

The changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe

WORK ASSIGNMENT 2

External factors influencing VET - Understanding the National Policy

Dimension: Country Case Studies

AO/DSI/JP/Changing_Role_of_Vet/009/15

Case study focusing on Poland

prepared for CEDEFOP – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

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The changing nature and role of vocational education and training – overall aims

The purpose of the Changing nature and role of VET-project is to improve our understanding of how VET is changing in the countries belonging to the European Union (as well as Iceland and Norway). Over a three-year period (2016-18) the project will analyse how vocationally oriented education and training has changed in the past two decades (1995-2015) and based on these results investigate the main challenges and opportunities facing the sector today and in the future. Work is divided into six separate but interlinked themes:

- (a) the changing definition and conceptualisation of VET;
- (b) the external drivers influencing VET developments;
- (c) the role of traditional VET at upper secondary level;
- (d) VET from a lifelong learning perspective;
- (e) the role of VET at higher education levels;
- (f) scenarios outlining alternative development paths for European VET in the 21st century.

The study takes as its starting point that vocationally oriented education and training is something more than the traditional VET delivered at upper secondary level (in the form of school-based education or training, apprenticeships, or combinations of these). Due to the requirements of lifelong learning, we are able to observe diversification of VET with new institutions and stakeholders involved. We also see an expansion of VET to higher education areas, partly through reform of existing institutions, partly through the emergence of new institutions. This has been caused by factors internal to the education and training system as well as by external pressures linked to demographic, technological and economic changes.

This particular case study, together with 9 other case studies, provides input to theme (b) of the project ('The external drivers influencing VET developments').

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Poland

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I. Introduction

There is a well-established vocational education and training system in Poland. Nevertheless, VET has a far lower status than general education at every level. In essence, IVET as a destination has been seen as one for young people who do not possess the ability to continue their studies in general education. It was evident that the end of the 1990s / early 2000s that participation levels in VET were low. The government, since the early 2000s, has sought to tackle the problems of participation and esteem through a number of reforms and campaigns designed to increase the attractiveness of VET to young people. These reforms continue apace, but there remain substantial challenges ahead if the VET system is to better meet the needs of the economy.

Many of the recent changes have come from both the need to adapt the Polish system to meet EU requirements and meet the needs of a changing economy. The Polish economy proved to be resilient following the financial crises that affected most of Europe and continues to show relatively strong growth. As the government has tried to push the economy into the production of higher value goods this increased the demand for skills, but this has taken place against a backdrop of emigration of skilled people to elsewhere in the EU. This has required Poland to find ways of boosting its skills supply through, amongst other things, recruiting skilled people from neighbouring non-EU countries, improving the attractiveness of the VET system to young people, enhanced collaboration between employers and vocational schools in the provision of VET, and an increased emphasis on lifelong learning and accrediting existing skills. Poland in one way or another has been trying to tackle the problem of developing a VET system for much of its post-communist existence with varying degrees of success. There is, at the time of writing, a greater impetus or requirement to do so given the current interplay between economy and demography (explained in more detail below).

The EU has played an important role in driving change in the VET system in Poland. Resolutions by the European Commission in 2004¹ and 2009² obliged EU countries to develop a National Qualification Framework on the basis of EQF.³ As of 2016 this has been implemented. As has a competence based approach to completing a vocational qualification. There are signs that the VET system has become more flexible over time. There is a registry of professions with VET qualifications designed to grant entry to these professions. The registry of professions lists the qualifications necessary to gain access with the curriculum for that qualification increasingly being drawn up with the involvement of industry (e.g. via sector skills councils). Moreover, with the

¹ Draft Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Member States meeting within the Council on Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practices in the field of Guidance throughout life in Europe of 18th May 2004 No. 8448/04 EDUC 89 SOC 179, Internet: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?!=EN&f=ST%209286%202004%20INIT> on 2017-06-16

² Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') No. 2009/C 119/02, Internet: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528\(01\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528(01)&from=EN) on 2017-06-16

³ European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report Poland. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2014/87072_PL.pdf

introduction of a core VET curriculum, there is more autonomy for vocational schools (and employers) to determine the skills, competencies, and knowledge to be delivered.⁴

While there is much change in the VET system designed to increase its relevance and attractiveness to young people and the economy, it has been recognised that the country has been grappling with how to achieve this goal since its escape from behind the Iron Curtain. On the other hand, one could say that it has travelled a long way in a relatively short space of time.

2. What is meant by VET and the National VET System

In Poland, there is no official definition of VET. National reports on VET typically rely on definitions taken from the pedagogical literature or refer to a common understanding of the concept. VET is related to the Polish terms *kształcenie zawodowe* or *edukacja zawodowa* (professional/vocational or education/training). Legal acts that refer to the VET system do not define the term. The Ministry of Finance – which needs a definition of VET in relation to certain forms of tax relief - uses the VET definition contained in the European Council Implementing Regulation (EU) No 282/2011 when necessary.

The Polish national VET System consists of three main parts which are regulated separately.

