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Introduction

The fourth issue of our Bulletin offers a sort of summary of the DARE 2¹ project during whose implementation we have had ample opportunities to talk to researchers and business people from various European countries. The key leitmotif of such meetings has been disability and using the potential of persons with disabilities in knowledge-based societies organised in a modern fashion.

This time has brought exchanges of experiences and discussions leading to many conclusions as well as fascinating comparisons presented in this publication. Clearly visible are differences between countries and ways of thinking rooted in specific cultural contexts. Another clear distinction is when disability is seen as a theme belonging to corporate social responsibility and when it lies in the domain of philanthropy.

Such differences are vital for the ability to have an unhindered view of the problem in case. In this Bulletin, however, we decided to focus more on what connects academics and business people, those with and without disabilities, from large and smaller enterprises, from the public and private sectors. It is about the need or willingness to acquire up-to-date and reliable knowledge about disability so as to create a better “society of tomorrow”, as Gerard Lefranc nicely put it in the interview published here.

¹ DARE 2: the acronym for *Disability Awareness – a New Challenge for Employees*. Detailed information can be found on the project webpage www.DareProject.eu.

Disability is a subject of special social importance as it concerns around 10% of Europeans, and including issues faced by elderly persons, whose number is growing, the group is even larger. We should not marginalise it not just because of human reasons, but also economic. If we fail to support these people actively and on the basis of their potential, we will still have to bear the cost of the social consequences of disability in the taxes we pay.

The way to reduce social exclusion is comprehensive and thorough education, which can and should bring effective jobs for persons with disabilities. This is where a space opens up for cooperation between universities and business. All the people have been, are or one day will be disabled to a greater or lesser degree and so the problem concerns everybody, which is why building an efficient system for the rehabilitation, education and employment of persons with disabilities seems to be one of the most important challenges for united Europe.

Goals, priorities, the European policy and national policies are big talk after all and maybe it is life stories told by specific people that speak most loudly to us. Such persons have been invited to talk about disability in the social context. These are people with and without disabilities, taking important decisions and working in their own companies, researchers and entrepreneurs. They share a passion for acting for a better society. Obviously, they are not all the people who could be asked about this, but it so happens that we enjoy good cooperation with these people or someone told us about them. We are going to persistently look for other heroes, new voices to contribute to the future issues of the Bulletin. For now we are happy that through such personal stories a clear picture emerges – through experiencing or coming in contact with the challenge of disability we can together improve disability awareness. This, in

turn, marks an important step towards building a more tolerant society, showing solidarity towards weaker and excluded groups, not dooming anyone to the societal margin because of his/her disability, skin colour, nationality and many other important features still too frequently considered as “otherness” rather than as richness and diversity.

That is why I am proud of having had the privilege to lead a disability awareness improving project, as a result of which modern training courses for university teachers, public administrators and company managers have been developed. My joy is even greater now that we know that thanks to a positive decision taken by the European Commission we will be able to continue such activities for another two years in a project called DARE-Learning.

Ireneusz Bialek

Chief Coordinator at the Jagiellonian University Disability Support Service

DARE 2 Project Coordinator

The Social Model, a Modern Approach to Disability

Malgorzata Perdeus, equal opportunities specialist

The modern understanding of disability has emerged as a reaction against the medical model focusing on the bodily impairment of the individual rather than his/her potential despite sometimes considerable disability. The medical approach thus assumes the worse position of disabled people in society as an entirely natural consequence of the limitations imposed on the individual by their biological limitations. It is only after good health has been restored that equal opportunities in social life may prevail between disabled and non-disabled people. However, in cases when improvement in health to the level perceived as normal for any given community is not possible, the person in question should receive assistance and support but his/her inability to participate in social life on an equal footing with non-disabled persons should not be treated as discrimination.

This way of thinking was found unacceptable by the disabled community in the USA and the United Kingdom. These two countries have been pioneers in introducing comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, which has had a major impact upon changes in thinking about disability prevailing thus far.

The modern understanding of disability is described using various models, most quoted being the social model prevalent in the United

Kingdom and the minority model popular in the USA. They may differ as regards their philosophical roots, the social context in which they are implemented or methods of solving particular disability-related problems, yet they share the conviction that

- disability is a result of interaction between a person manifesting some features (like ill health) and the physical, social or cultural environment surrounding him/her;
- disability is not equivalent to dependence;
- disability does not entail loss of one's potential, productivity, ability to make a contribution to social life;
- disability is a part of human life, and
- there are many more differences between disabled people than between people in general.

The opposition between the old and new understanding of disability has been spelt out clearly in the Madrid Declaration, adopted by representatives of organisations acting on behalf of disabled people on the eve of the European Year of People with Disabilities. It reads as follows:

Our vision can best be described as a contrast between this new vision and the old vision it seeks to replace:

- a) Away from disabled people as objects of charity and towards disabled people as rights holders;
- b) Away from people with disabilities as patients and towards people with disabilities as independent citizens and consumers;
- c) Away from professionals taking decisions on behalf of disabled people and towards independent decision making and taking responsibilities by disabled people and their organisations on issues which concern them;
- d) Away from a focus on merely individual impairments and towards removing barriers, revising social norms, policies, cultures and promoting a supportive and accessible environment;
- e) Away from labelling people as dependants or unemployable and towards an emphasis on ability and the provision of active support measures;

- f) Away from designing economic and social processes for the few and towards designing a flexible world for the many;
- g) Away from unnecessary segregation in education, employment and other spheres of life and towards integration of disabled people into the mainstream;
- h) Away from disability policy as an issue that affects special ministries only and towards inclusion of disability policy as an overall government responsibility.

(Madrid, 20–24 March 2002)

Such an approach makes a challenge for disabled people themselves and the rest of society, but it is not impossible to put it into practice. What is more, an even partial implementation of that model brings major benefits to society as a whole, in the form of gradual shrinking of the welfare zone replaced by active participation of disabled people in social life. This takes place mainly through education in its broadest scope and work on the open labour market. Additionally, the enhanced presence of disabled people in various aspects of social life results in a more open attitude of fellow citizens towards their problems, as well as bringing more tolerance and diversity in society.

Moving away from treating persons with disabilities like objects towards models based on empowerment is anchored in the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted on 13 December 2006 and ratified by many countries of the world, including the European Union.

You Are Entitled to Exercise Full Rights As Citizens of Our Country

An interview with Professor Irena Lipowicz,
the Polish Ombudsman



Professor Irena Lipowicz,
the Polish Ombudsman of the sixth parliamentary term (photo by Panek)

In 1976, Irena Lipowicz graduated with honours from the Faculty of Law and Administration of the University of Silesia. She became an assistant academic teacher and then an associate professor at the Faculty of Law of the University of Silesia. In 1981, she acquired the title of the Doctor of Law. Since 1980, Irena Lipowicz has been a member of “Solidarność”, Trade Union and she was a founding member of its Upper Silesian division. Between 1991–2002, a Sejm deputy; she was a member of the Constitutional Committee of the National Assembly which drafted the Constitution of 1997.

In 1992 the title of Doctor Habilitatus was given to her. Since 1997, she has chaired the Local Self – Government Committee of the Sejm; she was a deputy chairman of the Freedom Union Parliamentary Club as well as of the parliamentary assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); she was also a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Since 1998, she has been a professor of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw; currently she holds the position of the head of its Administration Law and Local Self-Government Department.

Between 2000 and 2004, she held the office of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Poland to Austria. From 2004 to 2006, she served as the Ambassador – Representative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Polish – German relations. She was a member of the College of the Supreme Audit Office for the years 2005–2010. In the period between 2006 and 2010 she was a professor at Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities. Between 2008 and 2010, she was a member of the Committee on Legal Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Between 2008 and 2010, she held the

office of managing director of the Foundation for Polish – German Cooperation.

She was awarded with the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta. Her other awards include the Edward J. Wende award in law and the award of Grzegorz Palka for the services rendered to local self-government.

In 2009, awarded the degree of Doctor honoris causa by the Osnabrück University. She was also awarded the Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold for the Services to the Republic of Austria, the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as decorations of the provinces of Styria and of Upper Austria.

On 10th June 2010, Professor Irena Lipowicz was appointed by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland as the Human Rights Defender (Ombudsman). On 8th July, the Senate of the Republic of Poland granted the consent for her appointment. On 21st July, Professor Irena Lipowicz took an oath in front of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, in its 6th term of office.

Ireneusz Białek: At the start of our conversation I would like to ask whether you had come across disability issues before taking over the office of the Ombudsman, and the reason why I am asking this question is that in Poland there is still a thick wall dividing the world of disabled persons and the rest of society.

Prof. Irena Lipowicz: Once I used to be a cub scout (brownie) instructor and among brownies' packs there was an action called "The Unblazed Trail". These were brownie camps and holidays for disabled children, mostly with Down's syndrome – such events were, at that time, an absolute avant-garde. I was not on the Unblazed Trail team but I did

take part in the classes and camps for disabled children. This allowed me to experience the challenge of disability quite early.

And thanks to my colleague, who is a specialist in autism, I got familiar with this problem, too. I remember how shocked I was when she told me that she had a meeting with the mothers of these children; I wanted to correct her saying that perhaps she had meant “mothers and fathers” – then she explained to me with sadness that “many fathers leave, abandoning their families when the child’s disability is really serious, but mothers usually do not leave their children”. These examples from various periods of my life had a very big influence on my perception of the problem of disability.

Your predecessors at this post also took up such topics, yet the current actions are really interesting and varied. Is this the result of your wider scope of interest in disability as a social challenge?

I am supported in my actions by a team of experts in the field of disability, as I do not feel to be an expert myself, although I do have a sense of legitimacy of many undertaken actions.

The priority which we opt for, must neither be a general nor political one. If we choose some priority, we must select appropriate measures for its execution and define the problem in a correct manner. In a large sea of human miseries and situations in which the office of the Defender tries to help everyone, many issues concern disabled persons. These are the things that have already been done. I was not the one to start actions in this area. But choosing the priority means that we must try to define what the largest problem for this particular group of people is. There are some areas which have already been specified. First of all, the problem that has been defined, concerns a silent approval of discrimination. There is

a general feeling that if there is a special fund in our country, if there are people on wheelchairs in the streets, if children with Down's syndrome have come forward and there are disabled members of Parliament, a giant progress has already been made and we do not have to expect anything more. The awareness that disabled and elderly persons are the largest discriminated group in our society is still absent from the general perception. The objective of the measures undertaken by the Defender is to activate this awareness, to influence social sensitivity and to put these issues in sharp focus. The priority was therefore to organise a team of experts, to listen to their opinions and to think what, apart from an average reaction to human complains, we can do together. My role is not only to participate in conferences, though this is equally important, but I would also like a progress in the social approach to disability to be noticeable after the end of my term in office.

