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THE DIRECTIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VET SYSTEM IN POLAND

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The European Network on Regional Labour Market Monitoring was founded in 2006 at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, Germany. The EN RLMM works on a non-profit basis to further the concepts and instruments in regional and local labour market monitoring and to diffuse the common methods for the study, research and analysis in this field. The objective of the EN RLMM is to promote a better understanding of the functioning of regional and local labour market monitoring as an essential instrument for improving labour market strategies and operations in accordance with the EU 2020 Strategy.

Every year, the EN RLMM focuses on one particular aspect of regional and local labour market monitoring with the objective to capture the state of the art in the research and further the available monitoring concepts and methods through mutual learning. The annual anthology published in the Network is open to both researchers and practitioners who would like to present good practice examples from different regions and localities, but also discuss the challenges in regional and local labour market monitoring. The annual conferences of the EN RLMM – the European Day and the Annual Meeting – offer the Network members a further opportunity to present their work and exchange their experiences with their colleagues from all over Europe.

This newly established **EN RLMM Working Paper Series** represents an additional opportunity for those involved in regional and local labour market monitoring to present their work in progress. It is open to all Network members who would like to disseminate project results or good practice examples from their regions. It can also be used for writing joint papers with colleagues from different organisations, regions or countries with the aim to explore the different possibilities for mutual learning. We hope that this new form of exchange will attract a lot of interest among the EN RLMM members and will lead to an even livelier exchange and co-operation across organisational and territorial borders.

In addition, the first issue of the **EN RLMM Scientific Paper Series** will be published later this year. This series will be dedicated to furthering the scientific concepts in regional and local labour market monitoring drawing from the concerted work which has taken place in the Network over the last nine years.

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THE DIRECTIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VET SYSTEM IN POLAND

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to describe and discuss the evolution, the current state and the perspectives of the vocational education and training (VET) system in Poland. In the period of the economic slowdown in Poland and the Financial and Sovereign Debt Crisis in several EU Member States, the need for structural reforms, including the reform of the vocational education and training is becoming increasingly important. Therefore, in the paper the special attention has been paid to the links between the education and labour markets in view of the signalled difficulties in smoothing the transition of VET graduates from schooling to work. The paper identifies the needs of Polish employers in relation to vocational training and puts forward some propositions for policy makers in order to improve the employability of VET graduates.

KEYWORDS: VET system in Poland, school to work transition, youth employment, labour market policies

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Financial and Sovereign Debt Crisis has, among other things, revealed the deficiencies of the national education systems. The negative consequences of the recession that has hit the European Union in recent years are staggering: in 2013, the youth unemployment rate has reached a record high in Spain and Greece, where more than 50% of the under-25 population is jobless. Therefore, a term “lost generation” has been coined, to describe the age cohort especially exposed to the risk of permanent socio-economic marginalisation. Consequently, the European Commission has called for national policies that would more effectively promote the transition from school to work (the so-called Employment Package, issued in 2012).

The main goal of this paper is to present the development of Polish national system of vocational education and training (VET) in recent years. Our analysis focuses on the effectiveness of the VET system, assessed on the basis of the transition of VET graduates to the labour market. Consequently, we identify the main weaknesses of the national system and we give some suggestions how it can be improved. The structure of our paper is as follows: to start with, we describe the labour market developments and the VET evolution in Poland. Then, we discuss the problems of the transition of the VET graduates to work. The last section concludes and brings some policy implications. In the appendix, we include the methodological description of the study.

2. THE ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN POLAND: THE IMPACT ON THE LABOUR MARKET AND EDUCATION

Poland can still be characterised as a transitional, post-communist economy. The heritage of communist past is still visible at the labour market level and in the VET system. The backbone of a former centrally planned economy was the heavy industry, and the ultimate task of the VET system was to provide workers for the large public companies, operating in the mining, steel, shipbuilding, electronic, food production and clothing sectors. Most of the VET institutions were actually providing graduates for specific public companies, and many of them had training facilities in those firms, where the students were able to gain working experience during the internship (TK4 2013). With the transition to a market economy in the 1990s, many of the state owned companies were privatised and, consequently, have substantially reduced the employment. For instance, the biggest company in Kraków in the 1980s was the Huta Lenina (Lenin’s Steelworks Company), which employed ca. 55,000 workers. Now the same

company with a different name – Accelor Mittal Polska – employs less than 2,000 workers (JK1 2013).

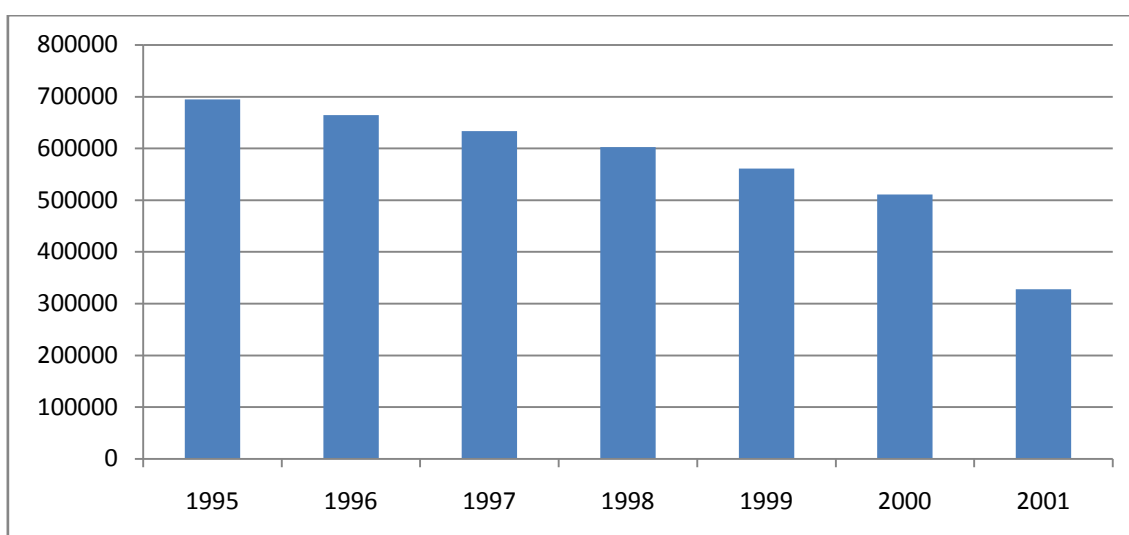
The socio-economic transformation in Poland had a profound impact on the older workers, who received their education before 1989. As the jobs in heavy industry were cut, many of them were unable to find employment in the growing service sector. Those people had usually vocational education, were trained for specialised, narrow occupations and had not been able to retrain and acquire new skills.