1. Secondary and tertiary non-higher education - both formal and informal - is under the governance of the Ministry of the National Education.
2. Higher Education, which includes higher vocational schools (introduced in 1998), are regulated separately and belong to the National Higher Educational System.
3. The Chambers of Craft and Professions are subject to a separate set of regulations.

Completion of a VET programme gives access to a profession. A set of competencies are specified for each profession. As of 2017, there were 251 qualifications giving access to 200 professions in the National Qualifications Register.⁵

VET in Poland mainly comprises school-based education provided by the state educational institutions to young people. CEDEFOP describes the school based structure of IVET as follows:⁶

- vocational programmes (*zasadnicze szkoły zawodowe*) enable pupils to attain a vocational qualifications diploma after passing a State vocational examination and also to continue their education on a higher level in the second year of general upper secondary programmes for adults
- four-year vocational upper secondary programmes (*technika*) where graduates can attain a vocational qualifications diploma after passing a State vocational examination and also the upper secondary programmes completion examination certificate (*matura*).
- three-year special job-training programmes (*szkoły specjalne przysposabiające do pracy*) for students with mental disabilities allow to attain a certificate of job training.

⁴ European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report Poland. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2014/87072_PL.pdf

⁵ Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualifications System (Dziennik Ustaw/ Journal of Laws of 2016 item 64)

⁶ Chłoń-Domińczak, A. et al.(2016). Vocational education and training in Europe – Poland. Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe reports. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2016/2016_CR_PL.pdf

- up to 2.5-year post-secondary programmes (szkoły policealne) for students who have completed upper secondary.

Vocational Schools deliver both general and vocational education within a VET programme; additionally, students will spend time training with an employer as WBL is integrated into predominantly school based vocational education.⁷ The emphasis currently placed on including a WBL element in school based programmes is seen as one of the ways in which VET system will better meet the needs of the economy in the future. In 2015 new form of dual education was introduced in vocational schools combining education at a vocational school with practical training. The practical training is based on agreement between a young person and an employer or between a school and an employer. A minimum number of vocational practice classes is set and employers can influence the content of vocational training programmes carried out as part of practical training within the company.⁸ There is also an apprenticeship system (operating at ISCED levels 2 and 3).

In addition to the above, there is the Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP). This form of education are designated for young people usually between the ages of 15 and 17 and are typically provided to students experiencing educational problems.

Post-secondary schools and technical Schools also have their equivalents for adults. Although VET has a lower status than the general or academic education, it can provide access to next level of education which can be important for adults looking to improve their careers. Accordingly, some adults attend vocational schools in order to obtain, extramurally, leaving certificates.

Acquisition of a VET qualification provides the opportunity to enter a profession. Examinations at a national level are organised by the Regional Education Authorities or The Chambers of Crafts. Because school-leaving exams are evaluated externally, there are Regional Institutions (Regional Examination Commissions (OKE)) which organise exams certifying the acquisition of skills. These institutions were introduced in 1999 following an amendment to the Educational System Act of 8th January 1999.⁹ There are currently eight OKE institutions responsible to the Central Examination Board (CKE). The CKE is responsible for the validation of qualifications for both general and vocational schools.

The list of professions is contained in the National Classification of Professions of Vocational Education and Training (KZSK) along with the relevant qualifications needed for entry to those professions. The Classification may cover new skills and professions which might be added to the list at a request of specified bodies, such as professional associations, ministries and business organisations.

The Chambers of Crafts operate on the basis of different legal regulations¹⁰ and offer journeyman's examinations for young workers who have learned their profession by working for a craftsman associated to a Chamber. The Chambers can certificate professions that are included in the KZKS and other ones that are defined by The Polish Crafts Associations (ZRP). Examinations conducted by the Chambers consist of theoretical and practical parts and meet both the standards defined by the ZRP.

⁷ Luck, Agnieszka (2013) Poland. VET in Europe – Country report. Cedefop, pp. 15 – 16

⁸ European Commission (2016) Education and Training Monitor 2016 – Poland. Luxembourg: Commission of the European Communities

⁹ Educational System Act of 8 January 1999 Dziennik Ustaw/ Journal of Laws of 1999 No. 12, item 96

¹⁰ Act on Craft of 22 March 1989 (Dziennik Ustaw Official Journal of Laws of 2012 No. 112, item 979, as amendment)

There are also 350 regulated professions in Poland¹¹ that require certification the relevant professional association. There are separate regulations of gaining such certifications - for example, in the construction industry or in medicine.

3. Historical context – the direction of travel

A Short History of VET in Poland

One can trace the antecedents of the current system of VET back to the 19th century when the first vocational schools were established in the Polish lands under partition. Since the rebirth of the Polish state (with the creation of the Second Polish Republic at the end of WWI), one can point to four distinct periods in the development of VET:

4. period of the Second Republic (the inter-war years);
5. period of the Polish People's Republic (1945 - 1989);
6. the ten-year "construction of a new Poland " leading to the so called Handke Reform (1990-1999);
7. post-secondary vocational education (after the reform of the Education System in Poland).¹²

The inter-war period was a turbulent one in Polish history. The period was characterised by relatively strong economic growth and intensive industrial development. The provision of VET at the time was fragmented. There were a variety of vocational schools, organised in a variety of ways, delivering VET related to specific professions at varying levels. Some of the schools at the time were characterised by high standards with a high reputation amongst employers; others less so. With the adoption of the Law on the School System on March 11, 1932, more uniformity was brought to the VET system. Newly established VET institutions, such as Vocational Secondary Schools, received the same status in law as that which had previously only been provided to general education. All vocational schools allowed the continuation of study into higher education.