On what assumptions should this progress be based? Poland seems to be in the transition period between the old and the new model of thinking about disability. Many European countries have been successful in the implementation of the social model. You mentioned the National Disabled Persons' Rehabilitation Fund (PFRON) as a social fund – how would you place this institution in the target system?

The Fund has really caused some breakthrough in the sense that, for the first time, some concrete money was assigned for disabled persons. I must add that I am against such specific funds, as they are easily “distorted”. Such a problem concerns for example the fund for combating alcohol problems – this money is frequently inappropriately used. Some stagnation and incorrectness also occurred in the PFRON

[National Disabled Persons' Rehabilitation Fund]. In particular I have in mind all the misuse of this money done by some group of entrepreneurs who kept encouraging elderly people, whom they wanted to employ, let us say as security officers, to be classified as disabled first and then they would be admitted to work. What was supposed to be a real assistance, functioned as its opposite. The employers who realised what financial gains they might have, began to manipulate this group of employees, so this artificially enlarged notion of "light disability" led to the overuse of PFRON resources. Luckily enough, some correction of regulations was made thanks to parliamentary actions, but still some heated dispute is revolving around this problem. As the Ombudsman I do not have legislative initiative, yet, thanks to my experts, I could point to some areas in which the fund requires special supervision. To make myself clear – I am not an advocate of doing away with the fund, especially now during the financial depression. The needs of the state are such that without some assigned resources for the disabled persons, the expenditure of this type would quickly be abolished. The Fund should, however, operate within the framework of the modern social model, which accompanies the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Poland has signed the Convention, but four years have passed and the Convention still has not been ratified. As the office of the Ombudsman, we have celebrated the fourth "birthday" of signing this document, gathering many social actors and we posed the question: when will the works on the ratification begin? We made it in demonstrative way, as the administration told us that the works had been stopped. Now they have been renounced, as we managed to activate the parliament and the government to do so. I believe that the ratification of the Convention

will be the best mechanism which will speed up the implementation of the modern model of social support in Poland.

Since it is so difficult to ratify a very modern document, as far as its message is concerned and which guarantees disabled persons equal participation in social life, this process might be accompanied by some serious concerns. What concerns are these?

There is a common belief that we cannot afford the ratification, as the Convention's requirements are very strict. I tried to analyse some fragments of it – for instance the problem of universal design. I took part in a conference of specialists in this area. It turns out that this issue is not so much related to new financial resources, but it rather deals with a different and more modern training of architects and also with social awareness. What matters as well is the promotion of employment of disabled persons. Since I came here we have been paying attention to the employment of disabled workers. The penalties paid in this respect by employers used to be treated as necessary evil. They paid fines, but still failed to employ disabled workers. Currently, some staff with mild or moderate level of disability are employed in our office. But some time ago I wanted for the first time to employ a very good young disabled lawyer, who – in spite of having all the qualifications and certificates – could not find any job. He had a very severe disability, but I wanted him to be employed with us and work on the hotline. To create a post for him, to meet to all the administrative requirements resulting from a discovery that our toilets were not adapted for the use by disabled persons – and such an employee must use the toilet, too – took us a year. Please note that if it was so difficult to finalise this employment in an office of more than 250 employees and with some experience in overcoming

bureaucratic obstacles, determined to reach this goal, how can the same process look like in an average company? Thus it is necessary to change procedures, attitudes, to invest in thinking and to increase the awareness of the problems related to disability.

How can this be done?

The actions should be taken on all levels. I am always glad to accept the proposal of a patronage of interesting initiatives. One of them, for example, was the “tunnel of experiences” for local governments. People without disabilities were walking through a tunnel in which they could experience the situations and limitations that disabled persons encounter on everyday basis. This was organised in a form of an adventure, but each commune head or mayor who had gone through such a tunnel, changed many things in the community and introduced some facilities for disabled persons.

During the last Woodstock Festival we had a “civil rights tent” with a ballot box hanging very high and young people wearing special glasses impairing their ability to see had to throw their votes into this ballot box. They could experience what the persons with blindness or visual impairment experience every day.

Speaking of social awareness, there are some new challenges in Poland – we have a new category of citizens: people 80+. Some time ago, people would not live until this age and the state is not ready to accommodate them. A similar situation concerns persons with chronic diseases, with cancer or SM². Such people generally want to go on working and thus the legislation must be made more flexible so that they could have some benefits, breaks at work and amenities which will allow them to stay

² From Latin *sclerosis multiplex*, multiple sclerosis.

active, to contribute to the life of society and generate domestic product. I would like to deal with the problems of these people as well. I think however, that the real social change may only occur thanks to large social campaigns which are possible with the involvement of business as there is no state institution (in particular with budgetary situation similar to ours) which has the resources to maintain such a campaign. I think that all entrepreneurs should ponder upon such a question – “can they name anything as their achievement in actions for the people with disabilities within the framework of corporate social responsibility?”.

In Poland entrepreneurs still perceive disability through the perspective of charity actions, whilst Western companies treat it as a chance to invest in diversity creating a good corporate image.

I think that this is one of the key issues which we are facing now: the change of philosophy and approach to disability. I will use an example here. As the representatives of Silesia in the Polish Parliament, we once faced a dilemma. On the one hand, we wanted to attract investments to Silesia and, with this purpose in mind, we had to present our region getting away from the stereotypes of harmed people and poverty of the “black” Silesia. It was evident that if without going beyond these stereotypes, we would not attract any investors. And, at the same time, in order to gain resources for the people in especially difficult situation, it was necessary to concentrate on the most neglected areas.

A similar problem concerns disability. Many foundations, in order to gain this one per cent of the taxes, want to evoke the largest compassion of society. Therefore they would show the tragedies of disabled persons, their poverty and exclusion – it is all true however. But, paradoxically, this solidifies the stereotype within society. Western countries were successful

in solving this dilemma and now they show disability as some different state of existence which does not exclude further education, work, involvement, happiness and enjoying life. This revolution in thinking is still ahead of us and no state institution will solve this problem for us.

What could be the role of universities in such a revolution?

I think that universities could create some sense of new normality. This means that it is normal that we have disabled colleagues, students or academics. That it is normal that they participate in the academic life together with us and that we accept the limitations of others, knowing that such limitations may sometime concern us, too. That we understand how much disabled persons may contribute to social life.

What is of special importance is the awareness of the young generation. When today's students become, for example, architects in future, we want them to make universal designs. If they become teachers, we want them to have a modern approach to the needs of disabled students. If they are business people, we want them to employ disabled persons and to be aware to their needs. Universities have a large social impact, so they can organise conferences for entrepreneurs, teachers or social administration. Such events at the Jagiellonian or Warsaw University may become an avant-garde of the awareness changes. It is also important that these events should attract teachers of secondary and primary schools.

At our conferences there are more and more teachers from such schools every year. Such events at the Jagiellonian University are always free of charge for them. What would you say to all these people who act for more participation of people with disabilities

in social life, irrespectively of the institution which they represent in these actions?

I would like to say that one frequently speaks of the “problem” of people with disabilities, whereas these people are our chance and potential, but not a problem. This is the way in which we should think about it in Poland. The impact of creativity, involvement, work for others which people with disabilities can contribute into society is immense.

You have the right to be here. You have the right to be full citizens of our country. You have the right to protest when you are harmed. If state institutions do not want to listen to you, please turn to the Defender of Human Rights.

Thank you.



A meeting of the Expert Commission on Disability at the Office of the Polish Ombudsman on 10 March 2011
(photo contributed by the Office of the Polish Ombudsman)

Inclusive Education As a Challenge for the Social Model

An interview with Simoni Symeonidou from the University of Cyprus in Nicosia

Simoni Symeonidou

Is a lecturer at the Education Faculty at the University of Cyprus in Nicosia. She holds academic titles from the University of Cyprus (BA in elementary education), the University of Manchester (MA in specific educational needs and development) as well as the University of Cambridge (PhD in teaching). She is involved in programmes promoting inclusive education. She has authored many international publications. The main area of her research is the history and practice of inclusive education in Cyprus and other countries, as well as any programmes and models of approaching education of persons with disabilities.

Agata Stawska: I will begin this conversation with a fairly obvious question: is there an equivalent of the Disability Support Service of the Jagiellonian University at the University of Cyprus in Nicosia?

Simoni Symeonidou: Yes, there is such a service and it is called Disability Support Unit, so the name is very similar. It deals both with



Simoni Symeonidou
(Photo by. M. Bylica)

the recruitment of students and a support for them during their studies. At the beginning, such a support was provided mainly by the persons responsible for it within the university faculties; now the decisions and guidelines concerning the support come from the unit and then they are directed to the faculties. At each faculty there are persons who are engaged as the assistants for disabled students – they help them in making notes and finding bibliographic material. The Unit co-ordinates everything that concerns the faculties and the teaching staff, integrating the system and providing the financial background. The Unit also employs psychologists and social workers. All the persons responsible for logistics and office

work also have their seat here, as the students contact the Unit first in order to leave their data.

In your academic work you deal with three models concerning the education of people with disabilities: segregation, integration and inclusion. Which of them is the most adequate with regards to universities? Does their application in practice depend on the type of disability?

Every university should definitely pursue the inclusive model, yet we see that the way to achieve it, is an ongoing process. We are at the integration stage, but each new adaptation brings us closer to the ideal, being inclusive education. The university which meets these criteria must be a very diversified academic institution, where each instance of being different is approved, where all the staff know everything about human rights and where all the buildings are adapted for various needs and so are the curricula. This is a great challenge for a university, especially given the fact how many people are working to achieve this goal – academic teachers, employees of the teaching departments and of such units as the Disability Support Unit. Thanks to their joint work, they can make the creation of an inclusive university much easier. But there is still a long way ahead of us with the largest obstacle being the stereotypes concerning disability. As long as we are unaware of the possibilities of disabled people, as long as we ask questions about what they cannot do instead of asking what they can; disabled persons themselves will avoid inclusion and keep outside. They need incentive and training and then we will be able to move on.

Inclusion and integration sound similar, yet I have a feeling that these two terms are opposite or even conflicting with each other.

No, I do not believe that they are opposite, but the word “integration” is burdened with many negative meanings, for example in Cyprus some adequate regulations were introduced in 1999, but we had started integration already 10 years before that. We simply brought disabled students to average schools, but the teachers then were not prepared for such a challenge and they did not know what to do, how to differentiate teaching and how to behave towards such pupils. It was required from the students to adapt themselves to the existing teaching system and conditions. In such circumstances, integration was a failure. We had many problems at schools and we still have them. Given this state of affairs, there is a common belief that integration does not work. Inclusion in education is a different idea. This means creation of schools on a completely new background – training teachers, training administration workers, accepting all students thanks to the application of inclusive solution. This is a much more radical action than integration – this is a further step towards the change of the paradigm in thinking of disability towards a new social model; this is another idea, completely different than the previous ones.