On the other hand, the principles of the market economy in Poland helped to appreciate the highly skilled workers, who have been employed in a growing service sector. Before 1989, a wage grid existed in the centrally planned economy. All wages and salaries were regulated and set on the national level. Moreover, as Poland was a socialist economy, the wage grid was rather flat, i.e. the differences between wages across occupations were rather small. After 1989, the wage disparities started to grow, and the highly skilled workers experienced the largest increase of wages. Most of those highly skilled workers had tertiary education. Consequently, the initial phase of economic transformation (1989-2000) in Poland made the VET graduates less attractive for the employers. On the contrary, employees with tertiary education have been highly appreciated by the labour market.

2.1 The labour market and education trends

These developments have led to a dramatic decrease in the demand for a typical vocational training in Poland in the last 20 years. It was reflected also in the number of pupils in vocational high schools, which dropped from 695,000 in 1995 to 328,000 in 2001¹.

Figure 1: The number of pupils in vocational high schools

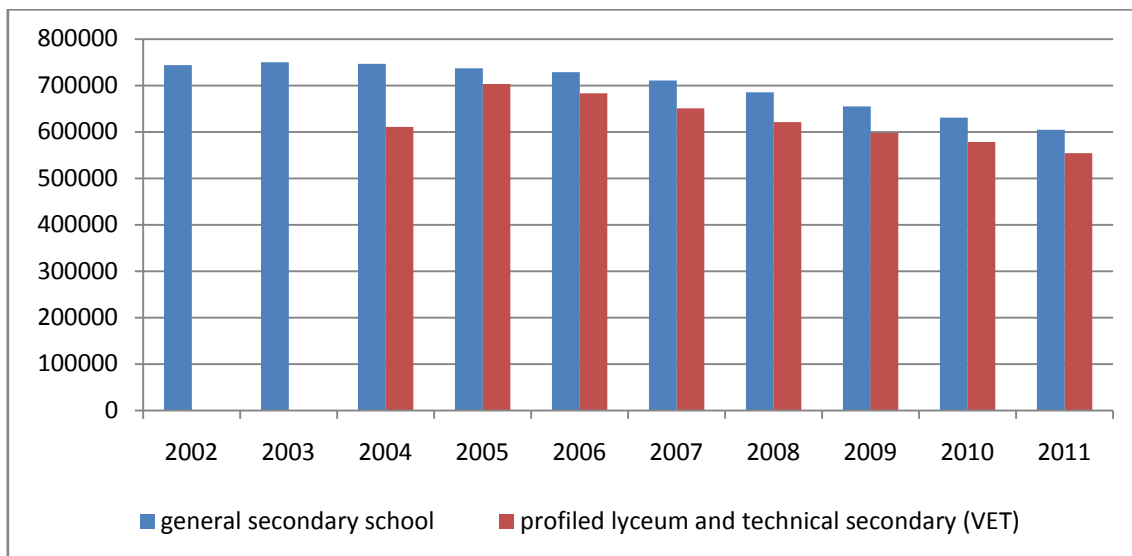


Source: GUS (2013).

¹ Please note, however, that the substantial change between 2000 and 2001 can be attributed to educational reform in 1999, which resulted in closing many of the basic vocational schools.

The changes in educational policy introduced in the second half of the 1990s included the promotion of general education at the secondary level, with the goal to increase the enrolment in tertiary education. With the declining industrial sector, the expectations in regard to the employment opportunities in the service sector grew. Therefore, it was believed, a modern Polish economy would need highly-skilled young workers, preferably with the tertiary education. As the result, the number of students in general secondary schools (the first step to get to the tertiary education) has visibly outnumbered the number of pupils in the schools offering vocational education in the past ten years.

Figure 2: The number of pupils in general secondary schools and in VET



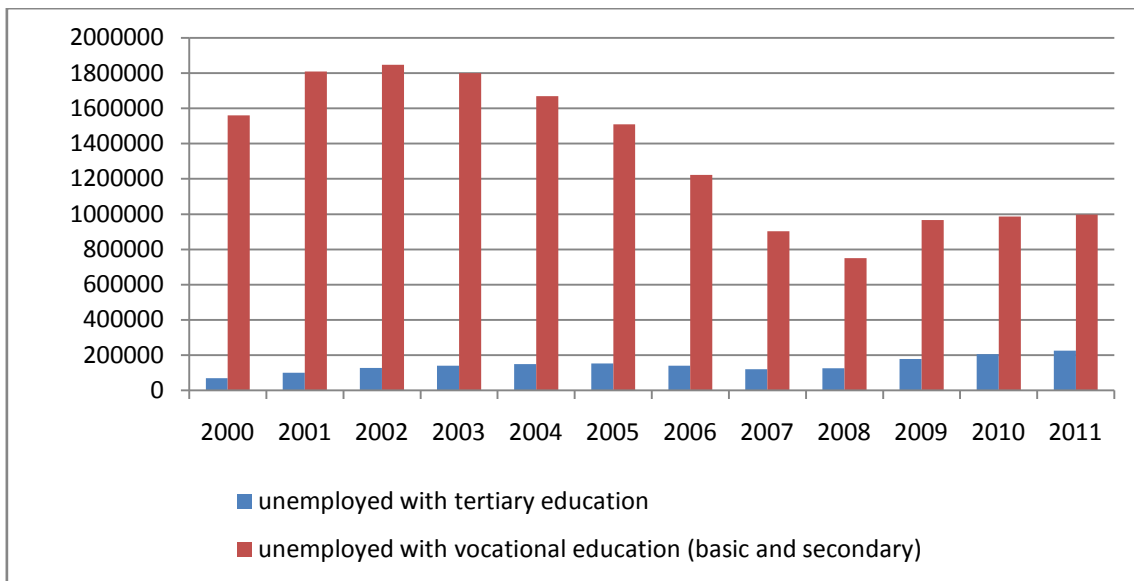
Source: GUS (2013).

The promotion of the tertiary education resulted in an unprecedented growth of tertiary education institutions and students and a negligence of VET. The number of tertiary institutions has increased from 112 in the academic year 1990/1991 to 456 in 2008/2009. In the same period, the number of students grew fivefold – from 404,000 to 1.9 million. The gross tertiary enrollment rate in the academic year 2008/2009 reached 52.7%, one of the highest rates in the European Union (Jeruszka 2011). Yet, the educational boom in the tertiary education has finally led to the oversupply of graduates (Figure 3) and the growing problem of their employability. For many years, completing tertiary education helped to avoid unemployment, but this trend is not visible anymore. The number of unemployed with tertiary education has nearly doubled within the last five years: from 120,000 in 2007 to 226,000 in 2011. The numbers would be even higher, if it had not been for the massive migration of Poles to the UK and Ireland after 2004², which pulled away as many as 1.3 million workers from the Polish economy at the peak of migration wave (2007, cf. Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2008). On the other hand, the number of unemployed workers with vocational education,

² In 2004, Poland became a member of the European Union and some countries, including the UK, Ireland and Sweden, opened their labour markets to Polish workers.

although still very high (nearly 1 million unemployed persons in 2011), has shrunk by 50% in the last ten years. Therefore, the perspectives of employment of VET graduates have improved both at the national and European (taking also the migration to Western Europe into account) level. Moreover, this trend has been discovered by the policy makers, who finally – after nearly 20 years of downplaying the role of VET – have understood that the vocational education should have been promoted among young Poles, in order to increase their perspectives in the labour market.