The pre-war system was more or less dismantled in the post-1945 period. The period of the Polish People's Republic was a time of rebuilding the VET system after the war to meet the needs of centrally planned economy. It was based on the assumption that people needed to be trained to work in a particular job in a particular sector. This was the purpose of the VET system during this period. VET was not seen as part of the education system – its purpose was simply that of equipping people with the skills needed so that they could carry out the job assigned to them. A Central Office for Vocational Training was established in 1949, but for the most part vocational schools were subordinate to various ministries depending on the profession in which they trained (e.g. Agricultural Schools were responsible to the Ministry of Agriculture). During this period vocational schools were divided into three types depending upon the level of learning they delivered:

- Basic vocational schools;
- Vocational education schools; and
- Technical colleges.

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regprof/index.cfm?action=regprofs&id_country=23&quid=1&mode=asc&maxRows=**#top%20 on 2017-06-23

¹² Report on Education (2012) Educational Research Institute, Warsaw http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=414 on 2017-06-16

Basic vocational schools were the most commonly chosen type of schools at the time; about 55% of all primary school graduates attended basic vocational schools. For the majority of them, this was their last level of education.

In the 1970s the first public criticism of the VET system were aired. A report at the time, prepared by the experts, demonstrated that vocational schools were second rate. Most of the graduates went straight to work with no prospect of further study, and the courses offered were narrow, used outdated methods and equipment, and provided little or no basis for continued study.

During the period of political transformation, a report titled "Education as the National Priority" was released at the end of the 1980s. It was a document essentially describing the same state of affairs as that described in the 1970s. The IBE Report "Education in Poland" quotes the formidable challenges facing policy makers at the time (see box).

Promotion of pre-school care, improvement of early-school education, development of pedagogical and professional path, respect for the curriculum <teach and learn slogan> combining the curricula of general education and vocational training, the development of the school system in accordance with the principles of lifelong learning, and the reform of educating teachers.

Source: Report on Education, Educational Research Institute, Warsaw, 2012 http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=414 on 2017-06-23, p.

After the political changes, a team of experts was created to introduce innovations in national education including the VET system, which had to be adapted to the requirements of the new economic realities. In 1991, the Education System Act¹³ was passed (still valid, though amended several times). The document as a whole, however, treated VET marginally. But for the most part there was not much interest in VET at this time. The number of students decreased, many VET schools were abolished, and the remaining ones, due to under-funding, offered low quality services. Research studies at that time¹⁴ pointed to the need to build relationships between VET institutions and employers, and the necessity of improving the professional development and guidance system.

A key change in the Education System in Poland was the Handké Reform in 1998. The reform led to the introduction of the lower secondary school "gymnasium" as a new type of school. The decision was made to reduce the duration of primary school education to six years, after which pupils would continue their education in secondary school (gymnasium) for three years and only upon completion of this cycle would a decision be made about whether they would continue in the general track (specialized lyceum) or enter a two-year cycle of education in vocational school. The structural reform postponed the choice of the direction of education at the secondary level (general or vocational curriculum) by one year. The evidence suggests that by delaying the decision about when to start vocational studies has improved pupils test scores. It appears that the extra year of general education had a beneficial impact on pupil's education.¹⁵

¹³ The Educational System Act of 7 September 1991 (Dziennik Ustaw/Journal of Laws 2004 No. 256 item 2572 as amended) – Act of 19 August 2011 amending the Educational System Act and other Acts (Dziennik Ustaw/Journal of Laws 2011 No. 205 item 1206 as amended)

¹⁴ Adamski W. (ed.) (1993), *Edukacja w okresie transformacji. Analiza porównawcza i propozycje modernizacji kształcenia zawodowego w Polsce*, Warszawa

¹⁵ M. Jakubowski, H.A. Patrinos, E. Porta, and J. Wiśniewski. (2010), "The Impact of the 1999 Education Reform in Poland", World Bank Policy Research Working Paper Series 5263

As well reforming the structure of the education system a core curriculum was also introduced. This essentially freed schools from a centrally determined curriculum and gave them autonomy over what they taught. The new VET core curriculum in VET includes the development of soft skills (i.e. interpersonal and social competences) such as forward planning, openness to change, managing and coping with stress as well as the ability to work in team.