You are talking about the creation of something completely new and this must be a very difficult process. How does inclusive education work in Cyprus?

The University of Cyprus is relatively young; it is less than one decade old and this is the amount of experience that it has, so it is easier to introduce new solutions in adaptations. We are building a new campus which, I hope, will be more accessible than the previous one. We are also

introducing more flexible curriculum which will depend on the needs. We are training teaching staff so that the inclusive approach could be more universal. I believe that Disability Support Unit plays its role in this process – certainly my colleagues from the teaching department are also involved in these works; teaching staff as well are doing a lot in this respect.

Thank you.

The interview was held in July 2010 on the occasion of a DARE 2 Quality Management Group meeting.

It Is the Student's Decision that Counts

An interview with Fabienne Corre-Menguy, Head of the Disability Support Service at the Pierre and Marie Curie University in Paris

Fabienne Corre-Menguy

Obtained PhD degree in biology-physiology and molecular biology in 1995 (at UPMC³) – post PhD position in the years 1995–1997 (CEA – Centre étude Energie Atomique⁴). Lecturer and researcher at the Pierre and Marie Curie University in Paris since 1997. In the years 1997–2008 he held lectures in molecular biology and genetics. Since 2000, she has conducted actions for disabled students: lectures and individual classes in biology at the UPMC's Disability Service. In 2004, on her initiative, a course was opened for all university students, entitled “Awareness of disability/Integration of disabled students – support methods”.

In the years 2008–2010, she lectured in molecular biology and genetics. Presently, head of the Disability Service at UPMC. Among the most interesting initiatives of the Service one must list an agreement with large companies on promoting academic achievements of disabled students and their inclusion in professional life. (2009–2012). Member

³ UPMC – Université Pierre et Marie Curie (Pierre and Marie Curie University)

⁴ CEA – French: Nuclear Power Educational Centre

of expert groups for support to disabled persons for the French Ministry of Higher Education, French Ministry of Education, and Inter-Ministry Disability Consortium.



Fabienne Corre-Menguy
(Photo by P. Kitmaker)

Agata Stawska: I would like to talk about the Pierre and Marie Curie University in Paris, in particular about the support it offers to disabled students. My first question, however, is: what do you do at the University?

Fabienne Corre-Menguy: UPMC is a technical and medical university, and I am an academic teacher, I lecture on biology. Seven years ago I also got involved in the organisation of support for disabled students. At first, I held classes in biology for disabled persons, later on I decided I wanted to do more in this area. I started organising academic work for disabled students, I taught them how to learn, how to deal with their disabilities in the university environment. And this is how I became the head of the office that is now called Disability Service. I've held this function for three years. It is rather absorbing, it does not leave the time for my own research in biology, yet I still manage to join these two functions – of a teacher and head of the office. The office where I work (the oldest, and at the same time the first of the kind in France) has been operating for twenty years and offers support to approximately 250 students.

How many disabled student are there across France?

At present, there are about 11,000 students at universities across the country. This data refers to universities only, which there are 70; we do not know, however, how many students get education in higher schools. Pierre and Marie Curie University is a university educating one of the largest groups of disabled students. Perhaps, there are even more of them, yet the students have no obligation to address the Service. Among the ones we work with, there are persons with various disabilities: related to sight, hearing, and motion. A large group is formed by students with chronic diseases, which, practically, cause educational problems equivalent to disabilities and thus can be treated in a similar way. Among the persons using the support of the Service, 20% are persons with dyslexia, which has also been considered by the French law as disability, and, unfortunately, an increasing percentage of students with mental health difficulties.

How do students with mental health difficulties cope with education at the Pierre and Marie Curie University?

This group is very difficult to provide help to. I admit, the problem is on the rise. For such students, the most important thing is the time, namely appropriate planning of the material to be learnt, as this is usually their biggest problem. We also offer additional corrective classes. Some students find this sufficient, others, unfortunately, don't, yet the problem is there and it is a great challenge to us. We are preparing a programme dedicated to such particular students. We want to carry it out in cooperation with enterprises, such as banks, for which this problem also becomes serious.

What is the standard support for students who address the Service?

As I have mentioned, the very existence of the Service does not impose any obligations on ill students or disabled ones. If they address us, we analyse their situation and specific requirements, considering the field of studies and their individual plans for life. Such an analysis is performed together with the student within our office, and every student may count on a team of people dealing with his or her case, which also includes a doctor and a lecturer of one of the classes selected by the student. They all agree on an individual educational plan, comprising the support of a consultant, technical support, namely the use of e.g. a computer, or other equipment assisting in education, as well as organisation of classes adjusted to the needs and capabilities of the student. This may involve reduction of the number of mandatory classes per year with their simultaneous allocation in time (in the span of several years). Course curricula are not subject to any modifications. Students in need are simply given more time. When the plan is ready, the Service deals with its implementation. At this stage, we cooperate with some lecturers who are sensitive to the specific

requirements of disabled persons, there is also a place here for the sign language interpreter. The Service also has equipment available which can be lent to students.

Is the problem of employing disabled persons reflected in French legislation?

In 2005, a new law was introduced in France, which makes life easier for persons with disabilities at all their fields of activity. Previously, such persons also received support, yet this was rather in the form of benefit or pension. Now, owing to the new regulations, this is a measure more in line with the concept of personal choice of such people, respecting their individual plans and making them come true. The same, of course, refers to students. According to the new law, the students may choose whatever they want from the university's offer, and the task of our Service is to allow them for that choice. It is the student's decision that principally matters here. Such a policy has changed a lot in the social way of thinking, in perceiving disability not just at the level of education, but also on all the fields of activity in life. Before the introduction of the new regulations, universities could organise support strategies within their structures, now they are obliged to do so by the law. The first recommendation of the law is to improve access to education, to promote the inclusive education model at all the levels of education. The other refers to the activation of the labour market for disabled graduates.

How is the new law reflected in financial regulations, how does it work on the practical and economic side?

The money for activities of the Service comes from three sources: first – from the university itself (the university pays for the work of 5

persons employed at the Service), second – from the Ministry of Higher Education, which is a direct consequence of introducing the new law. All who take active part in the so-called human support (persons directly involved in the work with the student, teachers, interpreters, etc.) are paid for from ministerial funds. The third source of financing includes companies and businesses obliged by the new law to employ disabled persons. In companies employing over 20 employees, disabled persons should constitute 6% of total employment. If this legal requirement is not met, the enterprise shall be subject to a fine of 7,000 euros (per each disabled person who has not been employed). Such money is transferred at the account of Agefiph⁵ governmental organisation, and then allocated for activities related to the employment of disabled persons. There is also another possibility – a company may enter into agreement with Agefiph (this mainly refers to larger companies) that the amount shall not be transferred to the state organisation, but can be used for similar purposes by the company itself. Such agreements contain several sections that also refer to higher education and promotion of employment of disabled graduates. Hence our cooperation with businesses, namely another source of financing.

Do such regulations only refer to private companies?

Agefiph is an organisation that collects money from private companies, but there is also Fiph – organisation that deals with the public sector.

⁵Agefiph – the French equivalent of the Polish National Disabled Persons' Rehabilitation Fund. The organisation gathers funds from penalties imposed on entrepreneurs who do not employ disabled people. It has the right to conclude contracts with employers wishing to keep the funds in their companies and allocate them for the purposes strictly related to the increased employment of disabled persons within their businesses. In Poland, it is not possible to keep such funds in a company (editor's note).

They both act according to a similar principle, and also the general rule as regards the percentage of disabled persons employed is the same for private and public companies.

In other words, owing to the possibility of entering into an agreement, the money from that company may be channelled directly to the university. Is that right?

Yes, but one has to remember that this is just one of the sections in the agreement, so just one of the opportunities for using such money. The company may also use another option, and allocate such funds for rehabilitation or measures aimed at the improvement of the situation of its own disabled workers.

Let us talk about the other side of this solution, about the pessimistic, yet possible scenario. What happens when the company obliged to employ disabled persons is not satisfied with their work or, for example, cannot offer such jobs?

This may happen, and then there is also opportunity to cooperate with companies that are adjusted to employ disabled persons (protected enterprise⁶). Let us imagine a situation where company A has no jobs to entrust to disabled persons, but must purchase materials necessary for its own operation; in such a case, it may purchase them from company B that employs people with disabilities. Such a solution is also a form of turning the aforementioned fine into a specific measure that brings benefit to both parties. Such expenses must comprise at least half of the amount envisaged by the law, the other half must be transferred to Agefiph or directly to the beneficiary under an agreement.

⁶ The equivalent of the Polish protected market (editor's note)

Apart from the financial ones, what are the benefits of such a legal solution?

Companies increasingly engage in the issues of disabled persons, they are increasingly aware of the needs of the university in this respect, which, in turn, results in financial security for our activities. Owing to this, we can afford various projects.

So, can such a system be considered a certain type of investment in young people?

Yes, the money may go to schools and universities. Since 2005, at the French universities, there are disability services that are in good relations with one another. We exchange experiences, and one of the common goals is to work out standards for educational support.

The University is also a place where opinions and attitudes are shaped. As such, does the institution get involved in the general debate on disability?

An important measure undertaken by our service is to improve the social awareness of disability. One of the ways to achieve this, similarly as DARE projects, involves organisation of training for academic teachers and administration workers. I have been running such courses since 2008. They comprise two days devoted to theoretical classes and practical workshops. The course allows for understanding various disabilities and for selecting the best methods of work with such students, while the effects of such training are rather satisfactory.

What is the interest in such courses among the academics?

About 80% of all university employees take part. I have high support of the rector for such activities. After completion of the course, the participants obtain certificates with which they can document the newly acquired skills. Since 2004, we have been organising similar courses also for students, preparing them to meet disabled colleagues during their studies. Such courses can be selected as an option by every student of any department or field of study, and are given credits for as in the case of other university courses. They last for 30 hours, of which 15 are lectures on the specificity of disability, legal regulations, social situation and the change of the way of thinking. Further 15 hours are devoted to practical skills – assisting disabled students at the university. It is among the course participants that we recruit our human support workers, as well as persons involved in the work with disabled students of secondary schools. Such measure is to promote the idea of studying among secondary school students and to encourage them to overcome barriers. Every year, we organise an Open Day at the university, devoted to disability. This is also an occasion for our students to take active part in the operation of the Service. They have the task to work on one of seven topics, namely propose, in the form of written paper, the method of dealing with a disabled student or graduate in various academic and life situations. In this way, we build the awareness of disability both among students, as well as among university employees and lecturers. We have plans of similar courses for managers and business employees.

Thank you.

The interview was held in July 2010 on the occasion of a DARE 2 Quality Management Group meeting at the office of the Jagiellonian University Disability Support Service.