Figure 3: Number of unemployed by education levels



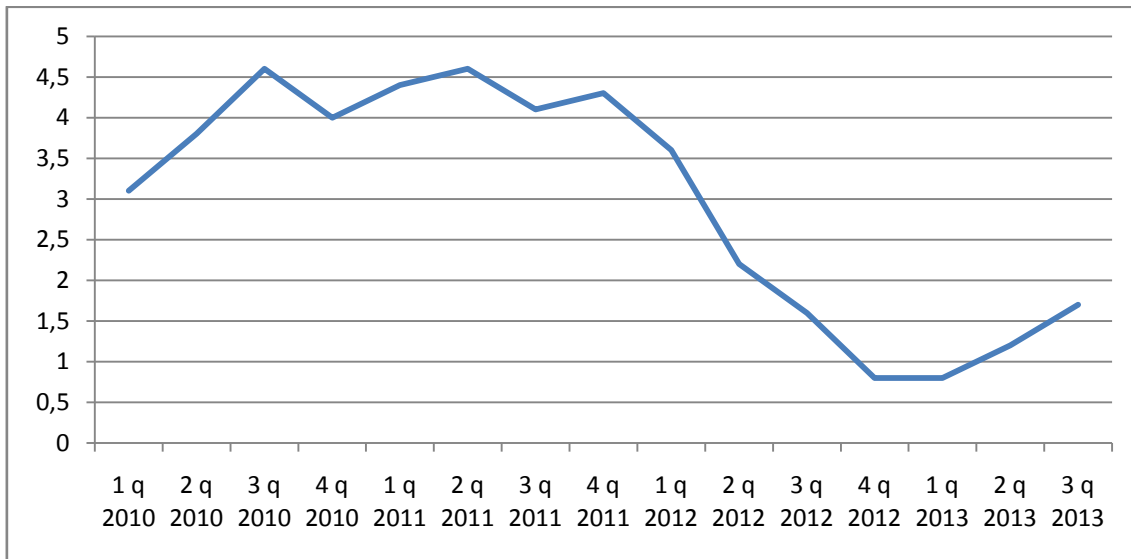
Source: GUS (2013).

2.2 The current trends in the Polish domestic labour market

The current situation in the Polish labour market is relatively favorable. The Polish economy has avoided a recession related to the global financial crisis, but in 2012 the economic slowdown started to become visible. The yearly GDP growth measured on the quarterly basis³ has slowed down from 4.3% in the 4th quarter of 2011 to only 1.1% in the 4th quarter of 2012. However, it seems that the Polish economy is recovering from the slowdown, as in the 3rd quarter of 2013 the yearly GDP growth reached 1.7%.

³ In this approach, the GDP growth is calculated by comparing a relative quarter of the year on an annual basis.

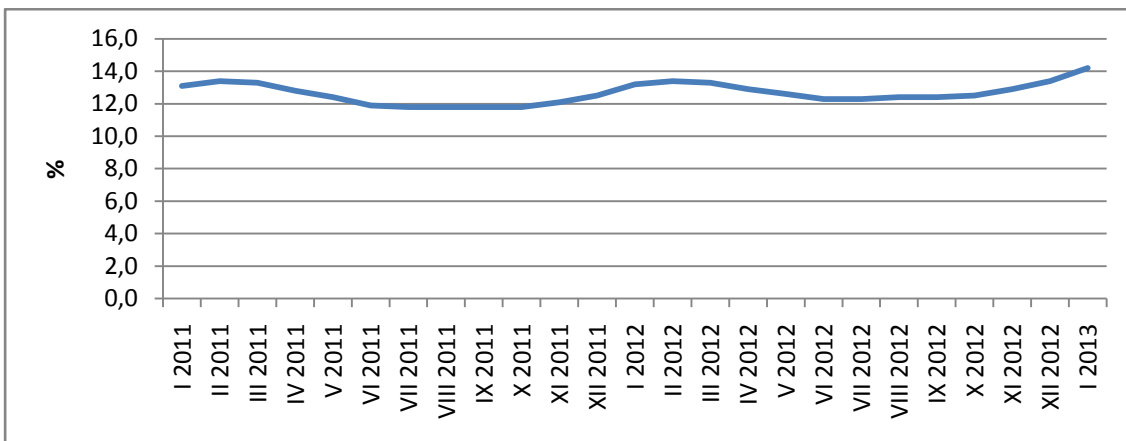
Figure 4: GDP growth rate (% , measured on quarterly basis)



Source: GUS (2013).

Still, the worsening economic conditions in 2012 had visible direct impact on the situation in the national labour market. The unemployment rate, already high in comparison to the general unemployment rate for the European Union⁴ has risen from 13.2% in January 2012 to 14.2% in January 2013 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Unemployment rate in Poland



Source: GUS (2013).

Representatives of the employers and VET institutions have quite unanimously agreed that the situation in the labour market for young VET graduates is tougher than it was ten years ago. In the beginning of the 2000s, the massive flow of foreign direct investments, especially visible in

⁴ The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for the EU-27 was 11.9% in January 2013, according to Eurostat.

special economic zones (specjalne strefy ekonomiczne – SSE)⁵, helped to create numerous jobs in the car manufacturing, household appliances and electronic sectors. Therefore, the position of employees in the labour market was relatively strong in relation to the employers: they could demand higher wages and change jobs easily. As the HR representative of a large manufacturer (3,500 employees in Poland) recalls, his company average rotation of unskilled workers in the beginning of the 2000s was almost 100% within twelve months. On the one hand, this situation was favorable for young VET graduates, as they were able to find their first job rather easily. On the other hand, the companies were not interested in further training of such workers, as they were aware of the limited loyalty of their employees. As of the second part of 2013, the situation is different: since there are fewer new job openings, the rotation even in the lowest positions in manufacturing is smaller, so the loyalty of workers to their employer is bigger. Moreover, as employers are more confident that staff members want to stay working in the same company for longer periods of time, they are encouraged to invest more in staff training (TK4 2013).

