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1. Methodology and background of the study

This report presents the results of a field study of the functioning of the dual scheme of vocational education in Poland, including the role of various stakeholders of the education system in its reforms carried out in recent years as well as in its current functioning. During the study, 26 individual in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of various institutions and organisations participating in the vocational education system. The interviews were conducted between April and September 2021. The list of informants includes representatives of entities responsible for shaping and functioning of vocational education at various levels. Already at the stage of designing the study, three analytical levels of the system's governance were distinguished: 1) political-strategic, 2) technical-strategic and 3) technical operational.

The first of them encompasses stakeholders involved in decision-making processes regarding long-term developments of the system in need of political legitimation. The institutions at this level which representatives were interviewed are¹: relevant departments of the Ministry of Education and Science (MEN) and the Ministry of Development, Labour and Technology (MRPiT), as well as three all-Poland trade unions (including two gathering teachers) and one nationwide employer organisation. The second level includes two sectoral employer or business associations and one sectoral trade union, as well as three institutions supporting educational system by providing expertise, developing core curricula etc. (e.g. research institutes). Third level encompasses two social dialogue bodies at the regional level, one local business association and four vocational schools' headmasters and five entrepreneurs cooperating with them in order to provide students with practical training, as well as two representatives of local education authorities (education departments of local government units).

Among the actors listed at the technical-operational level, some were examined in a formula of three mini-case studies. In principle, they were to cover three different vocational schools with cooperating companies and social partners, mainly trade unions present in these companies (three interviews for each mini-case study in total). The lack – or in one case the unavailability – of trade unions excluded the possibility of interviewing their representatives. The case studies covered three 1st stage sectoral schools with different educational profiles and locations. In each of the two case studies, two interviews were carried out with representatives of entrepreneurs providing practical vocational training under a dual education scheme. In one case, one of these entrepreneurs was at the same time a representative of the authorities of the sundry craft guild, which was the school's managing body and also supervised dual education. In the third case study, one large employer running a sponsored class and a representative of the local education authority were interviewed. As complementary to the case studies can be considered an interview with the headmaster of a technical secondary school, being a rare case of its type providing students with dual education, and with a representative of a local business organisation cooperating with some sectoral schools in the field of dual education.

The study was preceded by a desk research analysis conducted at the turn of 2020 and 2021, which covered the existing literature on the subject and legal acts regulating vocational education in Poland². In general, the field study confirmed a large part of the desk research conclusions, although it also allowed for a certain extension of the scope of identified entities and social dialogue bodies involved in reforms and governance of the VET system and a better

¹ Assigning individual institutions and organisations to particular levels of VET system governance is not always easy and unambiguous. For example, the national-level employer organisation has been assigned to the political-strategic level here, as it participates directly in the dialogue with key actors responsible for policy-making at the national level. At the same time, however, it is also involved in a technical-strategic dialogue through its regional and sectoral structures, as well as in the functioning of VET at the local level (e.g. organisation of vocational exams).

² Available from: https://involveproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/INVOLVE_deskresearch.-Poland.pdf.

understanding of their role. It also brought a better comprehension of the practices related to the application of certain legal provisions regulating the functioning of dual education.

2. General views of authorities and social partners on dual VET

Generally, the interviewees were strongly convinced that dual education is a vital, necessary scheme of vocational education. That's the consensus, both among public authorities and social partners representatives. In their opinion, dual scheme of education – or at least constant, intensive cooperation of the vocational schools with enterprises in the field of providing practical training – is a necessary condition for providing practical training of sufficient quality. Some respondents considered involvement of enterprises in vocational education as its *raison d'être*. According to the interviewees, only by training in a real work environment in the company premises, students can use the equipment currently used in a given field of activity – equipping school workshops or practical training centres will never keep up with the current trends in the economy.

An important benefit of dual vocational education indicated by the respondents is the possibility of transferring knowledge and skills that are difficult or even impossible to pass on during classes at school or to be included on the pages of a textbook. It is about 'tacit' knowledge, in accordance with the concept originally proposed by M. Polanyi (Sennett 2009: 51). Such a knowledge cannot be directly explained and described as it consists of specific manual skills, personal experience or intuition. They can all be trained mainly by repeating certain actions under the watchful eye of the master.

It is also important to acquire competences not directly related to a given profession, but to the presence in the workplace: availability, responsibility, punctuality, ability to work in a team, and knowledge of the employee's rights and obligations under labour law.