In the period following the reforms there was a feeling that the VET system had failed to flourish. It was still very much a second-choice for students. The history of the development of vocational education in Poland indicates the stages of flowering and the phases of withdrawal. The national VET system has changed over the years, changing the VET roles and priorities. At the beginning of its existence, it was supposed to train professionally qualified staff. In the post-war years up to the transformation of the political system, VET was an option for children from agricultural and working families who, having finished early-level education constituted a source of labour for the state-owned factories. Since 1989, despite a number of reforms, VET had not really adapted to the changing economic realities, resulting in it being out-dated and under-funded. This led to further round of reforms commencing in 2008 which, arguably, have begun to gain traction.¹⁶

After 2008 and encouraged by EU regulations, the aim was to develop a more coherent VET system. There were many Ministerial studies about need to increase of the quality of VET and its standards. The most recent change in institutional structure was the creation of a National Office for Vocational and Continuing Education that mirrored the structure of Centre for Education Development relating to general education. Further forms were introduced in 2012 (see box).

The 2012 vocational education reform, introduced by the Act of 19 August 2011 on amendments to the Education Act and other acts (Dz. U. No 205, item. 1206), focused on the increasing attractiveness and adjustment of VET to the needs of the labour market. To be able to respond to the labour market needs the VET schools must not only follow the newest technological trends and reflect them in their curricula but also promote innovativeness of the teachers and students. This cannot be done without a close cooperation with local employers, branch organisations and research and development institutions.

Source: Boguszewski, B., Luck, A. (2014) Innovation In VET. Poland. Cedefop, p. 4

The reforms introduced in 2012/13 included a learning outcomes based curriculum, a new formula for external assessment, new procedures for validating non-formal and informal learning, and the out-of-school system of vocational education courses. The reforms also led to an integrated qualification system. In 2016 Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) came into being which means that qualifications in formal and non-formal education will be assigned to designated PQF levels. The integrated qualifications register was launched in July 2016 and is coordinated by the Minister for National Education. By extending the possibility to accumulate and transfer learning outcomes achieved in various contexts, these tools allow for greater flexibility in obtaining further qualifications and make it learning pathways more flexible.¹⁷

¹⁶ Boguszewski, B., Luck, A. (2014) Innovation In VET. Poland. Cedefop <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Information-services/vet-in-europe-country-reports.aspx> on 2017-06-16

¹⁷ European Commission (2016) Education and Training Monitor 2016 – Poland. Luxembourg:

The Integrated Qualification System

The Integrated Qualification System has enabled the implementation of the most important elements of the ECVET system:

- identification of qualifications included in the Vocational Education System (as well as partial qualifications involved in several professions),
- description of qualifications using learning outcomes, organised in accordance with the ECVET requirements,
- possibility to gather and transfer the learning outcomes (for instance, in the professional practice system)¹⁸

The Integrated Qualification System reflects the change of dominance in the Education System in Poland. According to European requirements, the qualification system has been created. Competencies constitute the basic measure of education, in both general and vocational schooling.

A change in VET from a career-oriented to a qualification standard allows for greater flexibility and acquisition of single skills to obtain further professional training. What is more, it lets early-stage learners enter the Vocational training system outside the formal policy.

The Act on the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS), which came into force on 15th January 2016, introduced systemic solutions which includes: labour market qualifications (regardless of the way they are acquired), responsibilities of institutions, principles for quality assurance, etc..

The Integrated Qualification Register (IQR) is operated by the Polish Agency for Enterprise and Development (PARP). The data recorded in the IQR comprises of qualifications conferred at all levels of Polish Qualification Framework (PQF). It consists of all competencies that can be obtained at the level of General, Vocational and Higher Education.¹⁹ Initially, IQS was filled with full and partial competencies from formal education. Now, the data on qualifications from the market is being gradually included. Market qualifications are those which are used in the labour market but not necessarily possible to obtain within the formal education system. Associations of entrepreneurs and the Minister responsible for an industry sector may request a new qualification which stems from market demand to be added to the register.²⁰ The procedure of adding them to the list, as the market qualifications are the ones which do not have a commonly applicable legal basis, requires a systemic approach referring to quality assurance

4. Changes in VET enrolment

The graphs below show significant changes in the number of students recorded in Poland over the last twenty years. The key point is the declining number of students choosing the vocational path (see Figure 1) or completing the vocational path (Figure 2). The reasons for the changes rest with:

- the 1989 constitutional change;
- demographic changes;
- economic changes; and
- the Reform of the Education System.

¹⁸ Educational Research Institute (2013) Report on Education ,Warsaw, p. 205

¹⁹ Duda A., (2016) Country Report. Poland. 2016 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Cedefop. www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/2016_validate_pl.pdf

²⁰ Ibidem.

The 1989 constitutional changes resulted in rapid economic change and an increase in the unemployment rate. It tended to be those who were educated in the vocational pathway that lost their jobs in the move to a market based economy.²¹ But this may be seen as a transitional effect.