This problem can be exemplified with changes in the tourist sector. From our own investigation we recall that a director of an enterprise operating in hospitality and tourism sector, reported that the labour market in tourist services had had its ups and downs in the past ten years. In the beginning of the 2000s, the sector was still in the early phase of development and his company was able to choose among many well-trained candidates while hiring new employees. However, in the middle of the 2000s, after the EU accession, the tourism sector started to develop really fast, but there were shortages of skilled workers. So in between 2004-2007 the situation of graduates entering the labour market in tourism was rather favorable. In 2012, as the economy was slowing down, again the position of the employers was stronger: there were fewer vacancies and many candidates who applied for free positions. However, he observed that the overall level of the candidates' qualifications who applied for a job at his company was lower than ten years before, especially in terms of language skills and motivation (AM7 2013).

2.3 Closed and open sectors of the national economy

Even when the general trend in the economy is negative, the actual situation on the labour markets is differentiated depending on the occupation of each worker. Analysing the perspectives of VET development in Poland, it is therefore important to identify the closed and open sectors of the national economy.

- By the closed sectors we understand those sectors that have been especially affected by the economic crisis at the national level, thereby displaying a significant decrease in the number of employment opportunities and losing their importance in the national economy.
- By the open sectors we mean sectors that are expected to increase their economic weight in the future. Therefore, the open sectors should exhibit a growing number of job opportunities.

⁵ The SSE were special areas in which foreign investors were encouraged to create new production and R&D centres by receiving special tax exemptions and public subsidies.

Each year, the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy publishes a special report on scarce and surplus occupations. The scarce occupations are those jobs, for which the number of unemployed in a given occupation is smaller than the number of job offers across the country. In other words: the national demand exceeds the national supply (labour shortage). Therefore, scarce occupations could be treated as a proxy measure for open sectors of the economy. On the other hand, the surplus occupations are the ones for which the number of the unemployed is bigger than the number of job vacancies at the national level (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy 2012). These occupations can be used as a proxy measure for the closed sectors of the Polish economy.

Table 1: Scarcity and surplus of labour supply in certain occupations in the first half of 2012

Occupation	Index of deficit in supply
Manual worker	-28,987
Office technician	-8,650
Telemarketing worker	-3,765
Physical protection worker (no certificate)	-3,533
Sales representative	-2,707
Elderly caregiver	-1,908
MAG welding worker	-1,850
Office worker	-1,699
Financial advisor	-1,209
Certified physical protection worker	-1,089
Insurance agent	-864
Tractor unit driver	-757
Call center worker	-748
Kindergarten teacher assistant	-679
MIG welding worker	-664
Electrician	-577
Babysitter	-568
Customer advisor	-553
Seller (meat industry)	-536
Secretary	-532

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2012). The index is calculated by subtracting job offers from the number of unemployed in each profession.

Table 1 presents occupations characterised by labour shortages in the first half of the 2012. The most sought-after occupation in the Polish labour market was the manual worker – a low-skilled position. Based on the list of such occupations, we can identify some open sectors of the economy, such as:

- Financial services (financial advisors, insurance agents);
- Sales and marketing services (telemarketing and call center workers, customer advisors);
- Skilled and semiskilled positions in construction (MIG and MAG welding workers, electricians);
- Security services.

On the other hand, Table 2 lists the occupations displaying a labour surplus in the first half of 2012. The occupation with the biggest excess of unemployed in relation to job vacancies is the seller. In the closed sectors⁶ of the economy, we can indicate the following ones:

- Retail trade (sellers);
- Catering and food production (cooks, bakers, confectioners, nutrition specialists);
- Low and semi-skilled positions in construction (masons, carpenters, construction workers, construction technicians);
- Clothing industry (tailors, seamstresses);
- Car manufacturing (car and automotive mechanics, technician-mechanics);
- Semi-skilled positions in economic services (economists and economic assistants – both with VET).

⁶ I.e. the sectors that have been especially affected by the economic crisis at the national level.

Table 2: Surplus occupations in the first half of 2012

Occupation	Index of surplus in supply
Seller	64,157
Locksmith	22,692
Economist assistant	21,255
Mason	16,154
Technician-mechanic	15,712
Tailor	13,770
Construction worker	11,386
Cook	11,386
Automotive mechanic	10,507
Carpenter	9 524
Economist	9,520
Auxiliary worker in manufacturing	8,870
Cook in small catering	8,804
Baker	8,717
Car mechanic	8,589
Hairdresser	7,515
Confectioner	7,377
Seamstress	7,270
Nutrition technician	7,156
Construction technician	7,029

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2012). The index is calculated by subtracting job offers from the number of unemployed in each profession.

An alternative method of measurement of closed and open sectors of the economy is presented in *the Shortage of Talents* yearly reports, prepared by ManpowerGroup (ManpowerGroup 2012). In the 2012 Edition, the company surveyed 750 employers in Poland, asking them about the problems with hiring new employees. Based on this sample, a study identified Top 10 demanded occupations (see Table 3). According to the report, the open sectors of the Polish economy are:

- Financial services;
- IT;
- Restaurants (please note: not simple catering as in Table 2, but specialised catering services);
- Sales and marketing services;
- Construction (skilled positions only).

Still, the retraction in the national labour market is clearly visible, as the share of employers which pointed out problems with filling vacancies because of the labour shortages in the market has fallen from ca. 50% between 2008-2010 to a mere 37% in 2012. This is a clear sign of an economic slowdown in Poland and an evidence that employers have gained a dominant bargaining position when hiring new staff.

Table 3: Top 10 demanded occupations by employers in 2012

Rank	Occupation
1	Engineers
2	Qualified physical workers
3	Technicians
4	Drivers
5	Sales representatives
6	IT workers
7	Chefs/qualified cooks
8	Project managers
9	Machine operators
10	Finance and accounting workers

Source: (ManpowerGroup 2012).

Moreover, the abovementioned study indicates clearly that employers increasingly look for soft competences in their future employees, such as:

- Motivations/enthusiasm in work;
- Professionalism (adequate appearance, punctuality);
- Interpersonal skills and communication;
- Teamwork;
- Flexibility/easiness to adapt to new tasks and environments.

Finally, we can identify regional differences in the closed and open sectors, based on the data collected from our respondents (data collected in the survey and during the in-dept interviews conducted at the end of 2012). This may vary from the diagnoses carried out before, as our respondents came from Kraków and Małopolska voivodeship (the administrative unit in Southern Poland) only, and their opinion may not be representative for the whole national economy. Therefore, in the case of the Kraków and Małopolska region, the opening sectors are:

- IT services;
- Financial and customer attendance services in outsourcing;
- Construction, especially in the single-family housing;
- Tourism;
- Restaurants/catering services;
- Hospitality;
- Beverages manufacturing;
- Elderly care services.