The benefits were also indicated of employers who, thanks to dual education, have possibility to gain employees well prepared to perform their tasks, taking into account the needs of companies. What is more, companies directly involved in practical training can count on a reduction in the costs of acquiring a valuable employee compared to a situation in which a candidate recruited on the labour market would be prepared for work in a given company after completing the full cycle of education. It is so not only thanks to the possibility of obtaining support from the state (partial reimbursement of the costs of practical education), but – especially – as the result of the opportunity to shape the specific skills of the student in terms of the company's needs from the very beginning.

'An absolutely most efficient form of vocational education.' [EO]

At that time [several years ago when the interviewee was starting his career], teachers rarely improved their competences, based on common patterns or a yellowed notebook with scenarios. Learning in real conditions requires a different pace, adaptation to the real conditions present in a given plant, which – in order to be competitive and profitable – must develop. Unless it is a craft company reproducing old technology, e.g. jewellery or watchmaking plants, where continuing the tradition is advantage. [expert institution]

The question that needs to be asked is whether it is possible to make a vocational school without cooperation with employers. Some people think you can. Well, it is impossible to make a vocational school without employers. [school headmaster]

2.1 Normative/ideal definitions of dual VET

The features that define dual education proposed by the interlocutors are consistent with the image adopted in the literature. They consider it crucial to carry out practical training in a real work environment in the company. Some of them also pointed to a sufficiently long duration of practical training in relation to learning theory, as well as the alternation of both elements of education, ensuring their mutual complementarity: as one interviewee stated, the student can immediately transform theoretical knowledge into practical skills. As an example of the desired proportions between theoretical learning and practical training, the interviewees indicated the ratio of 2: 3 (two days a week at school, three days at the company), which seems to be a common solution in the case of educating juvenile employees in 1st stage sectoral schools. Alternatively, interviewees pointed to the general advantage of the duration of training in practice over teaching theory, so that we could talk about dual education.

It should be noted that the respondents usually focused on the practical training of juvenile workers as the only, and in any case the most important, scheme of dual education in the Polish vocational education system. This view, shared by representatives of public authorities and social partners at various levels, seems to confirm the experiences of the schools examined in the course of the case studies. Despite the existence of two other schemes of dual education provided for in the law, only the status of a juvenile worker gives the student the opportunity to work to a large extent outside school throughout the education cycle. The interlocutors often emphasised that dual education of juvenile workers had been implemented for many decades in craft companies, before this idea became popular among public policy makers, inspired by the experiences of especially German-speaking countries in this field.

Somewhat surprisingly, a different, more rigorous definition of dual education was proposed by the headmaster of one of the schools covered by the case studies, cooperating with a very large number of enterprises employing juvenile workers. This person assessed that 'real' dual training should take place under one roof in relation to both its components - theoretical and practical training. In his opinion, practical training should follow immediately after several hours of theoretical learning.

A representative of the craft community presented factors that seem to explain well the universality of the scheme based on employing young workers. She mainly pointed to its feasibility on local labour markets in Poland, especially in small and medium-sized towns and in rural areas. These markets are characterised by a relatively low demand for representatives of particular occupations – for example, there are two or three such people each year. Thanks to the possibility of creating the so-called multi-vocational classes, in which students representing various professions are educated, this scheme allows for a very effective and flexible adjustment of the educational offer to the needs of the local economy. Students learn general subjects (e.g. mathematics, history) at school, learn theory in their profession in special training centres (it usually takes several weeks), and receive practical training in companies cooperating with the school. Those are usually relatively small companies, often with the status of craft enterprises.

An alternative model of dual education, based on sponsored classes conducted on the basis of a contract between a school and a large company, cannot be common in the country, as there are so many large enterprises interested in educating students of vocational schools. Students who do not get employment in these companies must take into account the necessity to migrate in order to find a job that satisfies them in a company with a similar production profile.

At the same time, it is worth mentioning the interesting consequences of such a state of affairs, mentioned by the interviewees. Firstly, educating juvenile workers in small companies allows young people to get a job in local labour markets. They do not have to migrate to other regions of the country or even more abroad, which is an important issue in view of the large scale of economic emigration that has taken place since Poland's accession to the European Union. However, this feature was considered negative by one interviewee, as it reduces the mobility of employees. The second important circumstance is the fact that basing the education of juvenile workers to a large extent on craft companies allows, in some cases, the transfer of unique, rare skills developed by generations by a given company. Meanwhile, large, often international

companies cooperating with schools on the basis of an agreement with the headmaster and educating a significant number of students are mostly assemblies of components produced in other countries based on ready-made projects developed in R&D offices abroad. That is why - as indicated by the representative of the craftsmanship - most of the processes related to production are learned by students, as well as by other employees, in a superficial way and without providing insight into the details of the technologies used.

