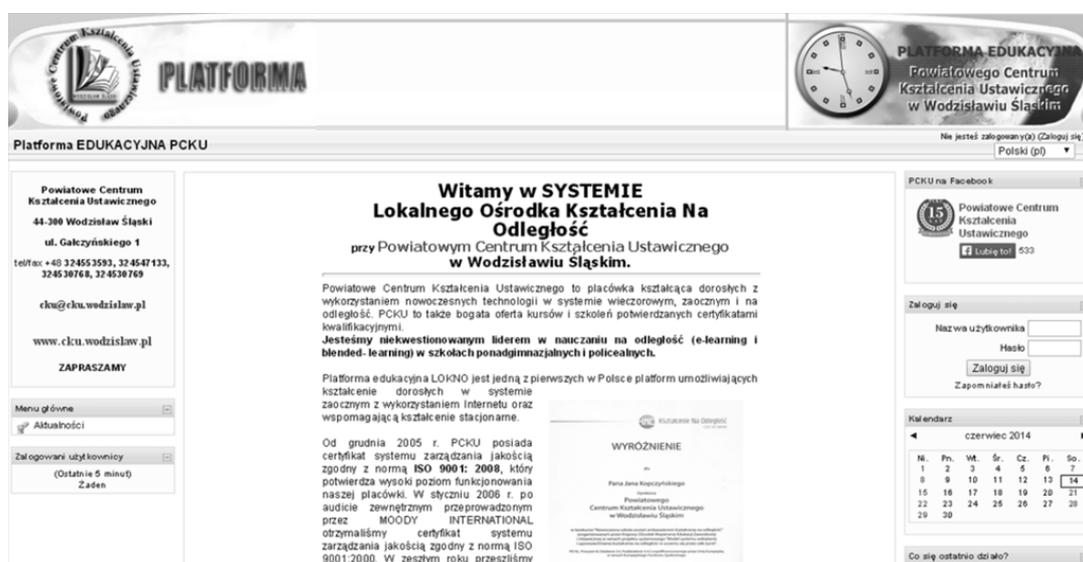


Fig. 4.3 View of educational platform PCKU in Wodzislaw Slaski

It is the National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education (pol. KOWEZiU) which is responsible for the idea of creating the professional edu – industrial cluster, based on an internet platform (Fig. 4.4 and 4.5).

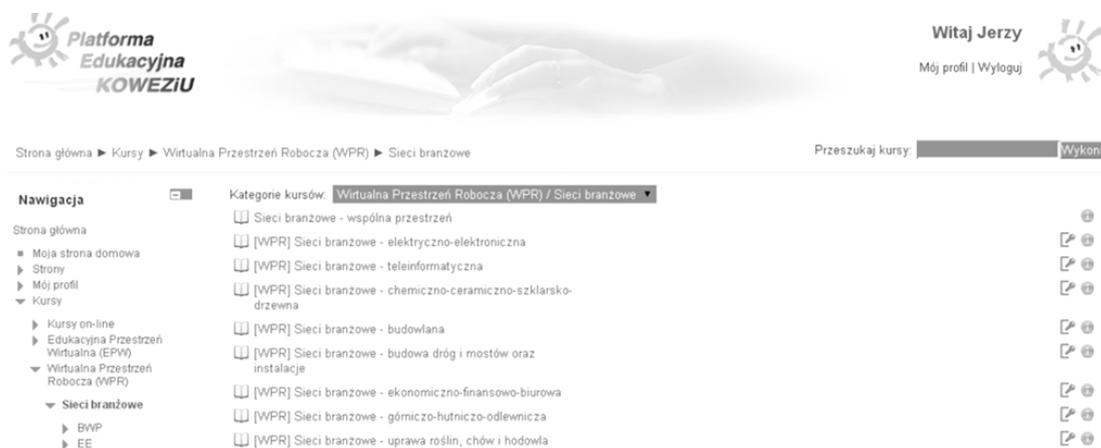


Fig. 4.4 View of branches forming the beginning of a cluster

The screenshot shows the 'Platforma Edukacyjna KOWEZIU' website. The main content area displays a list of forum topics, each with a speech bubble icon and a title. The topics are:

- Forum aktualności
- Wdrażanie PPKZ
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące wdrażania PPKZ
- Monitorowanie PPKZ
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące monitorowania PPKZ
- Ewaluacja PPKZ
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące ewaluacji PPKZ
- Plany i programy nauczania
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące planów i programów nauczania
- Współpraca z pracodawcami
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące współpracy z pracodawcami
- Współpraca z uczelniami
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące współpracy z uczelniami
- Dobre praktyki
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące dobrych praktyk
- Źródła pozyskiwania dodatkowych funduszy
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące źródeł pozyskiwania dodatkowych funduszy
- Informacja o wydarzeniach krajowych i zagranicznych w branżach
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące informacji o wydarzeniach krajowych i zagranicznych w branżach
- Nowe technologie
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące nowych technologii
- Praktyki i staże
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące praktyk i staży
- Źródła informacji w tym akty prawne
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące źródeł informacji w tym aktów prawnych
- Seminaria branżowe
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące seminariów branżowych
- Przydatne dokumenty
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące przydatnych dokumentów
- Egzaminy zawodowe
 - Forum dyskusyjne dotyczące egzaminów zawodowych

At the bottom of the page, contact information for the National Center for Vocational Education Research (Krajowy Ośrodek Wsparcia Edukacji z Zakładami) is provided.

Fig. 4.5 View of the issues in the mining, metallurgical and foundry business

The cooperation between the authors of exam tasks and the employers

If the author, creating the exam tasks, can do an internship in the corporation, it will bring the advantages of exam tasks which are topical and contain, recognized by the employers, actual skills. The vocational school reform allows the branch specialists (after receiving the specific training) to work as tasks authors and examiners. There is also a possibility to create in companies the exam centers, which are allowed by the district exam committee, to run and supervise the exams confirming job qualifications.

4.8 THE REASON OF LACK OF COOPERATION BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND SCHOOLS

However, the cooperation between schools and companies is still weak, few and far between and unorganized. On the employers side a lot of barriers occur connected with establishing and conducting activities moving towards long-term involvement. The aim is to eliminate obstacles given below and try to establish regular, not occasional, purposeful and long-term cooperation between schools and employers.

The barriers on the employers side [6]:

- short- term and narrow-minded speculating focused on survival and securing on-going business,
- low awareness about long-term benefits to employers, resulting from considering the expertise of workers in the company in longer perspective,
- the economical factor: too low investment outlay given on cooperation by the companies,
- poor level of knowledge in the area of advantages in terms of cooperation between vocational schools, which is one of the methods preventing from shortage of qualified workers,
- lack of worked out contribution strategy in discussion concerning the need of cooperation between schools and companies,
- low motivation to take part in active discussion about competences,
- low level of social business responsibility,
- lack of a local unit that would mediate in initiating, establishing, coordinating and introducing the cooperation of schools and employers,
- complicated and long-term procedures which accompany in creating cooperation,
- organizational issues of the employer, including lack of proper structure, space, entity or person responsible for the issue of cooperation with universities or high schools; lack of appropriate conditions for the organization of the practice;
- Inadequate to the needs of companies, the educational offer, which discourages them to cooperate with schools (many companies complain about the lack of schools in the area, educating the profession the companies are interested in), but does not take action associated with the formation of the offer;
- ignorance concerning the possibility of participating in curriculum development
- reservations about the attitudes and knowledge of teachers, including in the opinion of employers, they do not show interest in the profession, are not up to date, do not follow trends, they are not interested in replenishing knowledge, and sometimes in cooperation with employers;
- difficulties in adapting the program of practical training to the actual capabilities of the employer;
- lack of gratification to encourage employers to become more involved in the process of vocational training,
- major barriers in cooperation with schools in the development and implementation of curriculum, declared by employers were [6]:
 - lack of interest on the part of schools (25%);
 - no time for this type of activity (15.5%);
 - insufficient number of staff (14%);
 - lack of benefit from such activities (13.5%);
 - insufficient knowledge in this area (9%);
 - other (5%).