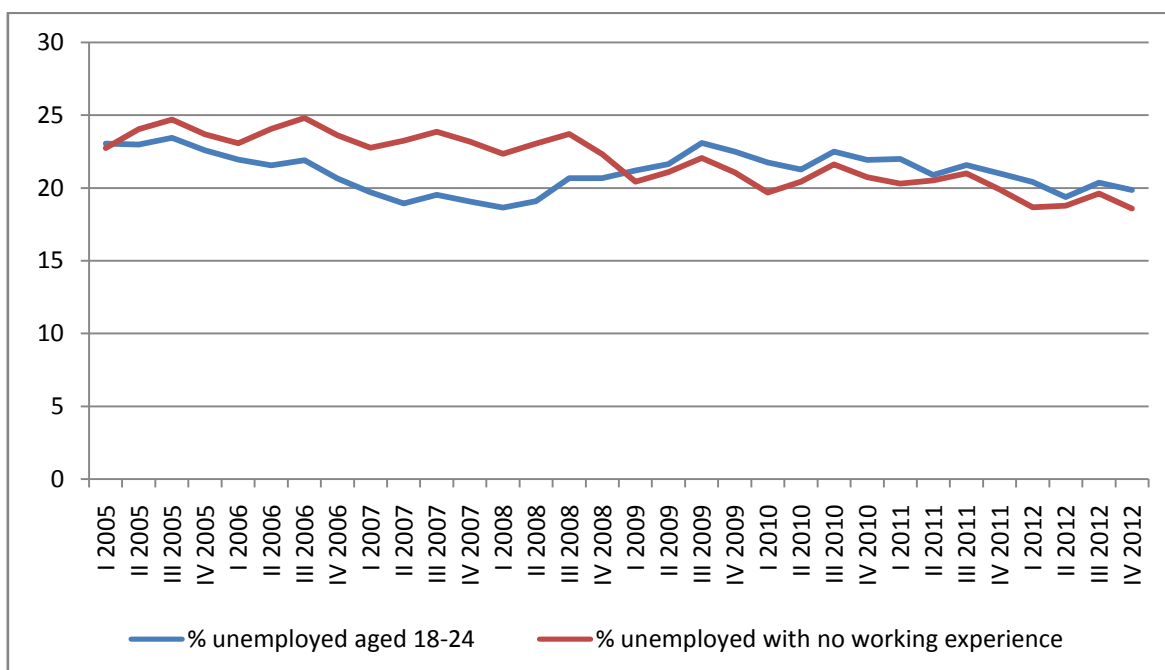
And the closing sectors are:

- Road and bridge construction;
- Education;
- Childcare;
- Mining and steeling industry.

2.4 Young workers on the national labour market

As in several other EU Member States, the situation of young people in the labour market is a source of a great concern for politicians and economists. The individuals in the age group 18-24 constituted 19.9% of the unemployed persons in Poland. At the same time, this group usually has no professional experience – those persons account for 18.6% of the unemployed (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Unemployed young persons as the % of overall unemployment



Source: GUS (2013).

In recent years, there has been a significant improvement: in absolute numbers, the number of unemployed persons aged 18-24 was reduced by 43% between 2005 -2012 in relative terms. This phenomenon can be explained by several factors:

- The massive migration of Poles in the period between 2004-2009, which was described in the previous sections. Among post-accession migrants, 55% were persons in the age group of 20-29 (Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2008);
- The demographic changes, especially the falling number of the younger cohorts entering the education system;
- The prolongation of education: the extension of the period of schooling from the secondary to the tertiary level, therefore postponing the moment of entrance to the labour market;
- Special programmes aimed at the promotion of the employment of young workers, which will be described in the next section.

3. TRANSITION FROM THE VET TO THE LABOUR MARKET

Before we describe the methodology of our analysis of the transition of VET learners into the domestic labour market, some issues concerning the quality of vocational education have to be discussed. As we have mentioned before, the downgrading of importance of vocational education at the end of the 1990s had a profound impact on the whole sector. As many vocational schools were shut down, and the financing for the remaining institutions was substantially reduced, the quality of vocational education also had to fall. Many of the VET institutions also lost main recipients of their graduates – the large public manufacturers – and found it extremely difficult to replace them with new ones. Therefore, they had huge problems both in placing the students in the work training programmes and – consequently – in helping them to get a job. Not surprisingly, this trend was associated with the declining popularity of VET among young people. Moreover, we could observe a negative selection of candidates to VET programmes: many of the pupils/learners had been admitted to vocational schools because they had no other alternative and wanted just to earn a final diploma (ŁA2 2013). Here we should note that in Poland the participation in the formal education system is compulsory for persons between 7-18 years⁷.

Therefore, many public VET institutions have at least two barriers in offering high-quality education:

- Lack of proper funding, which results in inadequate training facilities (machines, equipments, labs, etc.). Still, as one of our respondents (the director of a VET institution) argues, there were some possibilities of funding from the EU funds and some schools were successful in getting money for necessary investments (JK1 2013);
- Lack of the motivation on the part of the learners (ŁA2 2013). This problem is visible in all educational institutions (also at the tertiary level), but is the strongest in VET. Consequently, VET teachers have sometimes serious problems when working with pupils who are not interested in learning.

Moreover, our respondents indicated that the skills trained in VET facilities and institutions often did not match the labour market demand and employer's needs. The director of a public institution of VET even mentioned that some of the schools operating in Kraków were actually "producing the future unemployed" (JK1 2013). The managing director of a HR department at a major international manufacturer in Poland provided additional three examples of such mismatch between the VET supply and labour market demand and the problem of coordination by regional and local administration:

- One large multinational manufacturer of razors and shaving products decided to invest in SSE in Łódź (a large Polish city in central Poland). The reaction of the local administration was very positive, until the managers of the company – just after they had started the recruiting process in 2005 – discovered that there were no candidates for 300 new positions. It turned out that in the whole metropolitan area of Łódź (ca. 1

⁷ A detailed overview of the VET system in Poland can be found in the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training Report (Cedefop 2011).

million habitants in 2012) there was no VET school which offered training for chemical technicians.