2.2. Views on existing regulation on main dual VET schemes

Generally, representatives of public authorities and social partners recognise the provisions of the education law in force in Poland as actually allowing for the implementation of dual education. However - as already indicated above – this primarily concerns professional preparation of juvenile employees based on individual contracts concluded by them with employers. These employers then direct the employee to a chosen 1st stage sectoral school for theoretical training. Much less numerous respondents also indicated other schemes of dual education. One of them, representing an expert institution supporting vocational education, even suggested that vocational schools known to him more often cooperate with companies based on an agreement concluded between the school headmaster and the company. However, in the light of other interviews, this opinion is definitely isolated.

In turn, the representative of the public authorities pointed to the third scheme of dual education available in Poland, which is a student internship, as an innovation introduced in 2019 in the education law. He emphasised that this solution meets the EU definition requirements for dual education and indicated a lot of its advantages. Firstly, the student internship may go beyond the compulsory education content and include learning the skills that the employer wants to offer students. It may be conducted throughout the education cycle and allow the student to complete all mandatory practical training. Its actual duration can be flexibly agreed between the student and the employer. The student may receive remuneration for the internship, unless the parties agree otherwise. The employer includes the student's remuneration as tax deductible costs. Most of the interviewees, however, were not well acquainted with this scheme, or indicated that it was too early to be able to assess its role in providing dual vocational education.

An important conclusion from the interviews is also the possibility of combining two types of contract on the basis of which students are trained in companies. This means that even when a large company concludes a framework cooperation agreement with the school headmaster, students can still sign individual contracts with it, giving them the status of juvenile employees.

Many interviewees notice the changes that have taken place in recent years in the field of educational law in relation to VET, including dual education. Among others, replacing basic vocational schools with two-stage sectoral programmes (schools) was indicated, giving the possibility of continuing education at a tertiary level, as well as increasing the emphasis on practical education and the requirement for schools to cooperate with employers (e.g. when introducing a new occupation to the educational offer). It was indicated by some respondents that solutions have been introduced to enable employer organisations and individual companies to propose new occupations to the classification of vocational education occupations, as well as changes in the curricula of the already existing occupations. The change mentioned in the interviews was also the introduction of a new classification of occupations for vocational education itself, and the division of occupations into two or three qualifications, which was then changed, by reducing the number of qualifications per occupation to one or two.

This does not mean, however, that the introduced changes are always assessed positively by the respondents - as well as the law itself. For example, a craft representative declared that her organisation opposed to the recently introduced facilitations for practical training instructors in companies. In her opinion, the simplification and reduction of the duration of the pedagogical

course for these people from 80 to 48 hours has a negative effect on the quality of the training process.

This opinion may be somewhat surprising because, in general, according to a number of respondents (including headmasters of the schools covered by case studies), the educational law is a significant burden for companies involved in dual education. A problem, especially for small enterprises, which do not have sufficient administrative and legal personnel, is the fullness of executive acts, their complexity and lack of clarity. At the same time, as assessed by one of the respondents, entrepreneurs are often unfamiliar with the most basic concepts used in education, such as the core curriculum.

‘Even large employers are reluctant to delegate their employees to struggle with the entire educational law, with all those piles and tons of papers.’ [school headmaster, CS2]

Another important objection to the shape of educational regulations, which was reported by the representative of the craft, is the lack of a general obligation to contribute entrepreneurs to vocational education and their membership in craft chambers, as is the case, for example, in German-speaking countries. Therefore, in her opinion, it is not legitimate to speak of a ‘dual education system’ in Poland - we can only speak of a ‘small system’ covering enterprises with the status of craft companies. If such enterprises employ juvenile workers, they are under the law obliged to belong to a craft guild.