Managers of the Future

An interview with Gerard Lefranc, Director of Mission Insertion, a Thales department in charge of disability policy

Gerard Lefranc

As an electronics and software engineer from I.S.E.N in France Gerard Lefranc has vast management experience at Thales Group in various areas:

- specialist software for users with disabilities
- intellectual property
- human resources

He is currently in charge of the management of the policy for employing persons with disabilities at Thales Group. The policy's main axes are:

- recruitment of persons with disabilities (currently 1,500 persons with disabilities at Thales France Units)
- development of support programmes aimed at retaining jobs by persons with disabilities
- implementation of disability awareness programmes for Thales Group managers
- cooperation with Thales Group subcontractors as regards the implementation of the policy for the employment of persons with disabilities at entreprise adaptée businesses

- improvement of the professional qualifications of disabled university students.

Participating in a French Government initiative aimed at supporting school pupils and university students in finding employment Gerard represents the corporate interest. He used to be president of the normalisation committee, which developed French regulations (AFNOR) concerning “requirements and recommendations concerning the integration of persons with disabilities in organisations”. He is also a Thales project manager in charge of projects focusing on the development of technological tools for persons with disabilities.

Ireneusz Białek: What does Thales do?



Gerard Lefranc
(photo contributed by Thales)

Gerard Lefranc: The key areas of the company's operations are defence systems, systems for civil and military aviation, satellites and radars, as well as railway traffic control systems. The company employs around 35 thousand people in France and as many elsewhere across the globe.

Since when have you been with the company and what did you do before becoming Director of Mission Insertion?

I have been with Thales Group for as many as 37 years. I started off as an engineer and managed a team developing software for defence systems. After fifteen years, I moved on to the HR department where I was in charge of three centres dealing with personnel and social issues. Back then I was much in touch with trade unions. I worked in the purchasing department then, in charge of rationalising the number of our suppliers and reducing the related costs. Later, I focused on copyright and patents, particularly in the area of computer software and finally the head of the HR department offered me the chief post in the Mission Insertion unit, set up at the Thales Group main office to focus on disability. Our company took this theme onboard very early on, already in 1992, and in 2002 Mission Insertion was created and I became its Director two years later.

Why did you become interested in disability?

I wanted to get back to the HR department and do something new and disability was such a new area in the company. Back then a restrictive law was adopted in France concerning employing persons with disabilities. Each company must employ at least 6% of disabled staff, failing which it pays huge penalties for the benefit of Agefiph⁷ (a state organisation

⁷ See footnote on p. 32.

collecting the penalties and funding help for the employment of people with disabilities). It is, however, possible to retain such financial resources in the company, provided they are used to develop a policy of the employment of persons with disabilities in the future. My unit is responsible for managing such funds.

Although similar rules concerning employing persons with disabilities apply in Poland, sanctions for not employing them are much lower and it is not possible to retain such financial resources in the company. Does your disability policy cover other countries like Poland, for example?

No. In countries other than France each Thales branch conducts its own policy in this area, yet I would like to achieve some degree of uniformity, as most staff of our company are employed in EU member states. That is why despite different national systems concerning disability, for instance in France and Poland, one could refer to provisions of European law or documents adopted by the European Union like the UN Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities. For now, however, at Mission Insertion we focus on more employment for persons with disabilities in France and cooperation with universities is one of the basic tools to achieve that goal.

And what is this cooperation like in practical terms?

80% of our company staff are engineers and technicians, which is why we cooperate mainly with schools educating future engineers. We invest in programmes which give students opportunities for enhancing their professional qualifications as well as programmes aiming at minimising limitations stemming from disability, for instance using

modern technologies. We have concluded agreements with universities and commit considerable financial resources to such programmes, yet it is beneficial to both sides, with university students being the prime beneficiary of the system. Such activities have a very wide scope and we want to include in our company life all the people, regardless of the type and degree of their disabilities. This is what 'Thales of tomorrow' is going to look like, an inclusive rather than exclusive company, promoting employee potential rather than focusing on employee limitations, which after all can be eliminated to a large extent by means of, for example, relevant technologies. It is a matter of the knowledge and awareness of those who make personnel-related decisions in the company. Thales wants to be a socially responsible business and fears no challenges related to it. We know, for instance, that the number of students experiencing mental-health difficulties is growing. On this, we cooperate with the Pierre and Marie Curie University (UPMC) in order to support students in their professional inclusion, so that they can work for us in the future.

Why is it so that many companies confuse corporate social responsibility with charity activities, particularly as regards disability?

They do not know the real needs of persons with disabilities and they fear whether they would make good employees. That is because of lack of knowledge and awareness amongst managerial staff. Philanthropy has been a sort of tradition since the Middle Ages and it is easier for us to practise. Social responsibility is a more demanding idea obliging one to learn on a daily basis, improve one's awareness and invest in people, in this case people with disabilities, with a long-term effect in mind. One can then expect some profit, the creation of potential. Philanthropy, in

turn, is a noble yet still sharing one's own profit with others, it is not acting together. In other words, rich people often share their money with disabled persons, but are they interested in how such people live on a daily basis? Social responsibility means learning how they function, collecting reliable knowledge and using one's potential in cooperation with disabled persons, in order to create such jobs for them that would enable them to support themselves whilst bringing profit and satisfaction to the employer.

Social responsibility is then an ambitious idea, more time-consuming, yet bringing profits larger than those from charity actions. And let us not forget that in the context of social responsibility disabled persons become a subject, whilst in terms of philanthropy they remain passive recipients of assistance. The world has changed entirely since the Middle Ages and social responsibility is much more compatible with modern times than philanthropy. If someone asks you for a fish, teach them how to catch it instead of giving a fish to them. By the same token, universities and companies should teach persons with disabilities how to catch fish. This is the essence of the cooperation between Thales Group and its partner universities.

In Poland, philanthropy has a long tradition, too. How to convince decision-makers that socially-responsible activities are more useful?

This comes from education and better awareness. The role of the school is fundamental in this regard. When I was at school, there were no persons with disabilities there, and now there are. The school, university and then company: all these institutions should take their share of responsibility for disability as a social issue, just like non-discrimination

of women, people with a different ethnic background or elderly persons. Building such a culture of approaching these problems lies in the interest of the entire society. We at Thales Group want to make sure that young engineers starting work with us know that the company implements a non-discrimination policy. Action brings action. Anyone can look at us and launch their own activities, also in Poland.

Following up on what you have just said: what joint actions can universities and companies take that are socially responsible?

First and foremost, acting well in their respective fields of responsibility. The role of the university is to provide good education for future employees and developing civil society, whilst the role of companies is the creation of jobs ensuring success for the company and comfortable life in such a society for its employees. It is in the interest of both, however, to develop a better society and this is where they can cooperate closely. People educated at university come to companies like ours and take managerial posts. If they have disability awareness, they value potential and diversity, they become ‘managers of the future’. It is just such ‘managers of the future’ that we must educate and employ in order to have a better society. ‘Managers of the future’ will be changing Europe and the world quickly.

Many people ask me about the agreement between Thales Group, the Pierre and Marie Curie University and the Jagiellonian University. A question recurs on the company’s benefits from cooperating with a Polish university. What are they in your view?

We had concluded an agreement with the UPMC at an earlier date and that is how I learnt about cooperation between the UPMC and

the Jagiellonian University in the context of the DARE 2 project. The experience you have gained on the project whilst developing a disability awareness course programme for managers is of great interest to me. I would like to use it to improve our knowledge concerning persons with disabilities at Thales Group. Additionally, we are an international company and your students may become our employees one day, they can also become ‘managers of the future’. I would also like everyone in Poland to know that Thales is a company that not only does good business with your country but is an enterprise following defined and clear operational principles as regards social responsibility.

And what would be your message to other companies, including smaller ones, as well as organisations and individuals interested in social responsibility?

I would like them to speak in various ways about what they do and share good practice in this regard. This will broaden the circle of people and institutions eager to take socially responsible action, and may even create healthy competition. This would be good for all. Law, regulations and big politics are important, but specific actions can and should be taken at each level, also local, and this is very important. Such local actions must be spoken about, their results presented at various conferences at various places. In this way more people will learn about them, and possibilities will open up for cooperation with others who do something similar, some joint ventures, and this itself makes an opportunity for making some larger social change happen.

Thank you.

The Further You Go, the Trickier It Gets

An interview with Anna Wandzel, Head of the PFRON (National Disabled Persons' Rehabilitation Fund) Branch in Katowice

Anna Wandzel

A psychologist and coach. The Head of the Division of the National Disabled Persons Rehabilitation Fund in Katowice. A graduate from the Psychology Department at the University of Silesia in Katowice and the Postgraduate School of Human Resources Management of the Warsaw School of Economics. A student of the PhD studies in the Department of Social Studies at the University of Silesia. She cooperated with the Jagiellonian University on international EU projects such as HEAT, SUN, IDOL and DARE. As an external expert she participated in the validation of projects as part of the Equal programme. In 2002–2008, she was a consultant for disabled students at the University of Silesia. A consultant of the Polish Senate during the works on the changes to the legislation concerning professional and social rehabilitation of disabled people. A member of the workgroup developing the Strategy of the Social Policy for the Silesian Voivodeship for the years 2006–2020.



Anna Wandzel (photo by M. Bylica)

Ireneusz Białek: What is the nature of your disability?

Anna Wandzel: It's chondrodystrophy which is underdevelopment of long bones and the course of the illness varies from person to person. In my case it means very short stature. The difference in height between me and my friends became pronounced in the 3rd and 4th forms of primary school. Other children were growing rapidly while in my case this process was inhibited. My childhood years were filled with a constant search for doctors, an attempt to understand the situation. The development of long bones in my legs resulted in an abnormal curving... God proved to be very imaginative and the doctors said that in my variety of the illness the thigh bone and the shinbone could grow together and the space between knee joints was too small, which meant that there was no cartilage and the distance between the bones was not proper. What is

more, the shinbone developed faster than the long bone and because of that some deformations in the leg occurred. As a child I found it harder to walk, I got tired more easily, I couldn't catch up with my friends and all this got worse. When I was fourteen, that is at the time when a young person looks for peer acceptance in a group, I was excluded from it.

My parents found a professor who implemented the Illizarov method, which consisted in lengthening of the long bones. In my case the doctor decided not to lengthen the bones, but the joint. I had an apparatus fixed and it was stretching the space between the joints. For four years I was immobilized, I could not lie on my side or in the prone position. It was a period of growth and as a result of being constantly in this lying position I developed scoliosis. One thing was fixed, another one deformed. This is the nature of my disability.

So you didn't get up for four years at all?

