COMPETENCE ASSESSMENT STATUS REPORT (NATIONAL SURVEY)

POLAND

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Report about the system of competence assessment tools in Poland

Competency based education can be described and characterized by the fact that learning tasks, which are more or less representative for later professional tasks, form the backbone of a curriculum. All other parts of the curriculum (lectures, practicals, skills training) are strictly connected to this backbone. Competencies are not coupled to separate courses or modules but developed throughout the curriculum. In addition a flexible curriculum should make it possible to take elsewhere acquired competencies into account. These characteristics of a competency based curriculum indicate that for each individual student with a particular learner profile at a particular moment in time should be possible to select suitable or necessary learning tasks, to emphasize or de-emphasize particular aspects of those learning tasks, and to exclude other learning tasks. The main goal is to develop an effective model for personalized task selection in a competency-based. This includes the specification of a learner profile, a dynamic task selection model, and assessments for updating the learner profile. Three experiments are focused on:

- effects on student satisfaction and learning outcomes of giving students-limited-control over learning task selection,
- transfer effects of increased variability in a set of selected learning tasks,
- differential transfer effects of increased variability in example materials and increased variability in required problem solving behavior

The dynamic task selection models developed and validated in this project make it possible to select appropriate learning tasks for students, increase the flexibility of education, and can be directly implemented in electronic learning environments.

The clearest definition of competences according to Polish conditions should be understood as a quality of being adequately or well qualified physically and intellectually. Competence also involves the demonstration of skills, knowledge and abilities in accordance with the following principles like:

- *consistency* (the ability to repeat practice techniques and outcomes)
- *independence* (the ability to practice without assistance from others)
- *timeliness* (the ability to practice in a time frame)

- *accuracy* (the ability to practice utilizing correct techniques and to achieve the intended outcomes)
- *appropriateness* (the ability to practice in accordance with pure standards outlined within the practice jurisdiction)

The development of the key competencies (soft skills) demanded by employers can increase opportunities of students, the unemployed and employees to succeed on the labour market. Key competencies, however, do not play an important role in the school curricula and in the training programmes for adults (the unemployed and SME employees). The existing education system is focused mainly on the development of general and profession related knowledge and professional skills.

According to many Polish surveys and analysis in large and SME's companies, governmental and local instituition – key competencies areas include, define and identify competencies presented below:

- competency for effective communication
- competency for efficiency
- competency for life-long learning
- competency for communication in foreign languages
- competency for co-operation
- competency for solving problems
- competency for flexibility
- competency for entrepreneurship
- competency for exploring and orientation in information
- competency for customer orientation
- competency for independence and decisiveness
- competency for organizing and planning

Polish National Strategy of Developing vocational competences is strictly connected with above mentioned competencies. This Strategy is based on SWOT analysys including:

- training manuals for trainers and trainees,
- vocational programmes and tools for testing competency level,
- tools for application and further development of competency in daily life,
- tools for training and certification of competency trainers

In Poland the way of thinking about the role of competencies based on education is that it can be looked upon as an instructional system in which a performance-based learning process is used. The learner demonstrates level of attainment on subject-area. Competence based course format can give the participants more responsibility for their own learning process. Subject material for courses in competence based education may be offered in many different modes for participants. Competence based assessment in professional education settings should focus on learning and instruction not limited to occupational performance, and development of soft competencies along with performance in hard competencies. Assessment criteria should be based on appropriate benchmarking and not on minimum standards as currently practised.

The system has been developed in close cooperation between teachers and representatives of working life. The system aims to maintain and enhance the vocational skills of the adult population, to equip adults to engage in an occupation as self-employed people, to develop working life, to promote employment and to support lifelong learning.
This is the reason why system of competencies based on education is often compared with the system of competence based qualifications which includes:

- further vocational qualifications,
- demonstrating the vocational skills required of skilled workers

Adults may demonstrate their vocational skills in competence tests regardless of how and where they have acquired the skills. Although taking part in competence tests does not require formal preparation, many participants participate in preparatory training to rectify gaps in vocational skills learnt at work and to enhance vocational skills. The students participating in preparatory training are provided with individual learning programs.

Since few years competence-based qualifications has been regulated by the formal governmental Act.
The Polish Ministry of Education is obliged to make a decision about the qualifications that should be included in the qualifications structure. The qualifications structure is periodically revised according to a situation in labour market and to feedback obtained from the world of

business. The requirements for the competence based qualifications are specified and confirmed by the National Board of Education.
In Polish system of developing vocational comptencies functions the entity responsible for arranging and supervising each sector of the economy.

The concept of competence-based education can facilitate learning in a society characterised by rapid changes and complexity, like today's society. In education, based on competences the content is no longer starting point for curriculum development, but the competences that are important for working in practice. Competence-based education is very popular in Poland and other countries as well, beacuse of the expected decrease of the gap between education and labour market. The implementation should be seen as a system innovation. In several practice oriented projects researchers as well as people from practice are working on designing competence profiles, integrating courses, bringing the practice closer to the school, and designing competence-based reward systems.
Polish experiences in applying the system of competency based education understood as educational programs with required knowledges, skills and attitudes are very helpfull to present results like: good coordination between state department and local supervisory staff, involvement of individuals not committed to competency based education, failure to provide uniform inservice education information and materials, and involvement of too many individuals providing technical assistance.