In the interview with one of the school headmasters, the problem of short-sightedness of public policy makers was also indicated, along with introducing changes in educational law without proper consultation and reflection. There is no far-reaching vision of developing the system of vocational education, or even education in general, and successive governments sometimes radically change the direction of changes. In the opinion of the same interviewee, the state introduces the necessary adjustments only when serious problems emerge. As an example of the effects of ill-considered changes, he indicated the current, temporary problem with very young 14-year-old students starting education in sectoral schools. This is the result of overlapping two decisions. First, the previous government lowered the starting age for primary education to 6. The next government raised this age back to 7, but at the same time it was decided to abolish three-year lower secondary schools, while extending the time of study in primary schools from six to eight years which resulted in the reduction of the learning time before entering vocational education by one year. As a result, young, emotionally immature people undertake vocational education, which is an additional difficulty and risk for employers. Some students at this age are not yet of sufficient height to be able to work in certain jobs or with certain devices.

The risk for employers is exacerbated by other ‘loopholes’ in the law, such as the lack of a common system of early career counselling, resulting in a high proportion of students changing their occupation during their education or even early school leaving. On the other hand, the reimbursement of the costs of practical education for employers, in itself assessed as too low by some respondents, is granted only after the student has obtained a vocational diploma.

3. Social partners’ involvement in recent dual VET reforms

In the opinion of the interviewees, the involvement of social partners in the reforms of vocational education carried out in recent years, including attempts to strengthen dual vocational education, was rather limited and not systematic. As will be shown in Chapter 5, there are no permanent tripartite bodies dedicated to vocational education, and a significant part of the relationship between public policy makers and stakeholders in vocational education is limited to engaging in public consultations.

Considering the frequent lack of open, systematic discussion in a larger body gathering social partners, the following issues can be indicated that have been raised in recent years in discussions on the fundamental shape of vocational education:

- Practical training issues, e.g. requirements for practical training instructors in companies. According to the respondents, the opinions of various circles were divergent with regard to this matter. As indicated in Chapter 2, representatives of the craftsmanship support maintaining relatively high requirements, including, in particular, a pedagogical course for candidates of sufficient duration. However, there were demands from other circles representing business to simplify the process of practical training instructors employed by the companies hosting students. Apart from the uncontroversial postulate of allowing people without tertiary education to perform this function, there were also demands to shorten and simplify the preparatory pedagogical course addressed to the instructors, which was introduced despite the objections of the craft representatives, concerned about lowering the quality of the students' training process. The issue of remuneration for teachers of practical vocational training in schools was also discussed. Representatives of business and trade unions are of the opinion that they are too low to attract qualified specialists to work in schools, who can count on much higher salaries in private companies. Another consulted issue was introducing student internship as a new scheme of dual education. The consultations also encompassed other aspects of supporting practical training in companies, such as the introduction of an obligation for a school headmaster to undertake cooperation with a company when planning to introduce a new occupation to the educational offer.
- Certain aspects of the organisation of state vocational examinations. According to the representative of one of the teachers' trade unions, thanks to the unionists' suggestions, a new, paid function of a technical assistant was introduced, whose role is to prepare the examination room for candidates and provide assistance during the examination.
- General reform of the education system, including major changes such as replacing basic vocational schools with two-stage sectoral schools and extending the duration of technical secondary schools from 4 to 5 years. The main directions of the 2017 reform, however, were imposed by the government. According to one respondent, representing a sectoral trade union, the reform consisting in replacing basic vocational schools with sectoral programmes and extending the duration of studying in technical secondary schools was not consulted with partners, it was introduced 'suddenly'. In light of other interviews, it seems indeed that the participation of social partners was limited to consulting the details of the reform. Information meetings were also organized locally. These were the so-called sectoral seminars, to which various stakeholders (local government, employers, school principals) were invited, during which the assumptions of the reform were presented.
- Strengthening the institutional support of vocational schools, including the creation and development of a system of early career counselling for students of higher grades of primary schools. Based on the interviews with the school headmasters as part of the case studies, such a system is still missing, even though the need to introduce counselling on a common scale is an important postulate of social partners. It was included in Resolution No. 48 on the recommendation of changes in the education system in the field of vocational education, adopted by the social side of the Social Dialogue Council in 2017 (see: chapter 5). A representative of local educational authorities in Warsaw declared that a centre supporting counselling in this city has recently been established, which is clearly an attempt at a fill a gap in the education system at the national level. Another issue on the consultation agenda was the creation of a system for tracking graduates (such a system is currently being developed by the Educational Research Institute) or monitoring the demand for professions and qualifications (tools for this purpose were introduced some time ago).
- Early stage of vocational education reforms from 2012-2015. At that time, with considerable involvement of some stakeholder representing business, changes in the classification of professions in vocational education were discussed. Additionally, a new structure of professions broken down by qualifications was on the agenda, as well as – assessed by the respondents as very important – the possibility of proposing new

professions by employers or organisations representing them. At the same time, new standards for the description of occupations and qualifications in terms of learning outcomes were developed. A continuation of these changes can be considered the introduction of the division of occupations into groups corresponding to 32 sectors in 2019. At the same time, the Integrated Qualifications System was created, systematising all qualifications taught in schools of all types, as well as the so-called market qualifications, awarded by non-public entities. This system introduced uniform standards for the description of qualifications and levels within the Polish Qualifications Framework (which is compatible with the EQF), to which each of them must be assigned. In the opinion of some respondents, market qualifications may complement the public offer of vocational education.