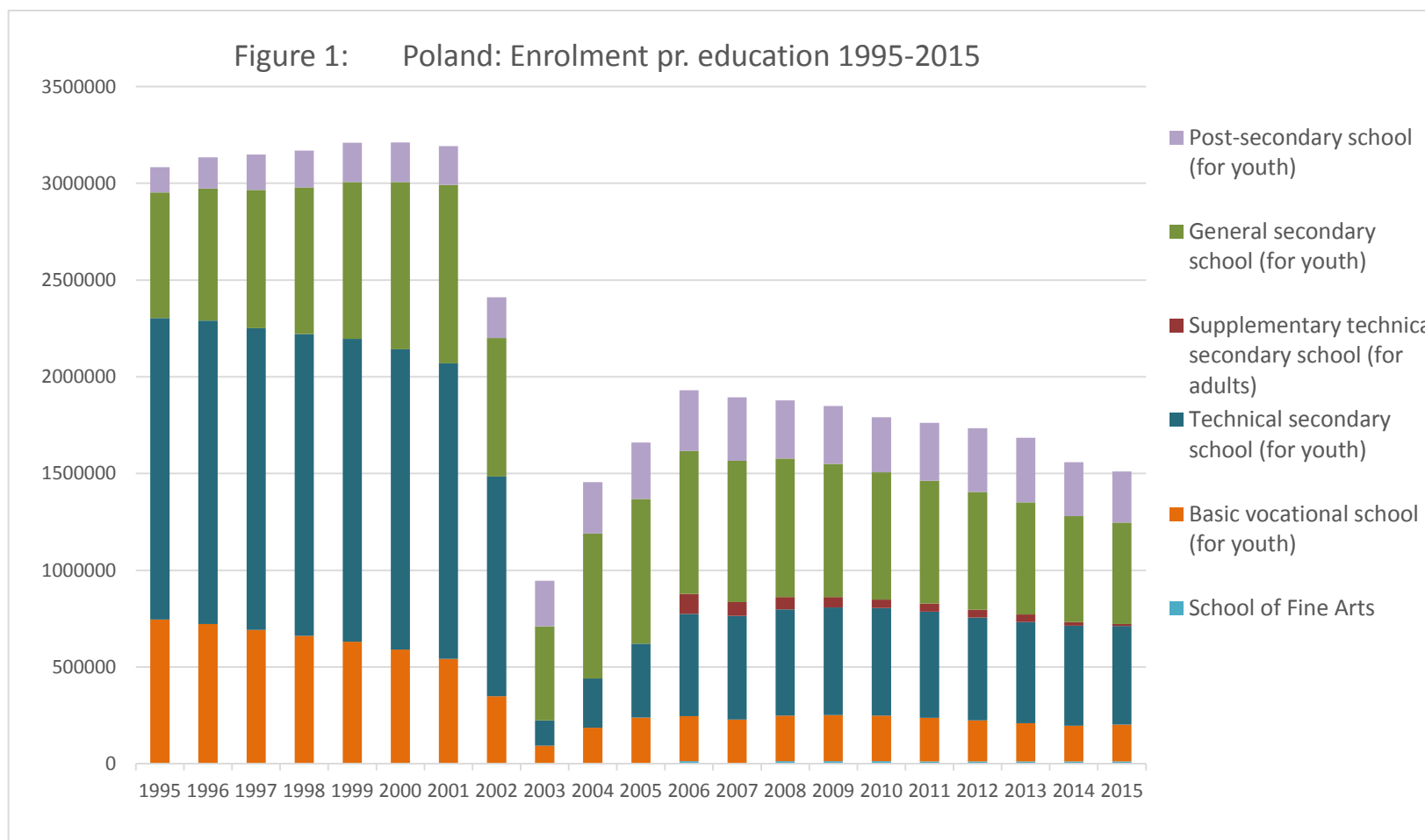
More long lasting is the scale of demographic change and the decline in the number of people aged 15-19 years. This phenomenon is evident in the graphs presented – there is less than half the number of secondary school students now than in the 1990s. This phenomenon will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Economic developments have wrought change on the education system too. Technological change has led to the loss of many traditional jobs to which the VET system granted entry. At the same time, there has been the emergence of new sectors of activity (often ICT linked) that gives a rise for new skills. The vocational schools historically have been under-funded, under-equipped and lag behind in having the capacity to deliver the new skills that the economy needs. This has an adverse impact on the standing of the VET sector which the consequence that young people have voted with their feet and selected the general academic route. Additionally the vocational schools have encountered problems in preparing students for the Matura exam. Compared with general secondary schools, which have a pass rate of 85%, that in vocational schools is much lower standing at 68% (data for 2016).²²

The revolution in the Polish National Education System following the Handke reforms was designed to increase the number of students in upper secondary school and higher education. But the impact on overall participation levels seems to have bypassed vocational education (participation in IVET was higher before the reform). Systemic changes were introduced in 2012, as well as a programme to improve the image of VET in society, especially among young people. Between 2010 and 2013, the programme promoted the importance of VET but it seems to have had little impact.