I didn't. I got bedridden in the 7th form of primary school and stood up in the 3rd form of secondary school. This is a period when everybody goes to parties, has first dates, relationships; young people go to the cinema, experiment in diverse ways on different trips, have adventures while I spent this time at home immobilized and not being able to get up. When I finally stood up I feared that my bones would crack. I was oversensitive about my skeletal system, but it proved to be stable. My feet hurt because the skin there was so delicate that I couldn't tolerate any contact with the ground. Now, from the perspective of my education (I am a psychologist by profession) I may say that the time I spent at home lying in my bed is the most important period when a peer group is of such significance; we discover ourselves, meet challenges. Although neither mobile phones nor the Internet existed, I was not completely

isolated from the world. My friends came to me and I participated in a teenage life through their eyes. Still, I was at home, bedridden. Right now when I'm talking about it, it is beyond me how I coped.

I was afraid of people at that time. I feared how they would perceive me. I was afraid of self-reflection in a more distant social contact, as I remember myself in relations with others as a child, and after four years I felt and was a teenager with all teenage problems, that is with increased sensitivity towards self-esteem, appearance and physical attractiveness. I knew something was wrong with that, I knew that I was afraid of people, crowd, I felt subconsciously that it was bad. I felt afraid to go out. Finally I went on a language camp organized by UNESCO and it was my first contact with a group. Then I realized that I had had a four-year gap in my life.

How did all this affect your life choices?

I was a bed-ridden child and I had to be qualified for individual tuition in secondary school. The passage from primary school to secondary school couldn't be ordinary. Every child, who received individual tuition had to contact a psychologist. Thus a psychologist came to me; the lady performed some tests, talked to me a lot. At that time I thought that I wanted to do it too, I thought that I also liked it. The chats with my friends added to it, too. I was a good listener and any information from the outside world was something amazing to me. That's why I now think that there are no real altruists, we always do something for ourselves. Back then I listened, because I was really good at it, because I liked it, but also because I needed it. Bearing all that in mind, I came to the conclusion that it could be a good job for me – to listen to others.

It was a time when I hesitated between choosing to study French and psychology. A rational approach won. I thought that I could brush up on the language at any time and psychology would be something making me feel fulfilled. I decided to study and it was a breakthrough. I could just stay at home and give up at that point assuming that I would not cope, I could just focus on these fears of mine.

If that had happened, we wouldn't have a chance to have this conversation.

Indeed, my way would have been different in such a case. It's hard for me to say what strength was in me thanks to which I did not give up. I remember being afraid, I remember myself in fear, yet going forward. I studied psychology at the University of Silesia, and that meant for me being 60 km away from home, in a unfamiliar environment, without mum and dad. I am an only child, always pampered, sick, on whom attention of the entire family is focused. I was prone to indulge in this admiration until now and I even had a good pretext. But my parents always supported me and when I told them that I had decided to study psychology, it was only natural to them.

I was admitted to university, which was not such an obvious thing at that time, because one could choose only one faculty, there weren't extramural courses, so it was a matter of "to be or not to be". I didn't think what would happen if I was not admitted. I do not remember myself being at that time a person who wanted to remain in this state of disability and benefit from it. I wanted to get away from it. When I got to university, I went through a life lesson, like everybody else. I met a great group of people I am still in touch with. We laugh that we are distant acquaintances. I was lucky because I had a circle of friends who never

paid attention to my disability. My first encounter with the university was frightening too. I enter and I see about a hundred people I don't know. Until then everything was familiar: faces, a way of functioning, schemes. Me in the centre, others look after me and all of a sudden – a reversed situation. I treated it a little bit as an animal which had activated its self-preservation instinct, simply I am alone now and I must survive in a biological sense. Later I made first friends, I got to know a girl and the organizational spirit in both of us drew us to each other. We saw a poster made by a boy from the fifth year. He was the head of the students' club and was looking for people to cooperate with. Without thinking too much, we responded to the advertisement and from the 1st year onwards, apart from studying, I was actively involved in university life. It was a very important experience for me – we began working in the students' club revitalizing it. We started organizing concerts, lectures, exhibitions, we were responsible for these activities. So I made a really strong entrance to students life. Thanks to the contact with a student from 5th year it was much easier for me to get around at the university because he knew everything, guided me and helped me survive in this jungle of information, thanks to which the world had become familiar and natural.

So this is how you became a psychologist, and what was your first job?

I got it thanks to my friend, who found an advertisement for a job for students at the seaside. It was about selling newspapers. She decided to go and presented it to me as a great idea for holidays, so I, with a soul mate by my side, responded enthusiastically. It was a great experience, we earned loads of money (for those days). From a coordinator assigning

work duties we got the best spot in Ustka – next to the promenade, and that’s how we made a huge profit. We watched people and their needs, e.g. we had crosswords on offer, people asked about pens, so we quickly completed our offer, we had cigarettes, people asked about matches so we completed our offer again. It was a lesson in marketing.

The first serious job however, was a conscious choice. Naturally, I felt apprehensive about it, but something made me go for it. I saw an advertisement at the university – they were looking for a psychologist. At that time I had a blissful feeling that I didn’t have to work for two more years. Yet I something told me that this blissful life that I had would be a little shorter so I decided to apply and then submitted my first CV. I had never been trained, I had never participated in workshops in self-presentation, I didn’t have a computer. I wrote my M.A. thesis on the computer of the Students’ Union.

The offer I responded to was for a job as a psychologist who would run occupational therapy workshops directed at disabled people. But if at that time if there had been some advertisement for a job with alcoholics, I would have responded to it, too. Of course, one may wonder if I, being disabled, would have got the job with alcoholics. I don’t know.

Later, a friend, who worked in the Career Centre at the university told me that they had received a job offer from the Representative for Disabled People who needed an assistant. First, I didn’t find it interesting, because assistants were like secretaries to me and at that time I worked as a psychologist, so I wasn’t interested. My friend told me about it perhaps because I was disabled or perhaps because he knew that I worked with disabled persons. And since nobody responded to that offer, my friend asked me again and told me to think it over and that it was not only

secretarial work, but it involved other things as well. I sent off a CV and the Representative invited me for an interview.

Back then, I thought a lot about why I wanted to work with disabled people. I thought I wasn't a kind of person devoting myself to disabled persons because of my own disability. Sometimes I think that I work against this group promoting equal rights. Such a tough love my mother advocated in relation to me. I love you, but fall, rise and walk on. I think that the configuration of different factors makes some ideas closer and others more distant. Already at that time I knew intuitively that disabled people could not be led by the hand, they could not be given too much, that compensation was a completely different thing from giving privilege to somebody or favouring this group only because they function differently. It has always been obvious and natural to me, I have never learnt that anywhere, I didn't acquire this knowledge at university, I may have consolidated it in contact with disabled people. I went to that interview with the Representative for Disabled People and I felt a bit edgy at the thought of being a secretary, but I was immediately enchanted by the man opposite and I thought I wanted him to be my boss. I didn't know exactly what it would be like, but I knew that this was the door I had to enter.

And this is when I met you.

Until then it was the best period of my professional work in the sense that I felt to the largest degree that I had a real influence on something. As it was a new territory for everybody, nobody knew anything. I had some vague idea because I was disabled myself and that's why I was allowed to formulate university policy on disability issues. The university

authorities never interfered, the only problem was the money for the development of students services.

What do you consider to be your greatest success?

I applied a holistic approach to these issues. I decided that a plan of action should be developed. Some ad hoc initiatives were not enough. I did not know yet what the job would entail, so I started working intuitively just like anybody else: I said that disability meant impaired movement, so it was necessary to remove architectural barriers. In the first month of my employment I intended to compile an inventory of all barriers at the university according to a form which I had developed. Thanks to it, we reviewed all the buildings, which had to be adapted at very short notice. It was the first of such initiatives. And all ideas for adaptation came from the people who came to us. It was not me who sitting at the desk came up with these ideas. They came from the people who would visit me and report difficulties. It was them who showed me this diversity within disability. I learnt then that it was not possible to treat all people in the same way, that there were different kinds of disability, that every disabled person functioned in a different way just like a non-disabled person and these issues couldn't be classified so easily. I had negative experiences too, I was disappointed with the way some people behaved such as their demanding attitude, there were also meetings with parents of disabled people, confusing equality with total favouritism, granting oneself extra rights on the grounds of disability.

Yet in spite of these achievements you left.

I left burdened with my own undertakings. Each new activity entailed other activities related to it for instance making reports, evaluating. The

number of students increased. The further you go, the more it costs you. The more activities, the more doubts, the more enigmatic things become, we begin to discern nuances and mutual influences of some things on others. I couldn't cope as one person. The university authorities did not share this view; they thought one person was enough. I knew what organizational changes had to be implemented, I knew what specialist services should be like, I knew how to do that, what's more there was money for this purpose. Yet the attitude of the authorities showed me that I could not put these ideas into practice and I didn't want such a situation. Besides, up to this day I cannot understand why some people thought that one person was supposed to handle that, it's an illusion.

One will have to do it sooner or later anyway.

I think that many decision-makers may find contact with disabled people disagreeable, unpleasant and sad. They are faced with "otherness" they do not know, they do not understand and reject, just in case, or at best they have somebody else solve this problem for them. And in fact an effective handling of problems of disability is possible only by involving different social actors, taking advantage of positive potential and knowledge of all, not only of disabled persons and their most immediate environment. A social model is more than sliding on the surface, and this is what appointing one disabled person for the position of the representative and pretending that some problem has been solved in fact is.

You have recently been appointed Head of the Silesian Division of PFRON (the National Disabled Persons' Rehabilitation Fund). Tell me what the system of your dreams should be like if it comes to the State assistance for disabled individuals.

Let's start from the beginning. A disabled child is born. At that moment there must be strong support from a doctor, psychologist, lawyer and a social worker. A doctor says – this is a disability which will be associated with this and that. A psychologist says – this is a disability which in the second month of life will show this, in the sixth month that while in the third or fourth year of life it will mean this or that. And the following symptoms will occur. That would be a correct reaction. This is something that I noticed during OTWs⁸. Some parents were completely unprepared to their child's disability and I witnessed that throughout my whole professional path. This difficult moment when a disability or something unfamiliar appears is treated in our culture as a negative characteristic or as burden with suffering which is connected with religion. Both attitudes are wrong, not objective and exaggerated. In the first case denial, aggression and questioning “why me” appear – all negative emotions, frustration, an attempt of rejection, anger, exasperation, etc. These are destructive things. On the other hand, in the other case, when rationalisation attempts are made – “why did it happen to me?” – the syndrome of “I am fated, burdened to carry the cross, so I am the chosen one as mother or father of a disabled child” appears. Neither attitude is adequate. Therefore comprehensive support to parents of disabled children is very important.

Disability awareness?

Yes, but awareness alone is not enough. There must be institutional support and some regulations which will bring about breaking down boundaries between the world of disabled persons and the rest of society.