It should be noted that some of the interviews revealed quite significant divergences in the approach of social partners to the desired shape of dual education. Their vision of the functioning of vocational education and practical training is fundamentally different in some points. Some representatives of teacher trade unions, according to a craft representative, would like a school-based system where employers would only be suppliers of modern equipment for school workshops³. On the other hand, the opposite position, stressing the importance of practical training based on the company, is expressed by business representatives. Supporters of such a solution emphasise the need to facilitate companies in order to encourage them to engage in dual education, e.g. by simplifying educational regulations, increasing the amount of reimbursement of education costs or expanding the catalogue of reimbursed expenses. At the same time, the interviews suggest that the trade unions and employers' representatives get the impression that the other side is favoured by the government, which means their opinions are taken into account to a greater extent.

'When there is a discussion about the division of time between practical and theoretical learning, teacher unions only see this as teachers flee hours of curriculum framework. (...) There is always the domination of the teaching environment. This weakens our voice at the Social Dialogue Council.' [EO]

'The ministry acts rather unilaterally, and if it considers some opinions, those are rather of employers.' [teachers' TU]

Since 2008, during the entire period of operation of the tripartite team [one of the sectoral ones], no [common] position could be found. It was possible to work out the positions of both employers and employees many times. It looks like at the Social Dialogue Council, for example on the minimum wage: first it is negotiated, then the parties propose, and then the government decides in another way, because «the company» cannot come to an agreement anyway. It is similar here, only we get along with employers more often. [sectoral TU]

Yet another dividing line may be drawn between artisanal firms and large enterprises. There are tensions here, as indicated above, related to the simplification of the pedagogical course for instructors of practical vocational training. Usually, however, the discrepancies go in a different direction than in the previous case - it is especially small companies that have problems resulting from too high formal and administrative burdens. In the opinion of the craftsman's representative, if the regulations differentiated the obligations incumbent on SMEs on one side and on large companies on the other, it would be easier to agree on a common business position towards changes in vocational education proposed by the government.

The respondents generally agreed with the thesis that in the area of social dialogue over the shape of vocational education, including dual education, at the political-strategic level, trade unions are rather less active (see: chapter 5 for more details). They are essentially teachers' unions which,

³ It should be stated, however, that in the interviews with the representatives of trade unions such a view did not appear.

first and foremost, strive for fair employment conditions for teachers. These organisations are more active at the sectoral level, which in this analysis should be assigned to the technical-strategic level (see chapter 6).

4. Dual VET and collective bargaining

The respondents agreed that collective bargaining is absent at any level of governance of the VET system, not only with regard to the issue of dual education. In Poland, collective bargaining is generally applicable only in the area of negotiating employment conditions. Collective agreements are considered to be the source of labour law (Hermann-Marciniak 2015). It should be noted that they are a relatively rare phenomenon in the Polish economy. It is estimated that they cover approx. from 14 to 25% of all employees in Poland (ETUI). In the analysed area, collective bargaining could be used to determine the terms of employment and remuneration of teachers in vocational schools, as well as juvenile workers in companies providing practical vocational training.

The conditions of employment, remuneration and professional promotion of teachers are not the subject of collective bargaining, but only public consultations. Conducting of such consultations was mentioned in particular by the interviewed representatives of teachers' trade unions who admitted that the government side to some extent took into account some of the comments from their circles, although it was a fairly arbitrary issue. For example, one of the respondents declared that, as part of talks conducted by the Team for the Occupational Status of Education Employees⁴, it was possible to persuade public policy makers to undo changes that significantly extended the period in which teachers' professional promotion took place – the solutions applicable before were restored.