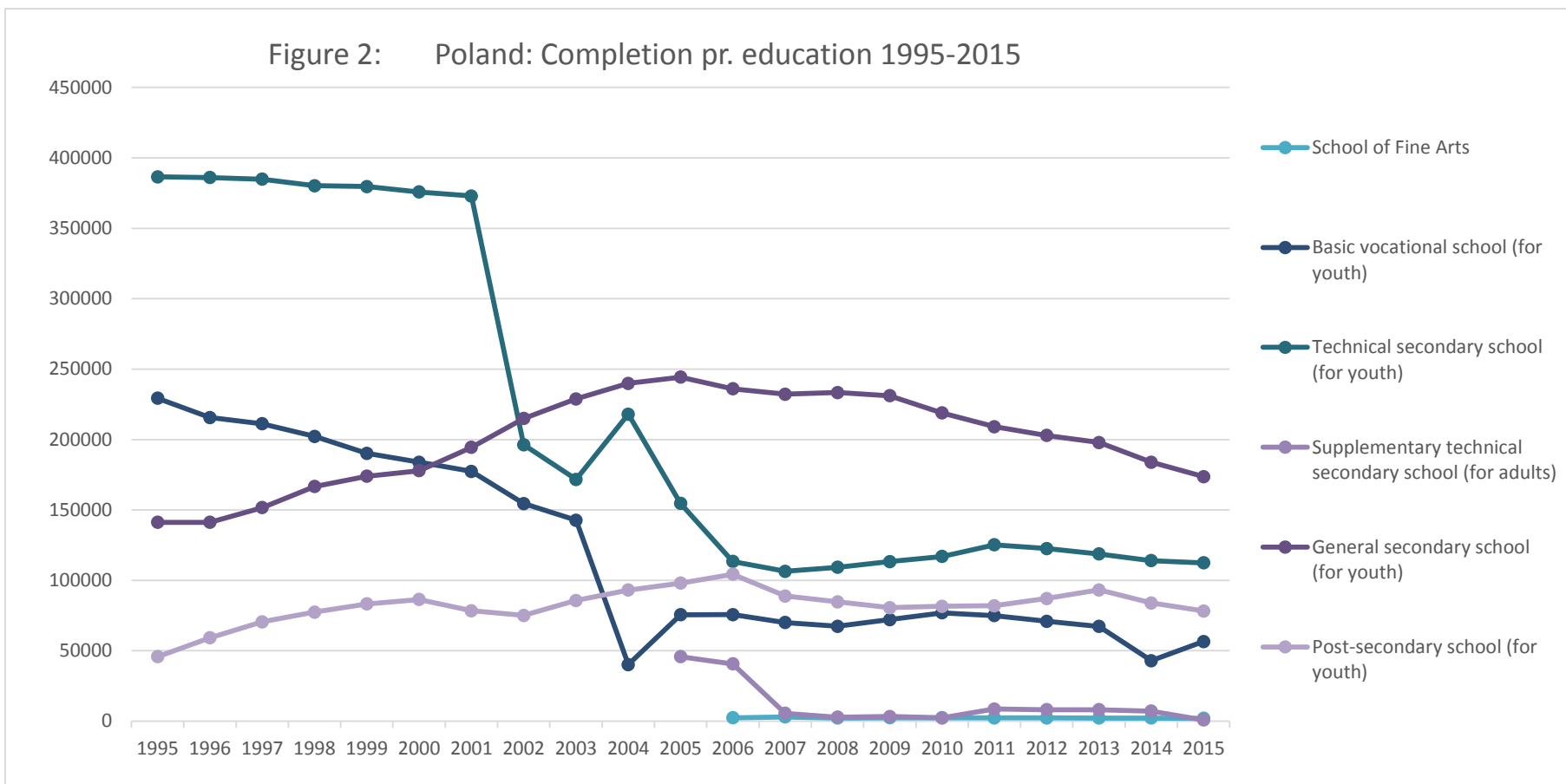
²¹ Educational Research Institute (2012) Report on Education , Warsaw http://biblioteka-krk.ibe.edu.pl/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=414 on 2017-06-16

²² Central Examination Commission, Report on the “matura” 2016, https://www.cke.edu.pl/images/EGZAMIN_MATURALNY_OD_2015/Informacje_o_wynikach/2016/sprawozdanie/Sprawozdanie_ogolne_2016.pdf on 2017-06-16



Source: Statistical Yearbooks of Poland 1995 – 2015

Figure 2: Poland: Completion pr. education 1995-2015



Source: Statistical Yearbooks of Poland 1996 – 2016.

Any analysis of enrolment data needs to consider participation in lifelong learning. This has been historically low in Poland. Participation levels are low and the percentage of people who would like to participate but cannot is high in comparison with the EU average. Due to the collapse of the centrally planned economy and with it many manufacturing plants, the involvement of entrepreneurs in VET drastically declined. Today, the involvement of entrepreneurs in vocational training in Poland constitutes only 33% of the EU average.²³ It is thought that the reduced inflow of new workers from the education system – due to demographic trends - will propel employers towards investing in the training of their workforce leading to acquisition of professional qualifications. It is further thought that educational institutions, otherwise short of students, will increasingly provide professional training within the VET system and thereby promote lifelong learning. What is more, they will try to do their best to adjust their training offer to the needs of the market as well as to the expectations of any new group of older learners.

5. The interplay between external and the internal factors shaping VET

Demographic change

One of the most formidable challenges facing Polish society – and the education system – is demographic change. The population is declining quickly as a consequence of emigration and a declining birth rate. The scale of demographic change can be seen readily from the Central Statistical Office's forecast. The number of people aged under 17 years will decrease by 1.2 million in the period to 2040, and by 2050 the population in this age group will be 30% lower than in 2013.²⁴ Taking the age groups into consideration, the number of people in the range of 19-24 will decrease the most (see Table 1). These changes will affect mainly educational institutions which offer tertiary and post-secondary education.