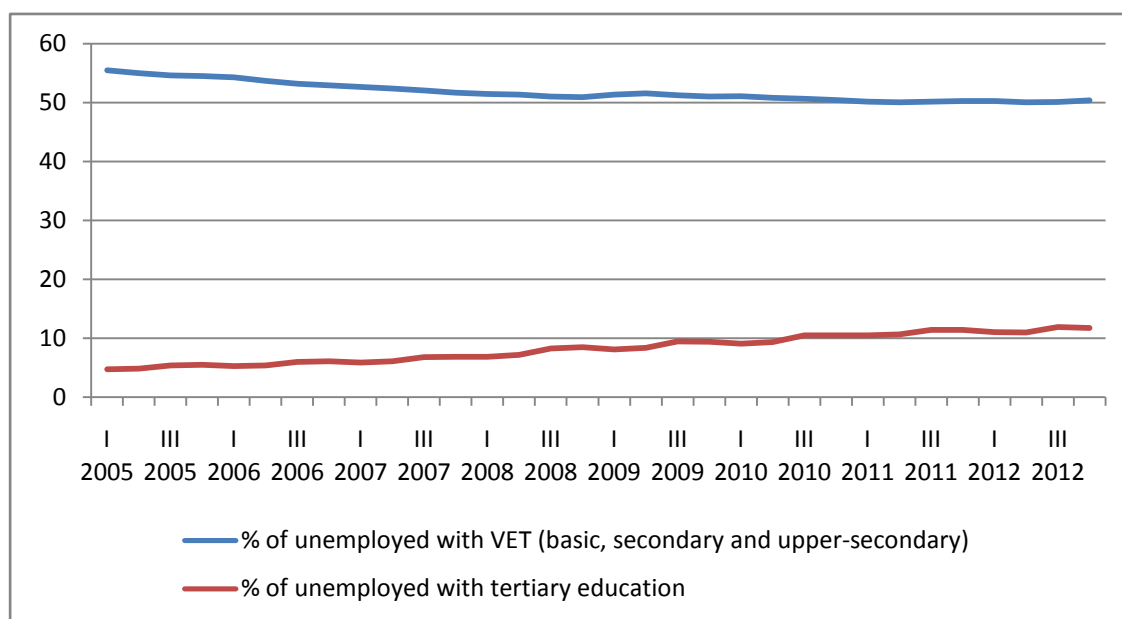
- Another firm, a leading household appliances manufacturer in Łódź, was not able to hire some semi-skilled workers in the city, so they have employed workers from Silesia region (southern Poland) and provided company-paid transportation: the workers had to commute 240 kilometers each day. The costs of such operation were high, and the company might have probably considered an alternative way to finance training at some VET institution in Łódź. Unfortunately, the VET institutions are not easily transformable and react very slowly to the changing labour market demand (TK4 2013).

Such strong opinions have been also confirmed in many studies, which analyse the expectations of the employers toward the VET sector. For instance, in 2009 the surveyed employers in Skierniewice (a city with 50,000 in Central Poland) indicated the willingness to hire workers for glass production and processing as well as for transformer winding and fitting, painters and semi-skilled IT workers. However, none of the vocational schools in the region had been offering training in these positions. Besides, the employers' representatives have complained about the level of the preparation of the VET graduates, arguing that they do not have enough practical skills, as their learning process is too theoretical (CDS 2009).

Similar results have been found in a study carried out in Wielopolskie voivodeship (an administrative region in Central Poland) in 2011. Most of the VET schools in the region have been offering training in professions, for which there was a surplus supply. Moreover, teachers and directors of those institutions were often unaware of this situation. Additionally, the educational offer was rather rigid, and the schools failed to teach the pupils soft competences, including the need for continuous, life-long learning. Finally, the practical skills of the pupils were negatively evaluated by the employers. This was due to the lack of the proper training facilities in schools (modern machinery and high-tech equipment), but also because of the weak co-operation with the companies (WORP 2011).

Having those factors in mind, there is no wonder that the graduates of VET programmes perform so badly in the Polish labour market. Nearly half of the currently unemployed in Poland are individuals with vocational education at the basic, secondary or upper-secondary level (50.4% in the last quarter of 2012). On the other hand, the graduates of the tertiary education institutions accounted for only 11.8% of the unemployed (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Share of the unemployed labour force by education levels



Source: GUS (2013).

The transition of VET learners to the labour market is so difficult also because they have little professional experience. Among the 16,762 senior (last year) students of VET in Malopolskie region surveyed in the 4th quarter of 2012, 61% had worked in 2011, but only 18% in occupations which were somehow related to their trained vocation. Moreover, most (83%) of those who had some professional experience, had been working only during summer holidays. Therefore, it is not surprising that 38% of graduates of VET institutions had decided to postpone their entrance on the Polish labour market by continuing their education and 26% were either interested in migrating abroad in search of work or with the aim to continue their education. Not surprisingly, the largest share of students who already had decided to continue education (48%) was among the seniors of the basic vocational education (WUP 2013). Still, the former graduates of VET institutions do often pursue studies at the tertiary education institutions – in those specialised in technical subjects as well as in general universities.

Therefore, the main barriers faced by VET learners hindering their successful entrance to the labour market are as follows:

- **The inherent and personal characteristics of many learners:** with the negative selection for VET schools, the average learning skills (for instance, as measured by the OECD survey of adult skills – PIAAC⁸; cf. OECD 2013) of the graduates are smaller than in the general education secondary schools. Moreover, the motivation of some students is weak, as they are just forced to pursue education until they reach the age of 18, but do not see the benefits of such education;

⁸ The results of the most recent Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey show that in Poland the students of VET institutions score 50 points less in the reading components test than the students of the general secondary schools (OECD 2013).

- **Lack of proper teaching tools available to VET teachers:** as the learning system is mandatory, the schools cannot (with the exception of some extreme cases of improper behavior) relegate students which do not want to learn. Moreover, many schools have poor training facilities and have difficulties in finding partners (employers) to place their students for an internship;
- **Mismatch between the supply and demand:** the educational offer of most VET institutions reflects the structure of an old centrally-planned economy. For instance, in Radomsko (city in central Poland) the vocational school still trains workers for the furniture manufacturing, a sector which was dominant in the local economy 20 years ago. Still, it does not train workers for the nearest household appliances manufacturing plant. In Nowa Huta, post-industrial district in Kraków (a city in Southern Poland), there are four VET institutions, specialised in training of workers for the steeling and electronic industry. However, currently the demand for such specialists is very small and most of them either end up unemployed, or need to change their qualifications in order to get a job;
- **Lack of proper coordination between the VET sector, public administration and employers associations:** especially the employers complain that the schools are unable to adjust their educational offer to their specific needs;
- **Rapid changes on a labour market:** these make the planning of the educational offer extremely difficult. It is hard to predict what the demand for workers will be within the next 5 years, and the training period in most VET institutions lasts for three or four years.

