

## REVERSED PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY:

## LEARNING & TEACHING IN PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION (PHE)

Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Hoża 20, Warsaw, Poland, March 8, 2019

### Background Introductory Paper

## THE EMERGING CHALLENGES OF PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION IN POLAND

### Background

Total number of students in all types of Polish HEi was over 1.200.000 in 2017. Whole system consists of various types of institutions: universities and “higher schools”. Higher schools do not meet the criteria to become academia but offer Level 6, 7 and sometimes even 8. Institutions offering qualifications at EQF<sup>1</sup> level 6 or higher may be public and non-public. There is a vast number of non-public higher education institutions; the official register POLON<sup>2</sup> includes total 383 such institutions, but only 242 labelled as “functioning”.

From the diversification aspect there are 34 public institutions of professional higher education (PHE) in Poland, equivalent to Universities of Applied Sciences, providing professionally-oriented education at Level 6 and 7. PHE institutions were all established in the years 1995 – 2000 to activate medium-sized cities all over Poland. The number of students in public professional HEIs in the 2016/2017 academic year was 50 885 at level 6 and 6 076 at level 7. Twenty-three of the 34 “universities of applied sciences” mentioned above offer programmes at level 7.

However, not only public institutions of professional higher education offer professionally-oriented courses. The regulation from 2016 stated that an institution that is offering a programme at Level 6 is by law obliged to re-structure such a programme to comply with the professional course provisions. So all the institutions were obliged to make these changes in their curricula to meet the criteria required for professional programmes. Moreover, since the

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<sup>1</sup> European Qualifications Framework, see <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/content/descriptors-page>

<sup>2</sup> <https://polon.nauka.gov.pl/en/index.html>

adoption of the new Higher Education Law in 2018 there have been many on-going changes (Academic studies must be converted into professional, professional into academic, etc.).

A dynamically changing world throws forward new educational challenges: We teach students today to meet the demands of future jobs, future economic conditions and environmental impacts. The biggest challenge for PHE institutions in Poland now is to coordinate the academic and practical parts of programs, especially in terms of providing high-quality internships. Many efforts are being put into building and maintaining good relationships with local/regional businesses for work-based teaching and good learning outcomes. Another important issue is digitalisation: efficient use of new technologies and the restructuring of teaching and learning methods must be made to support these computerised technologies.

Professional programmes must prepare students and graduates to enter the labour market after graduation. Therefore the importance for meta-skills and widely understood social competences is constantly growing. Discussed is required on how to structure this set of competences.

Carefully defined programmes for Level 6 may be a starting point to the discussion on future research problems in professional universities.

### **EURASHE definition of Professional Higher Education**

EURASHE as a political representation of Professional Higher Education in Europe developed its own concept and definition based on thorough mapping of concepts, patterns and arrangements across the European Higher Education Area<sup>3</sup>.

Professional Higher Education is a form of Higher Education that offers a particularly intense integration with the world of work in all its aspects, including teaching, learning, research and governance and at all levels of the overarching Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area.

Its function is to diversify learning opportunities, enhance the employability of graduates, offer qualifications and stimulate innovation, for the benefit of learners and society.

The world of work includes all enterprises, civil society organisations, and the public sector. The intensity of integration with the world of work is manifested by a strong focus on the application of learning achievements. This approach involves combining phases of work and study, a concern for employability, cooperation with employers, the use of practice-relevant knowledge and use-inspired research.

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<sup>3</sup> Project HAPHE, funded by Erasmus+ programme in years 2012 – 2014, <https://www.eurashe.eu/projects/haphe/>

## Introduction

Poland is introducing a new Higher Education Law ("*Ustawa 2.0*"). The intention of this legislation is to build a consistent system of higher education that encompasses a variety of institutions from research-intensive universities to practically oriented universities and colleges.

The Polish higher education sector will play a very important role in the national strategy of "Responsible Development". Professional higher education institutions must be ready to deal with new challenges. In this respect, EURASHE experience is very important.

The following discourse will outline some major issues that will confront higher education in the future. Each summary point below is followed by questions to assist the discussion.

## 1. Education and the future

Technological innovations in production, computerization, digitalization, artificial intelligence, service delivery and logistics and specializations among others are changes that will affect people and their future working lives at both the individual and community levels. The education sector will need to respond to such change in terms of the teaching programs, their mode of delivery and teaching methods. Today more than ever workers/employees will need a wide range of technical and personal skills. This is the future challenge that higher education must confront.

### Questions

- a) What will the jobs and working conditions be like in an uncertain world?
- b) What will the future university look like?

## 2. The future teaching models

### 2.1. Professional education and academic education

Professional programs have a short history in Poland. Until recently Polish universities offered well-structured academic programs with short internship sections. Many professional courses require both traditional academic knowledge and practical skill-sets. Hence this requires the integration of both academic and professional training.

### 2.2. Online courses and digitalization

Professional programs have incorporated new technologies that have brought significant changes in the way today's students access information. They predominantly obtain information sourced from the Internet in electronic format rather than hard copy format from traditional library resources. The massive amount of web-based information requires that students learn how to discriminate among information and data sources to establish not only accuracy and validity but also the use of such information to critically construct arguments and solve problems on a variety of real-world issues.

Also, computer technologies are now available that allow off-campus teaching courses, which means that PHE institutions will need to consider their on-campus infrastructure requirements. It must be recognized. However, that teaching requirements for academic knowledge and practical training are very different. Online computer courses lend themselves well to on-the-job work-based training or internships.

### **2.3. Meta-skills in professional programs**

The importance of meta-skills to encourage creativity, emotional intelligence and mental stability cannot be over emphasized. This is especially so in a world of change and uncertainty. The contribution of higher education is extremely important in this respect.

For these reasons narrowly based professional skill training is not enough. Courses must include meta-skills that deal with what it means to be a good citizen, for example. This closely aligns with the School of Life courses advocated by Alain de Botton and his followers.

Meta-skills also refer to general and reusable skills that can either apply broadly to a wide set of problems or help with the acquisition of other more specific skills. An example could be the ability to create a mental map of an area of knowledge to help learn more specialized knowledge; the ability to improvise to allow communication/understanding in a situation where information/data has changed, and time does not allow for more detailed preparation. It could also involve the ability to create a database from large amounts of disparate information sources.

#### **Questions**

- a) Do we need a new model for professionally-oriented studies and if so what will it look like?
- b) What should a professionally-oriented curriculum look like?
- c) What new teaching methods are required?
- d) What meta-skills are required and how can they be taught within professional programs?

Ewa Stachura

March 5, 2019

Document based on the KRePUZ representatives' discussion