Table 1: Increase/decrease of population size by educational age groups (in 000s)

Age group	2013 - 2014	2014 - 2015	2015 - 2020	2020 - 2025	2025 - 2030	2030- 2035	2035- 2040	2040- 2045	2045 - 2050	2013 =100
13 – 15	-24.9	-51.2	3.1	47.7	-97.0	-138.4	-223.2	-288.3	-310.0	73.0
16.- 18	-45.6	-90.4	-209.4	-7.0	-160.1	-231.6	-290.8	-374.8	-422.0	66.7
19 - 24	-115.1	-237.1	-735.6	-904.9	-629.6	-871.1	-1012.5	-1138.9	-1296.6	57.8

Source:

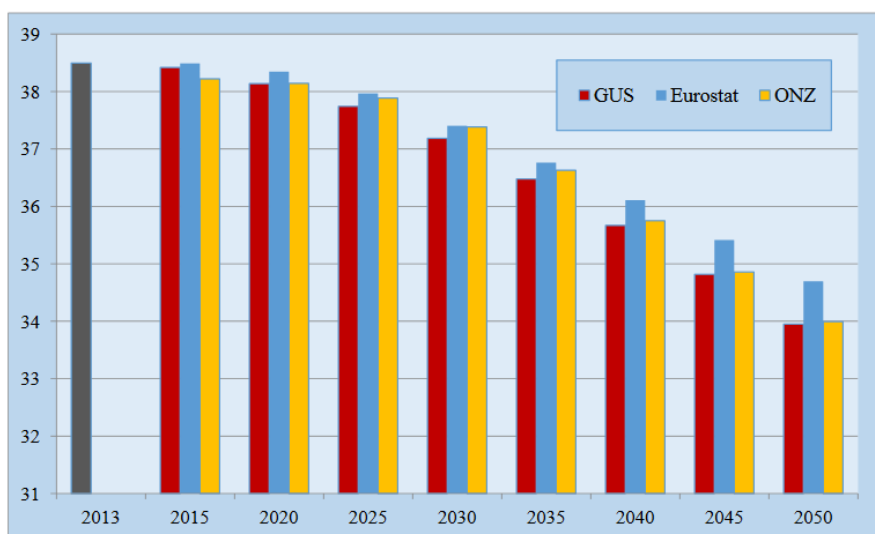
http://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5469/1/5/1/prognoza_ludnosci_na_lat_a____2014_-_2050.pdf#page=140&zoom=auto107449, p. 152

In short, the population of Poland will decrease drastically in the next 35 years up to 2050, at most, half of the state from 2013 (see Figures 3 and 4). Poland, compared with many other European countries as well as the EU average, will significantly reduce in population. This situation will not only affect the number of younger students in educational institutions.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴http://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5469/1/5/1/prognoza_ludnosci_na_ata____2014_-_2050.pdf p. 148 on 2017-06-16

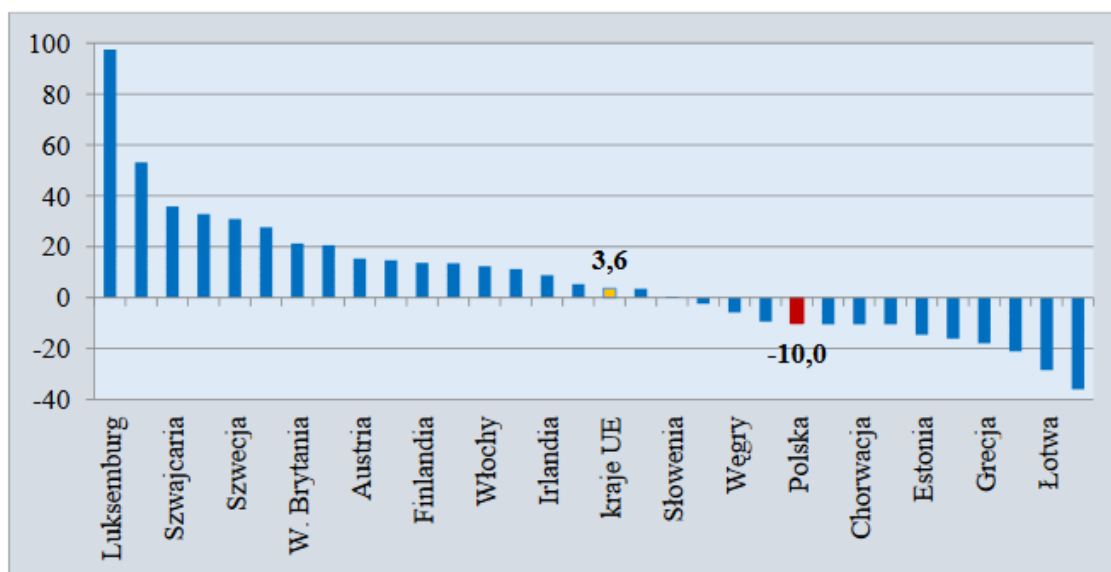
Figure 3: Population projection for Poland (millions)