The politicians and administrative authorities in Poland have become increasingly aware of the problems of the VET graduates' integration into the labour markets. Therefore, some special measures have been designed to increase the employability of young workers. In 2002, a ministry of labour started a project "*Pierwsza Praca*" (i.e. First Work). The aim of the three-year programme was the activation of young workers for the labour market. A special www page was launched (www.1praca.gov.pl – the page is no longer active), which included a short "help kit" for young people who have been looking for the first job. Moreover, the project included special tools of activation, including: counselling services, training courses, internships and apprenticeships. The final two components of a programme were co-financed with public money and were therefore attractive for private employers, who had the opportunity to hire a cheap employee and test his or her skills during the apprentice period (usually six months). These were the most popular among the beneficiaries of the "*Pierwsza Praca*" programme – 40.6% of the participants went for an apprenticeship or internship (Liwiński 2007), which accounts for ca. 300,000 graduates in the period between 2002-2005. Yet, the effectiveness of this project was put in question by some authors, as only 1/12 of the beneficiaries of the programme found a regular job (Sobiak 2005).

In 2005, a new project – "*Pierwszy Biznes*" (i.e. First Business) was launched. The aim of the governmental programme promoted by the ministry of labour was to encourage the entrepreneurship among the unemployed persons up to 25 years of age and graduates of tertiary education institutions up to 27 years. The beneficiaries of the programme could get a preferential loan up to 40,000 złoty (ca. 10,000 euros) for the period of 36 months. However,

the project had a limited effect: in the period of 2005-2006, only 165 loans were given, with a total value of 4.8 million złoty (ca. 29,000 złoty per individual, on average – cf. Kowalska-Żakieta and Kutuła 2007).

In 2012, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy launched a new programme “*Młodzi na rynku pracy*” (Young on a labour market), with the aim of promoting employment of young people and supporting their training, according to the employers’ needs and the labour market demand. The most important component of this programme is a pilot governmental project “*Twoja Kariera – Twój Wybór*” (Your Career – Your Choice), to be carried out in 23 provinces (powiat) (sub-regions within the voivodeships in Poland). The aim of the project is to test new tools aimed in promoting the employability and training of young people, including: individual counselling, internship and practicing vouchers, and vouchers for further vocational education (MpiPS 2012). It is too early to assess the effectiveness of this project, but there is an evident shift in the public policies’ philosophy: the decision-making is transferred from the public authorities only to the beneficiary, who should be involved in this process together with the counsellors/professional guidance assistants.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The results of our research have shown that the importance of VET system in Poland has been constantly reduced by policy makers during the first 20 years of the socio-economic transformations (1990-2009). Many institutions have been shut down and the public financing for the vocational education has been reduced. Most of the VET centers were unable to modernise their training facilities and the biggest employers who used to hire the VET graduates had to close their operations and went bankrupt. Therefore, the attractiveness of the vocational education among young people has fallen: the VET centres and institutions had to struggle with the problem of the negative selection of the candidates; many of the students had enrolled in vocational education only because they had to and were not interested in learning. Consequently, the quality of vocational education has decreased.

Instead of VET, in recent 20 years the tertiary education has been promoted by public authorities. This policy has led to a boom in the tertiary schooling sector (both public and private), the impressive rise in the tertiary enrollment rate and in graduate numbers. On the other hand, this policy has resulted in the worsening quality of higher education and in the overproduction of tertiary education graduates, especially in social sciences (for instance: management, marketing, pedagogy, political science, sociology and psychology).

The overproduction of tertiary education graduates is bad news for universities and other tertiary education institutions, but gives some hope for the VET sector. In last few years, the vocational education has regained the attention of the policy makers. The Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk has recently stressed the importance of a good vocational education, stating that: “If I had to choose, I would rather be a leading welder with a high pay than an always-unemployed political scientist” (Wpoliczycy 2013).

Still, these are only political declarations, but the VET system needs to be changed and adapted to the needs of Polish and European labour market. There is a clear need for improving the quality of vocational education in Poland. The reforms of VET should include:

- Improved co-operation between national and regional authorities, employers' associations and representatives and the VET centers. Some consultative/intermediary bodies should be established in order to facilitate the communication between all the stakeholders involved in this process;
- More elastic approach in the educational offer, which takes into the consideration the local demand for vocational skills. Nowadays, the employers have limited influence on the vocational education programmes and tracks, and the co-operation between companies and VET centers is limited mostly to internships;
- More emphasis on soft competences in learning and teaching – according to our research, many of the employers indicate a lack of soft skills such as group co-operation, communication, creative problem-solving, etc.

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APPENDIX

In order to describe the national labour market conditions (closed and open sectors) and the current state of the art in vocational education training (VET) in Poland, various methods of research have been used.

First, we conducted a typical desk research. We gathered data from publicly available sources and reports to present the evolution of labour market in Poland and, consequently, the gradual changes in VET system in recent years. Based on this research, we were able to identify and analyse the closed and the open sectors of the Polish labour market, and describe the entrepreneurship possibilities for the VET graduates.

Second, we conducted 22 interviews in March and April 2013, using the questionnaire provided below. We contacted VET trainers (twelve persons) and Labour Guidance Professionals (ten persons), both from the public and private institutions. The personal profiles of our respondents are intentionally varied: they include not only the traditional teachers from the secondary vocational education, but also persons responsible for training at the post-secondary vocational level and for the in-job-training. Also among the Labour Guidance Professionals, we surveyed both public officers from the local labour administration and persons working in schooling labour guidance centers and private entrepreneurs active in the guidance field. Both the Labour Guidance Professionals and VET trainers were asked about the current conditions in the national labour market. The confidentiality of our respondents' identity was ensured remained by coding their names with a 2-letters code and a number.

Finally, we conducted five in-depth interviews with the following experts: a VET representative, a Human Resources expert, a person responsible for in-job-training, a senior manager and an entrepreneur. The interviews were carried out in March and April 2013.

QUESTIONNAIRE (POLISH TRANSLATION)

Wprowadzenie

Ten kwestionariusz wykorzystywany jest w ramach projektu VTeCOACH (REF: 2012-1-ES1-LEO05-48196), którego celem jest zaprojektowanie narzędzia dydaktycznego dla uczniów i nauczycieli kształcenia zawodowego, wspierającego rozwój miękkich kompetencji. Narzędzie to wykorzystuje koncepcję 360-stopniowej oceny ucznia i filozofię coachingu.

Projekt jest realizowany dzięki wsparciu finansowemu Komisji Europejskiej. Kwestionariusz uwzględnia jedynie opinie autorów, a Komisja nie bierze odpowiedzialności poglądy i informacje w nim podane

Zgromadzone dane, w tym dane osobowe będą wyłącznie wykorzystane w ramach projektu VTeCOACH; jedynie partnerzy i wykonawcy oraz Komisja Europejska będą miały do nich dostęp.

Z góry dziękujemy za poświęcenie czasu i wypełnienie ankiety.