Vocational competencies are strictly connected with development of soft skills. Common ground between those two areas are: sympathy, knowledge of human nature, self-assurance, fighting spirit, ability to work in a team, analytical thinking, creativity, motivation, conflict resolution and others. Many Polish universities in cooperation with enterprises realize that developing soft skills during educational period is one of the most important factor essential to create the growth of the economy. This is the reason why universities expand soft skill programs
which comprise the following elements:

- assesments that measure people’s workplace skills
- job analysis or “profiling” system that determines the levels of skills required for competent performance in specific jobs

- instructional support that helps educators teach necessary skills
- a research and reporting system that links assessment and job profiling data to offer timely and useful information
- an information service that provides job profiling,
- instructional support, and other services.

Traditional control hierarchies with narrow, highly structured, routine jobs and tightly supervised workers are poorly suited to dynamic environment. Instead, Polish nowadays organizations are often more flexible, utilizing team oriented, decentralized structures that empower lower-level workers to make decisions and take initiative.

Employer perceptions of employee readiness are influenced by a dynamic interplay among evolving organizational needs, educational institutions practices, and the preparation of the students who enroll in educational institutions. These factors have changed the employers needs and expectations of employees. First of all, to function effectively in the twenty-first century modern, dynamically workplace, employees need greater ability in the basics such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Thus, employers desire workers with more formal education. Employers expect employees:

- to have interpersonal skills necessary to communicate, solve problems, coordinate activities, and resolve conflict
- need to possess the ability to self-manage, take initiative, and engage in self-directed learning.
- to be ethical and flexible

Beside employers tend to expect schools to build general skills like: basic knowledge, discipline, professionalism, good work habits, the ability to communicate, openness, problem-solving ability, and well roundedness.

Reducing the gap between new employee soft-skills abilities and employer expectations may be facilitated by providing students with a better understanding of what qualities and characteristics employers value most and an accurate assessment of where students currently rank on these competencies and traits. Both schools and employers should be more obliged to assist in this process. Teachers may need to learn more about what employers want, do a better job of conveying this information to students, give students feedback, and encourage them to learn in

applied settings as well as in the classroom. Employers may assist by providing internships and summer jobs that expose students to employer expectations, and by providing feedback to the students.

Very important thing to remember is that it is impossible to achieve the relevance of vocational education to the needs of the labour market without the support and involvement of employers. During the last few years employers behaviour has totally changed. They' ve become more and more active in the implementation of the vocational training process. They also present an attitude of involvement in cooperation of creating curriculum of the universities.

The new quality of policy in this case shows that the main issue is to promote dialog between employers, employees and universities. It is intended to establish similar stand about interrelations of the expectations.

Work has begun on professional standards the development of which is impossible without the participation of employers. In essence, the professional standard is an agreement covering a certain period of time between employers and educators on the content of work to be done by those employed in a certain profession and the required skills and knowledge. More wisdom and openmindet employers try to participate in qualifying exam commissions, evaluating the knowledge and practical skills of students of vocational education establishments. However, vocational education establishments often have difficulty in providing practical training, therefore there is a need for greater support on the part of employers in hosting training placements for students.

In order to ensure the existence of vocational training which fully meets the needs of the labour market, it is necessary to involve both the state and employers in the implementation. Currently the modernisation of training facilities and the provision of the training process at vocational education establishments is not at all as rapid and of a level to satisfy the demands placed on it.

In the last few years Polish citizens became highly respected workers in the European labour market. More and more employers, especially from Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, France and Scandinavian countries employ preferably Polish workers who have motivation to work, high qualifications and relatively low costs of work which make them more and more attractive for the employers. In accordance with information and data come from governmental entity – Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency (PAIiIZ), the structure of Polish society is one of the key factors that make Poland very attractive place for investment. In 2006

PAIiIZ commissioned a survey among foreign investors who together employ over one million Polish workers. The survey showed the most important factors lying behind Poland's attractiveness to be the youth, ambitiousness and high skills of its society.

Poland has the largest working population in Central Europe. It is also one of the youngest populations on the continent:

- 50% of the Polish society is under the age of 34 years
- and 35% is under 25 years of age.

This means that about 13 million young and well-educated people will enter the labour market in the near future. The unemployment rate, which reached about 14% at the end of 2006, has a positive impact on the availability of labour for foreign companies and makes it easy for investors to find the right employees.

Foreign investors rate highly the skills and commitment of Polish employees. In many cases the Polish subsidiaries of foreign companies were judged to be the most effective units worldwide according to their management. A survey commissioned by PAIiIZ in 2006 found that:

- 99% of chief executives of foreign companies had a positive opinion on Polish managers qualifications saying that they are good or very good
- 98% of executives surveyed expressed similar opinions on specialists
- and 95% of respondents assessed the support specialists as good or very good

For young Poles higher education is becoming increasingly commonplace. In 2005 Polish higher schools provided education more than 1.8 million students. In the same year over 340,000 people graduated from colleges and universities, four times as many graduates in 2002 as there had been in 1992.

In addition, over 350,000 people graduate from basic and secondary vocational schools each year, so finding the right employees with the appropriate level of qualifications for any position in a company is easy for investors.