^a2013 r. – dane rzeczywiste; 2013 – actual data

Source: http://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5469/1/5/1/prognoza_ludnosci_na_lata____2014_-_2050.pdf#page=140&zoom=auto107449, p.164

Figure 4: Projected changes in population size 2013-2050 (in %) (Poland – red, EU average – yellow)



Source: http://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5469/1/5/1/prognoza_ludnosci_na_lata____2014_-_2050.pdf#page=140&zoom=auto107449, p.165

Technological change

Over the past 20 years or so the Polish economy has grown substantially and has proved to remarkably resilient in the post-crisis period. At present, the economy is growing by around 3½% a year. The government has signalled its intent to drive up productivity in the economy through a process of innovation and capture of relatively high value-added segments of the market. This is, to some extent at least, dependent upon being able to improve skills supply. There are a number of factors of interest here:

- stimulating skills supply (especially in the light of observed outflows of skilled workers to elsewhere in the EU);
- ensuring that skills supply meets skills demand; and
- providing vocational schools with the resources to produce the skills the country needs.

Emigration from Poland has resulted in its labour and skill stocks being depleted. Many of those who emigrate are relatively high skilled. Given demographic trends this has placed a pressure of being able to stimulate skills supply. To date, this has been met by encouraging immigration from neighbouring countries (some outside of the EU), encouraging participation in continuing training (which has been historically low by EU standards), and accrediting existing skills that may have been acquired through informal / non-formal means. The Polish Qualifications Framework (*Polska Rama Kwalifikacji, PRK*), and the integrated qualifications registry (*Zintegrowany Rejestr Kwalifikacji, ZRK*), that were introduced in 2016, should support moves to increase (accredited) skills supply.

Whilst it is important to increase skills supply, there is also a need to ensure that it is relevant to the needs of the labour market. It has been readily apparent in the post-communist period that the IVET system has not been able to meet the needs of the labour market which has, in turn, contributed to its lack of attractiveness to young people. There has been a tendency for vocational schools to teach subjects they have the resources to teach rather than what is in demand in the labour market.

It has been further noted that vocational schools often do not have either the equipment or the teachers with the knowledge to develop the (new) skills in demand in the labour market. It is interesting to note that the latest reforms of the VET system look to bring vocational schools and employers closer together, so that employers can share their expertise more in teaching young people. The emergence of sector skills councils may well have the effect of being able to more readily identify the key competencies that individuals need to acquire to enter a given profession (i.e. those listed on the registry of professions). As the OECD points out, if employers want to counter skills shortages in the future then it is beholden upon them to engage with vocational schools to acquire the skills they need. The creation of the core vocational curriculum leaves space for vocational schools and employers to develop the skills that they consider to be of particular importance in the labour market.

Macro-economic developments

Historically living standards have been low in comparison with Western Europe and unemployment rates over the 2000s relatively high. These have undoubtedly had an impact on the relatively high levels of emigration observed over recent years. This, coupled with the low fertility rate, has, as noted above, created demographic pressures that have implications for the economy. The unemployment rate has fallen over recent years - in part driven by relatively strong economic growth and in part through the retirement of older workers whose skills were obsolescent – and there are signs that the vacancy rate is increasing. The fact that Poland, by EU standards, has low labour market participation and employment rates means that there are signs that conditions in the labour market are tightening which could, potentially, have an impact on growth. As noted above, to counter this trend the government is looking to boost labour and skills supply. But it faces a number of challenges. Productivity rates are relatively low by EU-standards which, at least in part, explains why wage levels are relatively low and the preference for many well qualified Poles to emigrate to elsewhere in the EU. And being able to boost productivity rates is dependent upon having relatively well qualified employees to introduce and operate new technologies and production processes. As

noted above there are plans afoot to boost skills supply but it has to be recognised that this remains a formidable challenge for the VET system.

6. Conclusion

Vocational Education in Poland has been modified in a very heterogeneous way. Throughout the last hundred years it has functioned in, at least, three different political and economic systems. The national VET system in Poland is built on the basis of adaptation to the changing environment (including external conditions) and the implementation of EU recommendations. The challenges facing VET in Poland are a combination of external and internal factors. The necessity to reform the system is driven by a significant decline in the population as well as social transformations. The country is characterised by a lack of stability in employment, the necessity and the need to change professions, and a longer period of activity in labour market. In fact, all these factors contribute to the development of VET in Poland. The most significant innovation has been the development of a competence based vocational qualification system.

Changes in the Vocational Education System (2012), and then the formation of the Integrated Qualification System (2016) provide evidence of attempts to make solutions consistent with the European System and, in doing so, adjust to the reality of the current labour market. Both employers, who are able to better recognise workers whose competencies they need, and employees, who can control their education and career in a more personalised way, will benefit greatly.²⁵ The move towards a position that favours employers and individuals, suggests that developing areas of VET in Poland, namely the involvement of employers, the participation of adults and older adults in lifelong learning, constitutes progress that will move Poland closer to today's distant, European average.

²⁵ Educational Research Institute (2013) Report on Education ,Warsaw, p.198