CONCLUSIONS

The active involvement of employers in the education of young people and close cooperation with the schools could increase the level of practical skills and soft skills of people entering the labor market, (employers often complain about the lack of adequately trained people). As a result, this would lead to a reduction in employers' recruitment problems, reduce expenditure on training new employees and shorten the time period needed to implement them. In addition, reduce the scale of the mismatch between supply and demand on the Polish labor market, and thus the level of youth unemployment. However, many employers do not decide to start cooperation with schools. For the local and regional economy, it is important to introduce well prepared youth to enter the labor market and to provide them with adequate skills sought by employers. The quality education, including vocational education, affects business decisions relating to job creation – locating investments, expanding the scope of its operations [6].

From the employer's point of view, a person with no practical experience requires a lot of time and financial resources to become a useful worker, especially in the absence of practical preparation. (The labor market observer of Wałbrzyskie region, Second partial report). On the other hand, an investment in such a person entails the risk that as soon as she/he gets the knowledge and experience, will go away to another employer, who will offer better pay conditions, and will no longer have to train a new employee. Rational employers prefer searching through the labor market to find experienced workers who have gained practice elsewhere. These types of dilemmas can be eliminated through the implementation of a larger number of practices and internships offered to students and closer cooperation between schools and employers [7].

As long as school cooperation with the employer is located in the category of the budget of the employer covering marketing and advertising, many favorable for pupils tasks may be carried out from the scope of the broad sense of vocational education. These include, among others, educational excursions to the company headquarters, training with the scope of the technology or materials produced at the employer's. Problems arise when the contract provides for free transfer of donations to schools/institutions, such as materials, tools, machinery and equipment to modernize the tech- didactic base of teaching. According to regulations, the donor must pay corporate income tax and VAT, which undoubtedly limits the scale of cooperation between schools and employers at this level. The school can sign an agreement (contract sponsorship) with the employer about receiving free materials, tools, equipment and other products, which conditions are specified so that both parties have measurable benefits. The donor in exchange for his help in the form of techno-didactic equipment, expects a particular form of promoting and advertising their business on the school grounds. Like any contract associated with legal consequences, it should also be signed by the controlling body [6].

The cooperation of employers to improve the quality of vocational education should give young people the preparation for the work, which finds acclaim with all employers and at the same time meets the challenges of the European labor market [9].

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OF REGION DEVELOPMENT**

Abstract: *The work includes information concerning secondary education reform. It presents structure of the education system, qualification courses and the way they are financed, selected recommendations for more effective skills and knowledge acquisition with cooperation with employers and higher education institutions. It also shows concerns connected with the cooperation.*

Key words: *Secondary education, clusters*

**KORELACJA PRACODAWCÓW Z SZKOLNICTWEM ZAWODOWYM
W KSZTAŁTOWANIU PEŁNOWARTOŚCIOWYCH ABSOLWENTÓW,
JAKO ELEMENT ROZWOJU REGIONU**

Streszczenie: *W pracy zawarto informacje o reformie szkolnictwa ponad gimnazjalnego. Przedstawiono nową strukturę systemu edukacji. Omówiono kursy kwalifikacyjne oraz sposób ich finansowania. Omówiono wybrane propozycje lepszego pozyskiwania umiejętności i wiedzy przy współpracy z pracodawcą i uczelniami wyższymi. Przedstawiono obawy pracodawców związane ze współpracą.*

Słowa kluczowe: *Szkolnictwo ponad gimnazjalne, klastry*

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