Dane osobowe

Imię i Nazwisko	
Wiek	
Narodowość	
Tel. służbowy	
Email	
Dziedzina zawodowa i wykształcenie	
Stanowisko służbowe	
Opis zadań wykonywanych w obecnej pracy	
Opis wykonywanych aktywności szkoleniowych	
Doświadczenie zawodowe (w latach)	

Pytania

Proszę wymienić 3 sektory gospodarki, które oferują największe możliwości zatrudnienia absolwentom szkół i kursów zawodowych	1. 2. 3.
Jakie są miękkie i interpersonalne kompetencje (proszę wymienić min. 3), które są najbardziej potrzebne na rynku pracy?	1. 2. 3.
Czy centra kształcenia i szkolenia zawodowego mogą nauczyć wymienionych wyżej kompetencji/umiejętności?	
Proszę wymienić 3 główne bariery w ocenie i nauce miękkich i interpersonalnych kompetencji w ramach sformalizowanego systemu kształcenia zawodowego.	1. 2. 3.
Jak wyżej wymienione przez Panią/Pana kompetencje mogą być oszacowane i ocenione w ramach systemu kształcenia zawodowego?	
Czy może Pani/Pan wskazać na metodologię oceny, pozwalającą na ocenę tych kompetencji (Jeśli tak, proszę podać 1 lub 2 przykłady).	1. 2.
Czy zna Pani/Pan metodę nazywaną ocena 360 stopni?	TAK NIE
Jeśli TAK, czy może Pani/Pan wskazać na korzyści i ograniczenia tej metody? Jeśli NIE, proszę przejść do pytania 9.	Korzyści: Ograniczenia:
Czy Pani/Pan zna metodę coachingu i jej zastosowanie?	TAK NIE
Jeśli TAK, czy może Pani/Pan wskazać jak może być ona zastosowana w kształceniu zawodowym, w celu promowania zatrudnienia młodych absolwentów? Jeśli NIE, proszę przejść do pytania 11.	
Będziemy zobowiązani, jeśli zaproponują Państwo rekomendacje udoskonalenia narzędzi oceny wykorzystanych w programie VTecoACH (coaching i ocena 360 stopni).	

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW SCENARIO (POLISH TRANSLATION)

Przed rozpoczęciem wywiadu

1. Przedstawienie projektu: informacja o projekcie, celach i zadaniach a także celowości tego wywiadu.

Informacja dotycząca poufności i prywatności informacji i danych osobowych udostępnionych podczas wywiadu. „Zgromadzone dane, w tym dane osobowe będą wyłącznie wykorzystane w ramach projektu VTeCOACH; jedynie partnerzy i wykonawcy oraz Komisja Europejska będą miały do nich dostęp”

2. Zebranie osobistych i kontaktowych informacji respondenta.

Imię i Nazwisko:

Płeć:

Wiek:

Firma/Instytucja:

Dane kontaktowe (tel., email):

Doświadczenie zawodowe (lata):

Stanowisko pracy:

3. Zawsze należy podziękować respondentowi za uczestnictwo w projekcie.

Scenariusz wywiadu (proszę pamiętać, że to wywiad otwarty, nieustrukturyzowany – pytania są jedynie wskazówkami, ważne jest by respondent czuł się swobodnie i mógł wyrazić swoje zdanie).

Proszę opisać swoje doświadczenie zawodowe i obszar specjalizacji.

Proszę dokonać analizy narodowego rynku pracy: jego ewolucję w ostatniej dekadzie i ostatnie zmiany/trendy.

Które sektory gospodarki tworzą miejsca pracy dla absolwentów kształcenia zawodowego?

Czy może Pani/Pan opisać zmiany w otoczeniu edukacyjnym w Polsce? Na jakie profile zawodowe i kwalifikacje jest obecnie zapotrzebowanie na rynku?

Jak postrzega Pani/Pan przedsiębiorczość i samozatrudnienie jako narzędzia do wspierania zatrudnialności absolwentów kształcenia zawodowego?

Jak specjaliści w zakresie kształcenia zawodowego i sam system kształcenia mogą poprawić inkluzję zawodową absolwentów szkół zawodowych na rynku pracy?

Jakie środki powinny zostać wprowadzone, by ułatwić absolwentom przejście z edukacji na rynek pracy?

Jakie są najważniejsze kompetencje (szczególnie umiejętności miękkie i personalne) potrzebne absolwentom szkolenia zawodowego w celu poprawienia ich zatrudnialności?

<i>Czy znane jest Pani/Panu pojęcie “miękkich kompetencji”? Jak by je Pani/Pan zdefiniował/a? Proszę podać przykład takich kompetencji</i>
<i>Jakie pedagogiczne i edukacyjne narzędzia są wykorzystywane by rozwijać te umiejętności?</i>
<i>Jak nauczyciele i osoby odpowiedzialne za kształcenie zawodowe mogą wpłynąć na poprawienie tych umiejętności? Czy powinni oni sami rozwijać u siebie te kompetencje, by sprawniej przekazywać je swoim uczniom?</i>
<i>Jakie środki i działania poleca Pani/Pan aby zwiększać możliwości rozwoju umiejętności personalnych/miękkich umiejętności a także zwiększać zatrudnialność absolwentów kształcenia zawodowego?</i>
<i>Jakie metody i techniki rekomenduje Pani/Pan aby ocenić miękkie i personalne umiejętności nauczycieli kształcenia zawodowego? Czy są one wprowadzane przez szkoleniowców odpowiedzialnych za kształcenie zawodowe?</i>
<i>Czy znana jest Pani/Panu koncepcja oceny 360 stopni? Jak może być ona zastosowana w ocenie kompetencji nauczycieli i uczniów kształcenia zawodowego?</i>
<i>Czy znana jest Pani/Panu koncepcja coachingu? Czy znane są Pani/Panu narzędzia elektroniczne umożliwiające wprowadzenie metody coachingu?</i>
<i>Jakie korzyści mogą płynąć z wprowadzenie metody coachingu do rozwoju i trenowania kompetencji wśród uczniów kształcenia zawodowego?</i>
<i>Czy rekomendowałyby/wałby Pani/Pan coaching jako metodę wspierającą nauczanie miękkich kompetencji u nauczycieli i uczniów szkolenia zawodowego? Dlaczego (tak/nie)?</i>
<i>Czy może wskazać Pani/Pan na dobrą praktykę dotyczącą metody oceny kompetencji pracowniczych?</i>
<i>Czy może Pani/Pan przedstawić konkretne rekomendacje do rozwoju narzędzia ewaluacyjnego VTeCOACH (zawartość, podejście pedagogiczne, zbiór kompetencji etc.)</i>