⁸ Occupational Therapy Workshops

Not long ago I ran workshops and I met mother who started talking to me about her disabled child with Asperger's syndrome. She told me that other parents did not agree to allow her son to learn with their children fearing that this disability would affect their children, too. Some other parents said that they didn't want it because they knew that the child behaved in a strange way and they didn't want their children to learn with children with such disorders. This example shows what this woman is going through and the state stands by and does nothing, while it could offer her active support. A disabled child has the right to learn with other children and teaching should be organized in such a way. It is good for the whole society. Schools should be adjusted, teachers should be trained. It can be done, such a priority should be set. All institutions and agencies of the state should cooperate for this purpose. This is a basis of contemporary thinking about disability.

Some people have not been interested in disability as a social challenge so far because they have never come across this issue. To finish, I would like to ask you for your message to all these people.

Let me use a metaphor. The world would be the most perfect if everything was distributed naturally: there is a small bean and there is a big bean, a small bean comes in useful for one thing and a big one is useful for another thing and everybody with Winnie-the-Pooh's mind knows very well that both a small bean and a big bean are as necessary as average-sized beans which are the most plentiful. And nobody has to explain that that's the way it is, nobody has to subsidize it, nobody has to conduct therapeutic work with the small bean and the big one. Everyone simply knows that there are different beans in the world including green

beans which look completely different from normal beans. The world with different kinds of beans is a good world.

Thank you.

We were talking in a café. At the nearby table sat a mother with her child who became interested in our conversation. The boy asked Mum what disability and disabled people were. Mother answered: “These are people like you, except that they sometimes function in a different way and encounter different problems. When you meet such people, ask if you can help them in any way.”

It Suffices Not to Exclude

An interview with Wojciech Maj, the owner of Medison enterprise

Wojciech Maj

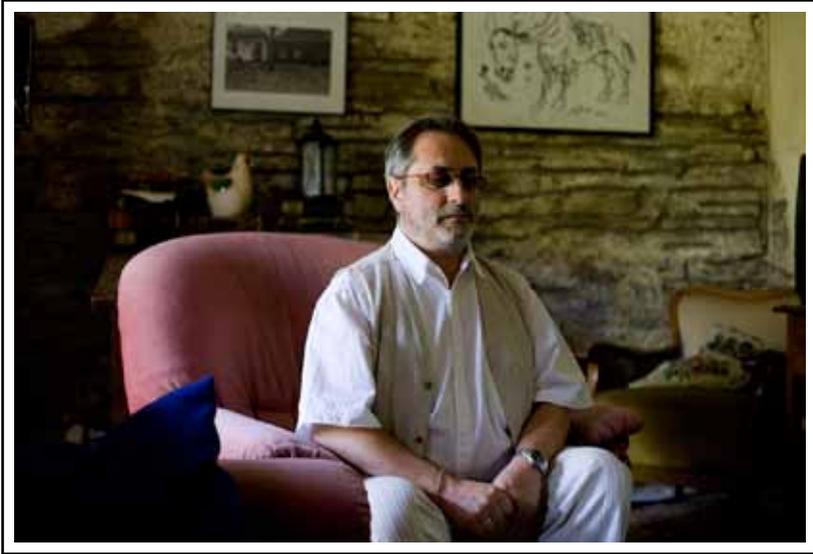
Is a blind entrepreneur, sworn translator of the English language, for over 18 years a company owner employing mainly disabled individuals, primarily blind or partially sighted. Married, two children, artistic. In his professional life engaged in the promotion and distribution of technical aids for persons with sight disabilities on the Polish market as well as training in equipment usage.

Ireneusz Białek: How did you lose sight?

Wojciech Maj: I was born as a fully sighted child, but I developed retinoblastoma. It's a malignancy originating from immature cells of the retina. I wasn't treated adequately. It was actually a fatal disease, but I survived, yet I lost my vision very quickly.

When did it happen?

I was born in 1956. At the end of 1958 or maybe halfway through 1959 I could not see for sure. I remember one event that I was very emotional about. We were moving out from our first place to another one in Katowice. I remember myself as a blind person. I remember this hustle



Wojciech Maj (photo by: J. Jarzabek – Studio Fototu Galeria)

and bustle, moving furniture, some kind of noises of different things hitting one another and the fun I had with it.

Having no sight is a normal condition for you, but what about your relatives, your environment?

My mum was very frightened. Dad pretended to be a tough guy, but I know he was very emotional about it. With time, they got used to it and quite early began to look for some educational opportunities for me. I went to kindergarten and then to school for blind children, as at that time there were no inclusive schools. My parents bought me a piano, because I was very much interested in playing and my education was oriented to this.

Later my parents decided to place me in a mass school, which was very rare at that time. A blind boy who had been at the school earlier had

prepared the ground for me and my parents thought that I would cope too. They were right, I got to the open access school which I was very proud of.

Today I regard that as the right decision, but even at that time I did not doubt for a single moment, I was not afraid of this change. I met with a wonderful reaction on the part of my teachers and friends.

Weren't they afraid?

My situation was easier because another blind student I had mentioned before had attended exactly that school for three years and the teachers had got used to it. However, diverse stereotypes existed. For example that boy was a great mathematician. So there was an assumption that I would follow suit. They soon realized that mistake. It was not maths that was my passion, but English.

I remember sitting at the first desk on the first day of school and I remember that one guy came up to me and said "Hi, my name is Pawel, I will be sitting next to you," just like that. It was just like that and can't have been better. We are still friends.

And these interests led you to university?

Yes, to the English Philology Department.

It was the 1970s when you were admitted there.

The university was by no means prepared for it, but in some intuitive way everybody rose to the occasion. I was offered all possibilities to sit exams in an adjusted way, which means that I completed standard forms. At that

time I had my own Braille typewriter⁹, so I could write assignments. But I had all multiple choice tests completed by an academic. I could have the time of the exam extended. These were real exams in an alternative form. I remember being taught by an English Philologist who was the Jagiellonian University graduate, who now works in Japan and teaches English to Japanese people.

There weren't any regulations. He didn't have to do it. You were lucky.

I think, I was extremely lucky, it was an unbelievable occurrence, some intuition at play and really good will. It was done in the best possible way.

Surely not everybody was so lucky.

I am aware of that. A few years later another blind person wanted to get to that department and she was not even allowed to sit exams.

Today it would be considered to be an act of discrimination.

I even asked them why they hadn't allowed this person to sit exams and they told me that he was so dependent that they couldn't help him.

It was not their role. They were supposed to test his knowledge, not self-dependence.

Exactly, it should have been the role of other institutions. Perhaps the Polish Association of the Blind should have helped him then. There was a division called the "division for blind persons receiving education".

⁹ A black print typewriter at that time used also by blind persons.

“The division for the visually-impaired receiving education” is also an interesting name showing that learning was not common among blind people.

The full name was “The division for blind persons receiving education in the open market” or something like that.

The awareness has changed in the sense that is commonly assumed in society that it is education that is a great chance for disabled persons.

Yes, thanks to these studies I worked as a translator in a big state-owned enterprise in the mining sector. At the beginning of the 1980s it was a prestigious sector and I felt very good there. I had a post in a research library and I translated articles about computers which began to be popular then, as well as the ones about assessment of mining risks. The texts were difficult, but I tried to do this job well. I think they were pleased with me, because after some time they used me as a consecutive interpreter, i.e. the one that interprets on a current basis. It was a very uplifting experience and helped me continue to work and believe that I would cope. I also translated various texts which were religious in nature for one Protestant publishing company and it was them who decided to buy me a computer in exchange for work. It was 1989, which is the beginning of computers adapted to the needs of blind people in Poland. My working techniques radically changed. I damaged my computer a few times and each time I got really frustrated. Once or twice a specialist from the Institute of Technology came to me and rescued it. One day he told me exactly what he had done and I understood that he had typed a simple file autoexec.bat, but since I had deleted something in my computer, it would not get

activated. Once he showed it to me, he was no longer god to me, but an expert. I simply understood that I could learn it too.

I learnt MsDOS with its all varieties and I began to be useful to other, sighted persons. Actually, I didn't have contacts with blind computer users, but I discovered that I could give advice and support to many acquaintances. I decided to start my own company which was to deal with translations with the use of the Internet. But there wasn't much interest in these translations, so I set up a new business with the name Medison (and it has been called this way until now). Its role was to provide computer hardware and software to people with total and partial visual impairment. At that time I began to be involved in translations of specialist software for this group of users. Later, I added screen readers, mobile phones and Braille notebooks. I am very pleased with this job.

Your story sounds as if there were no barriers for blind people in Poland, but you are one of the very few who have been so successful professionally.

I think it followed from the fact that I was one of very few who decided to start my own business. This activity, however diverse as regards the economic outcome (and in a turbulent way) generated enough profit to make it possible for me to buy necessary equipment, have it upgraded, and have constant access to tools. It was also a way which ensured that not all means were consumed. Of course, there were difficult times, too. For example on one occasion an accountant drawing up my balance sheets in one year told me that my tax-settlement would be favourable, and then suddenly on the last day before making a statement it turned out that the reality was quite different – there would be 7500 PLN of VAT and 15 000 PLN of income tax to pay, because the lady had made

some mistake. It was horrible, but I treated it as inherent part of an entrepreneur's work. Not a disabled entrepreneur, but any entrepreneur who has a bungler accountant, who will make you end up like this. It was a lesson for me to be careful in the future.

What do you think about the system of State support for blind people looking at this issue from the perspective of a blind person and at the same time an entrepreneur who in a way works for people with this disability?

Unfortunately there is no system of continuous support and help is provided in stages. Some supervisory board meet and decide if aid will be provided in a given year or not.

I think it should be organized in the following way: a disabled person comes and presents the need for a computer, software, speech synthesizer, enlarger. This person should justify this rationally and the request should be fulfilled or rejected. So far the support has been irregular in nature (regarding both the sum and the frequency). Some people would get gigantic subsidies for the weirdest things, and others a few thousand PLN with which they could buy a computer and half of a screen reader, so that's why they rejected such support.

Besides, making this support dependent on income is demotivating for those who work, who are active and make some money. If I struggle with all this wishing to accomplish something, why should I be punished with worse conditions? As I see it, it is really unfair. Charity support should not be confused with rehabilitation support.

It is so because in Poland disabled persons are placed within the sphere of social welfare. Thus, in fact it's not limitations resulting

from disability that are supported but poverty which disability often generates. As a result, the ones who are the most active lose a chance to receive rehabilitation support.

Yes, this is a system that has nothing to do with social justice.

What is your opinion on subsidies for entrepreneurs who employ disabled people? Would you confirm that to a large extent they are not interested in qualifications of these people but only in subsidies they may receive from PFRON (the National Disabled Persons' Rehabilitation Fund)?

They are employed for subsidies, this is a common practice. This system is abused and everybody knows about it.

It does not pay to be active and improve one's qualifications. It is better to be just disabled. There is no work for competent disabled people but there is work for disabled persons.

This system should be definitely changed.

What can business do in cooperation with universities to make disabled persons' competences matter more than subsidies?

Business people customarily search for employees at university. But this system works only in relation to non-disabled people. The employers' way of thinking must be changed. It is necessary to show them that they can search for disabled people at universities, monitor their level of achievement during studies and support the ones who are the most ambitious in this way generating rise in ambition in others and preparing a future employee by means of some system of incentives e.g.

scholarships. It would suffice if disabled persons were not excluded from the participation in the current of internship or scholarship programmes for all students. It's a matter of time and awareness.

Thank you.

Step into Our Shoes, Completely

An interview with Professor Stanisław Krompiec, Science Director of the Chemistry Institute at the University of Silesia

Prof. Stanisław Krompiec, PhD, eng

Is Scientific Director of the Chemistry Institute at the Faculty of Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry of the University of Silesia, head of Inorganic and Coordination Chemistry Department of the Chemistry Institute, President of the Katowice Branch of the Polish Chemical Society, author and co-author of over 70 scientific works and patents, has promoted 5 doctors, with 7 persons currently working on their PhD dissertations under his supervision.

His scientific interests include homogeneous catalysis (coupling reactions, isomerisation, addition to allyl systems, cycloaddition), research on mechanisms of chemical reactions, organic synthesis, metalo-organic chemistry, conductive polymers.

Apart from science, his interests include classical music (opera, in particular), psychology and politics.

Ireneusz Białek: I have learnt about your life story thanks to Justyn Jędraszewski, a guide at the Jagiellonian University Collegium Maius historic building and your friend. I have thought that our meeting can prove interesting to everyone who don't believe that

hard work coupled with an idea for life may bring success even in the presence of profound disability.

Prof. Stanisław Krompiec: Yes, perhaps, but this must be a precise story, and let me tell you why. People must try to step into my shoes, listen about difficulties, this must affect them somehow so that we are able to truly meet even for a moment.

Therefore, I want to start by saying that sometimes it is hard for me to get dressed by myself (a tie is a problem, for example), I have continuous pain in my stumps, eyes, and noise (“beeping”) in my ear. I must also take off my artificial limbs as often as possible, as otherwise my stumps wouldn’t have sustained continuous pressure. I get on the train and if anything goes wrong (for example, my scarf gets messy), I have a problem of how to correct it. I have to think whether to ask for someone’s help (as the neighbours’ reactions vary: surprise, shying away, dislike, rarely just natural and spontaneous will to help). These are just some of my everyday difficulties.

Can we go back to the accident? What happened then?

I started working at the Technical University of Silesia in 1977, and the accident took place in 1984. I had never dealt with explosives, the explosion was unpredicted. I simply had not read enough, had not thought over some issues, and matched with that was the lack of appropriate academic tutor, so the explosion took place. At one moment, I lost both hands and I had severe deficiency in my sight and hearing – a complete disaster. Nevertheless, I was oriented at overcoming this situation. I have had (and thanks God, I still have) a wonderful and caring wife, a son, and I happened to meet outstanding doctors, which made me come out of this somehow. Owing to my friends from Germany, I received fantastic

(myoelectric) artificial limbs that are – what is very important – very simple to use. I have recently replaced the already third pair of them (they simply wear after some 10 years).

Apart from that, the attitude of the University's authorities was wonderful. They could have said “a guy without hands to do chemistry is a misunderstanding,” yet they agreed to my return to work. Perhaps they saw some potential in me, as I was but an ordinary MA graduate, without scientific achievements. Anyway, I appreciate them for that. Professors Kulicki (Director of the Institute) and Suwiński (my scientific tutor after the accident) decided to allocate a laboratory worker to me, who would perform various activities for me, and I would direct him, acting as a brain to control practical carrying out of laboratory experiments planned.

Nowadays, we would call this a disabled person's work with an assistant.

Yes, but at the time some people tapped their foreheads, although officially nobody was against. I have experienced (for over 20 years) great human kindness. The rector agreed to significant reduction in teaching hours – instead of 270, I only had 60 and I could focus on my PhD dissertation. I worked with this laboratory worker of mine (or rather with a few, as they changed), and in 1989, after five years from the accident, I received the PhD degree. Then I decided to become *doctor habilitatus*. I carried out this dissertation in a time shorter than the PhD one. Here, I started to act as competition (particularly that I also like to have my own say) and I was sometimes treated “as everyone else”, but perhaps it's good. Basically, the public was kind in responses to my efforts related to obtain *doctor habilitatus* degree, and if there were any critical, unfavourable remarks, this was marginal and of no importance (that's what the world is like).

My direct boss, who helped me with my dissertation, Prof. Suwiński, is a man without whom I wouldn't have done anything in my scientific career. Although in many issues we are as two different worlds, we vary a lot, yet I must say that as regards my scientific development, this was a heaven-sent man (outstanding chemist, a man of broad horizons). As to the differences (between me and Prof. Suwiński) in looking at various things, I perceive them as enriching, forcing to think, to better justify my own arguments, sometimes provoking. It is good to have such people around, this may only be enriching, that's how I see it from the time perspective.

If there hadn't been for the accident, you would also be perceived as a competition. How did disability affect this competition?

I think as I said it to Prof. Suwiński, namely that the accident changed a lot in my life. He commented on this "Just don't try to convince me that the accident was your success." I replied "Professor, I only meant that until then my scientific life was heading towards a fall, while the accident changed this course of events." I have become wiser and I understood what I had been doing before was rather nonsensical. Well, and as it comes to scientific issues, I could finally have a true Master! (I mean, Prof. Suwiński, of course). Fortunately, God gave me a second chance (for a wiser life), unfortunately, after the accident. In my family life, the accident also changed a lot. Since then, we have started to live wiser with my wife, I certainly have. This was a process, as nothing here happens just like that. I have started to be a better father and a better husband, although this was very difficult. Think about that: there is a young man in the house, but he has no hands, which are very useful (for ordinary chores). For God's sake, what is that?! From that perspective, as I am

a religious man, I could say that perhaps God stated: there is no other way for that Krompiec to change his life but through the accident. This is how I would assess that from the time perspective.

That's a Job-like experience, a terrible vision.

But God did not take my wife or son. Job lost everything, I didn't. I just lost as much as it took. God had different plans for me than for Job, fortunately. I am quite serious about this. I see it clearly. Actually, one should say that it's not that God caused something, took it, but "allowed" for "this" (the accident) to happen.

In turn, I object to the vision of God who changes human life in this way.

God does not change our life, God gives an opportunity. The man must change it himself. This is a bit like in the story about the prodigal son. On Sunday I finished reading a book about depression, I admit this is one of the most interesting I have ever read. Among other things it was about what it means to heal, to change one's life. It means to say what the prodigal son said while being really down. When he was at the stage where he stole food from swine and he was not always successful, he said "I'll get together and go to my father." The psychotherapist explains this that he made the decision, saw his misery, trusted his father and his love, but he was the one to make the decision (I'll get together!). He knew this was not going to be easy. He had to change his life. This is the way to perceive my accident, as I see it. This was a certain moment when I could lose everything, but I think I have managed to change my life in the right way. Since then, the restoration started in all the areas of life, as I see it. When it comes to professional issues, everything went ahead,

perfectly, phenomenally. I obtain the *doctor habilitatus* degree at the age of 45 (whereas this took me 9 years, while PhD degree as many as 12), and a year ago I became titular professor. I have managed to promote several PhD students, so I'd say from the professional side, it is just great. This could have also been much faster if I had had appropriate psychological help after the accident, but I had none. And the last issue, namely the lack of psychological help is a true disaster and the reason for my anger and complaints to the "healthcare system". If I had had help, if I had been properly shown what one could do with stumps (wash oneself, deal with physiological needs, wash the dishes, clean, answer the phone, do the shopping, write), how to deal with "being stared at", I would have been able like I am now not after several years but after a few months!

What does your work with students look like?

When the lecture starts, the young people are rather perplexed, embarrassed. So, I have to help them, particularly that I start classes at year one. So, kids who have just graduated from secondary school come, and I tell them „Please, watch me carefully, here I have artificial hands, prostheses, but you are surely young Europeans, so the presence of a disabled person in a normal life is nothing unusual to you. I understand you may be a little perplexed with this situation. No problem. If I need help, I'll tell you, but you will only help me when I say so. I think you will get familiar with me soon.” Then all this tension evaporates, and it becomes normal. Later, when they come to my room to sign something, the prostheses sometimes lie on the window sill. I don't always have them on, as my skin hurts, I have to take them off, and this makes no impression on them (or at least they learn to control their reactions).

But previously, there was a tension you had to eliminate.

The conclusion is that nobody has prepared them to the fact that there are disabled people among us, and the sight of severe disability is not frequent, so it can be shocking. Therefore, they need assistance, the rest belongs to them. For me this is always a moment when my heart beats faster. This is undoubtedly a stressful moment – for both sides. Yet life is not about elimination of stress as such, it is rather about dealing with stress, about elimination or limitation of redundant (non-creative) stress.

When will the sight of a disabled person as a participant in social life be so normal and frequent as to make you feel no such stress and other people experience no such shock?

This is an issue of generations. Some fifty to one hundred years have to pass so that we achieve the appropriate level of wealth, which will result in working out a system of support for disabled persons that would effectively release their social activity. Simultaneously, changes to mentality will progress, yet this is also a long-term process. However, a certain tension between persons with disabilities (particularly when the disability is severe) and non-disabled people (whatever that means, I mean the common understanding of the term) cannot be entirely eliminated.

Can academic circles do something that would accelerate this process even a little?

Yes, it may improve the awareness of disability and functioning of disabled persons. At the moment, the awareness is not very good in the very academic, or even medical society. For example, I have to control everything by looking at it: when I take the glasses, I have to see whether

I have caught them; when I take a marker, I have to control this; when I switch on the light, I have to look whether I touched the wall, etc. If you want to understand me, try to control everything you do with your hands by looking at it. I assure you that after two hours you will not remember your name. In turn, some people tell me “You are in a better situation, as you do everything more accurately!” So I face such a complete lack of understanding. The awareness of the academic society in the area of disability is the foundation if the universities are later on to play a broader social role in this respect. This particularly refers to medical universities, but there the psychological and sociological side of the problem of the fully able and disabled people’s being together is poorly present (I particularly mean education of doctors).

Apart from that, in this society, we should help one another. If someone is less able, this should not be a problem. I have the right to expect from this society that I can be tired, and perhaps I may need help more often. I must honestly say here (and this is very important!) that most frequently I experience great kindness and support. I am very grateful to my co-workers from the Technical University and now from University!

On my part, I attempt to be a good chemist, and not a good chemist among disabled persons, but good as such. If I write to the best chemical journals worldwide, they don’t care whether I have hands or not, but they read what I have written and simply assess the worth of the publication. This is not about my hiding my disability, but I treat this as one of my many properties and I expect the others to treat it in a similar way.

This is a perfect situation, but one often perceives disabled persons in the context of limitations, not the potential represented.

I have never experienced that, as after 28 years of working at the Technical University of Silesia and now I moved to the University of Silesia, and my disability has not been a problem to anyone. I have become deputy director of the institute. A disabled person must be just as good as the others, there is no other way.

I get money for research through contest where the “disability” parameter is not present, and that’s very good. When I write a scientific publication, the parameter is not there either. When a PhD student comes to me, it doesn’t matter whether I am disabled or not. Hands are not necessary for thinking, actually. I act as promoter and academic tutor, I have no additional adjectives or no exemptions due to disability. I must say that my young collaborates are great in their relations with me – they could be model assistants for a disabled person (just as much help as needed, not more). The work with young people is the most beautiful dimension of my professional life.

In order for a disabled person not to have the qualifier used in the term, he or she must have a good education as well as other type of support to compensate for the limitations stemming from disability. In your case, this is good prostheses. Polish ones are not like these.

This is true. Without these prostheses all this would not have been possible. I only have them owing to my great friends from Germany.

And not owing to the support system in Poland, as in our country we prefer to pay several times for poor prostheses rather than once for good ones.

Exactly. This is probably not only because Poland is a poor country, but because the management in this area is unwise.

What would be your message, Professor, to all who want to change this difficult Polish reality?

First I want to say that this reality varies: there are difficult areas (e.g. poor institutional help, high costs of rehabilitation), and there are also areas where our national properties alleviate problems. When it comes to difficult areas, I have a method that before I give in, I have to try a thousand times, when the last one does not work, a week later I will try a thousand times again. It is only what that does not work, then I say, OK, it seems I have to give in. If someone is less determined, and the environment does not help, he or she may fail. I wish great determination to disabled persons.

To the fully able ones, I want to say: listen to us more, “step into our shoes”. This, however, should be stepping in completely, namely taking off your shoes and stepping into ours. If I say, for example, I have to control everything I do by looking at it, think for a moment what this is like. I touch my wife, and I would like to touch her with my hands and feel her, and I cannot. Think about that. I hate when everyone stares at me as at some specimen: „wow, he has no hands!” If you, dear neighbours, didn’t look that way, this would be quite a lot already. You see that I can’t do something, then ask delicately if I need help. All this must be specific, otherwise this all (our normal relations) will fail.

Thank you.

From Philanthropy to Investment

Ireneusz Bialek, Chief Coordinator at the Jagiellonian University
Disability Support Service

Corporate social responsibility is an idea increasingly often addressed in discussions concerning the role of business in the world of today. Many international and local conferences are held on the subject and examples of companies which put the CSR¹⁰ notion into practice show that it may influence the positive perception of enterprises by the public, and consequently translate into a profit, although seemingly such actions generate expenses only.

Various activities in the area of social responsibility are taken up by Polish companies, too and undoubtedly the implementation of that notion is becoming another field where economic operators compete. I wish to point out, however, that there is one area which has been largely neglected as regards such competition, i.e. disability has not been incorporated as part of the social responsibility notion.

¹⁰ Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, means the voluntary embracing by companies, going beyond minimum legal requirements, of social and environmental issues in their commercial operations and relations with various stakeholders. The basis assumption behind CSR is the responsible and ethical conduct of business towards the social groups it affects while respecting the natural environment as much as possible (source: www.mg.gov.pl).

I am perfectly aware of the reality to which we have become accustomed by the Polish system for supported employment: employers associate people with disabilities to be a valuable tool for securing subsidies from the National Disabled Persons' Rehabilitation Fund (PFRON), yet rarely to be competent, educated and prepared for work in a given position. This has been pointed out by Wojciech Maj¹¹. Persons with disabilities themselves have also grown accustomed to such a perception and made disability a market commodity: I have got my official disability attestation and you, Mr/Ms Employer, can receive a PFRON subsidy linked to my job position. If things are seen that way, competence is not that important. In Poland, we have created a new occupation called a disabled person, fair enough, but is it really what we wanted?

When I started at the Jagiellonian University as Rector's Representative for Disability, the prevalent mood at the school was that there was no need to open it up to the specific needs of such people as they simply did not come to such a university, could not possibly reach it, were unable to meet the criteria, they were simply not there. Should they appear one day, then the Jagiellonian University would open up to them. Back then, I would explain that given some experiences from Western universities, particularly British and Scandinavian ones, the first move should be made by the institution. If we opened the university – however little – persons with disabilities would be encouraged and come on their own. Because the then university authorities believed in such arguments, we followed that path and over a decade the number of students with disabilities have increased ten times. Today, the Jagiellonian University is a leader in educating persons with disabilities on an equal footing with all the other students. To describe the situation experienced by such students at our

¹¹ See p. 65

university it is fitting to use the term from British legislation: reasonable adjustment. This is exactly what our students receive.

Let us transpose this procedure and the term of reasonable adjustment into the business sector. From my experience talking to Polish entrepreneurs I conclude that disability is the last topic they see as interesting, inspiring, creative and able to build the brand of their companies. At the same time, Poland is one of the countries where businesses are very keen to sponsor various charity events for persons with disabilities.

It is not my intention to say that such actions are unnecessary or worse. I only want to stress that this is but one side of the coin. The other one, not thought about since disability is hardly associated with it, is making a profit using the company's image through various activities aimed at the education and employment of persons with disabilities, long-term activities seeking to attract competent staff, who may have a disability, who will not be dismissed once state subsidies are cut off and as a company owner one will feel proud to employ such a person, and to have its brand built in such a way. So here is a suggestion to open up business entities following in the footsteps of universities, to make the first step, to initiate a programme, to set up a disability section as part of the company's CSR unit, to take more responsibility for the entire process of developing future staff, rather than just to offer a gift of money to a charity event.

In the academic world this approach has proved successful. There is no reason why this should not work in the business world and the example from Thales Group is a proof for that. For such a process to take a proper form, however, disability awareness must be systematically enhanced, something postulated throughout this publication. Better

knowledge of this area can after all lead to a significant social change, the encouragement of appropriate civic attitudes and the “society of tomorrow”.

The Jagiellonian University
Disability Support Service

invites **academic teachers** whose
students include persons with
disabilities to

***a disability awareness
enhancement workshop.***



The objective of the workshop is to equip the participants with knowledge concerning disability: its types, consequences for the educational process and disability compensation methods as well as techniques for preparing classes so that they are adapted to the needs of students with disabilities.

The workshop is conducted as a group training session. The materials to be used are heavily interactive and the exercises prepared for the participants are based on activating methods.

At present, the following three modules are available:

***Who are people with
disabilities?***

The workshop focuses on the following themes: the role of the oppressive language used while speaking about disability, the stereotypical perception of persons with disabilities as a threat to their participation in society on equal terms and the role of the environment of persons with disabilities in determining his/her opportunities and limitations.

Each module lasts three hours. At the end of the workshop the participants receive certificates and supplementary materials.

The workshops are offered on a regular basis in the afternoon at the office of the Jagiellonian University Disability Support Service in Kraków at ul. Retoryka 1/210.

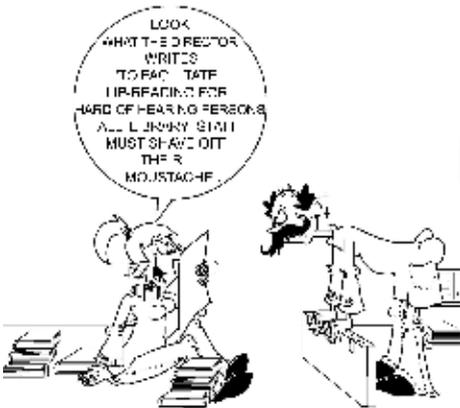
More than Braille

The workshop focuses on educational support for students with sight disabilities. The participants become familiar with methods for conducting classes and preparing materials in a format adapted to the needs of students with this type of disability. Appliances are showcased which facilitate the elimination of restrictions in access to written word through electronic and Braille versions of texts.



I cannot hear, I am a university student, I talk

The workshop covers educational support for students with hearing disabilities. The participants become familiar with alternative communication techniques used by persons with hearing disabilities and requirements related to principles of conducting classes for student groups including deaf and/or hard of hearing persons. One of the workshop's assets is a discussion on the meaning of Deaf Culture offered as part of the training.



If you would like to participate in a workshop please contact trainer **Małgorzata Perdeus** at malgorzata.perdeus-bialek@uj.edu.pl.



DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICE Jagiellonian University

THE OFFER OF THE JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICE

targets students who require educational support because of disability or health issues.

We also invite academic teachers and administration personnel who wish to improve their qualifications as regards the accessibility of university programmes vis à vis the needs of persons with disabilities.

THE BENEFITS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND THE DSS ARE:

- **drafting of an educational support strategy**
- **format-adapted courses and examinations**
- **cooperation of the Service's student affairs consultants with academic teachers/lecturers**
- **guidance concerning modern technological solutions**
- **English language classes for blind, partially sighted, deaf and hard of hearing students in a multimedia language workroom**
- **adaptation of teaching materials to electronic or Braille formats for blind persons**
- **agency or mediation in communication with other University units, if necessary**



OUR MISSION STATEMENT

- **The mission of our Service is to enable disabled students of the Jagiellonian University equal access to its educational offer, regardless of the kind and degree of disability.**
- **We strive to ensure that no student is disqualified at the beginning or during their studies because of disabilities or learning difficulties.**
- **We oppose all kinds of open or hidden discrimination.**
- **We support the constitutional right of disabled people to education, work and full participation in social life as we deeply believe this to be justified on both human and economic grounds.**
- **Our activities are guided by the provisions of the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was signed by Poland in March 2007.**
- **We also support all efforts aimed at the enforcement of the provisions of the Convention and its ratification in our country.**
- **In our way of thinking and actions we are inspired by the ideals of Jagiellonian Poland, tolerant and open for all citizens.**

The Jagiellonian University and the Pierre and Marie Curie University together with the company Thales offer a new programme for students called:

Space of inclusion

Aiming at:

- Improving civic awareness of disability, the rights of persons with disabilities and anti-discrimination legislation with special emphasis on access to education and employment on the open labour market
- Acquiring savoir-vivre and self-presentation skills
- Familiarisation with the operation of a large multinational company.

The program targets students with and without disabilities, thanks to which truly inclusive trainee groups can be set up where learning together becomes a way to learn about each other, open up to each other's problems and limitations as well as to enhance tolerance and respect for diversity.

Detailed information available from the Jagiellonian University Disability Support Service, ul. Retoryka 1/210, 31-108 Kraków • tel.: (0048) 12 424 29 50 • e-mail: bon@uj.edu.pl