With regard to collective bargaining as a mechanism influencing the terms of employment of juvenile workers taught in 1st stage sectoral schools, one could imagine a situation in which they can be held. However, identifying of such cases during the study was not successful. There was only one case study conducted including a larger company sponsoring classes in vocational schools in which trade unions were present. Despite numerous attempts, contact with their representatives was not made. At the same time, the representative of the employer side declared that trade unions are only informed about the company's activities in the field of practical training, but do not participate in negotiations concerning any aspects of it. In general, it should be emphasised that the probability of influencing the situation of juvenile employees by collective bargaining - in Poland conducted mainly at the company level – is negligible. The main reason is that small, craft enterprises dominate the field of practical training. In such companies establishing a plant trade union organisation is very difficult or – in the case of employing less than 10 employees – legally impossible.

5. Dual VET governance at political-strategic level

As already indicated in chapter 3, the involvement of social partners in changes in the VET system is limited and non-systematic, and the same can be stated about the functioning of tripartite bodies of social dialogue at the political-strategic level of the system governance. In Poland, there is no tripartite body dedicated exclusively to vocational education. When it comes to the dialogue at

⁴ A consultative team at the Ministry of Education and Science, bringing together representatives of various ministries, local government (as the bodies running public schools) and teacher trade unions.

the highest national level of public policy making conducted in the Social Dialogue Council (RDS)⁵, there is not even a working team dedicated to the education system in general.

The two RDS teams with the greatest potential to debate dual VET are the Problem Team for Public Services and the Problem Team for Economic Policy and Labour Market. They will be described in detail below. It should be noted, however, that changes in the VET system is an issue that is only undertaken on an ad hoc basis, on the occasion of major reforms or on the initiative of social partners. The interviews show that the discussion within these bodies could take place at most several times over a period of several years. Therefore, it is not a continuous and systematic process. Moreover, according to the respondents' declarations, the dominant form of information exchange between ministries responsible for vocational education - mainly the Ministry of Education and Science - and the stakeholders of the system is the written submission of comments on draft legal acts as part of public consultations.

Social partners are not always satisfied with the ongoing consultations and the extent to which their comments are taken into account by the government side. It has already been indicated above that there were suggestions in the interviews that the other side is being favoured. Another caveat raised in the interviews is the government's arbitrariness as to what stakeholder comments to take into consideration. The representative of the teachers' union described this problem shortly: 'our opinions are taken into account or not'.

Additionally, it should be pointed out that the dialogue in a tripartite or bipartite formula may also take place outside the above-mentioned problem groups. Particular sectoral teams of RDS also can be involved. In an interview with a representative of one of the sectoral trade unions, it was argued that the issue of vocational training was raised in the relevant RDS tripartite team due to high labour shortages in the sector. In turn, a representative of a sectoral employer organisation indicated the RDS plenary sessions as a forum where social dialogue on vocational training was also held. Interestingly, this case should be seen as a dialogue at the technical-strategic level. It was a part of the activities of the organisation aimed at restoring to the classification of VET professions an occupation important for the functioning of the sector, which will be described in detail in Chapter 6.

Also during one plenary session in 2017, 'Resolution No. 48 by the employees' and employers' side on recommendation of changes in the education system in the area of vocational education' was adopted. It had been previously developed in bipartite dialogue by the representatives of a social side of one of the discussed problem teams (see: 5.1). Its adoption can be considered as an attempt to draw the government's attention to the need to strengthen vocational education. Resolutions of the social side of the RDS have been adopted relatively often in recent years. Usually, they were aimed at opposing certain decisions of the government if, in the opinion of the social partners, their position was not taken into account sufficiently, or they wanted to draw attention to the need to introduce significant changes in a given area of public policy.

5.1. Most important tripartite institutions relevant for dual VET

Problem Team for Public Services of the Social Dialogue Council

The tasks of this team include the development of common positions and opinions of the partners on matters relating to the public service sector. The team consists of representatives of several ministries in the rank of undersecretaries of state (in other words, deputy ministers), employer organisations and trade unions representative at the national level. For several years, the chairman of the team was the president of the largest all-Poland teachers' trade union. Currently, this

⁵ Social Dialogue Council is a social dialogue forum for representatives of employees, employers and the government established under the Act of 24 July 2015 on the Social Dialogue Council and other social dialogue institutions. It replaced the Tripartite Commission for Socio-Economic Affairs.

function is performed by a representative of one of the employer organisations. In the opinion of a representative of one of the trade unions, the team discusses projects of all of the most important changes in the functioning of the entire education system. This was also confirmed by a representative of the Ministry of Education and Science. These include issues such as the 2016/17 reform introducing 1st and 2nd stage sectoral programmes and modifying the rules of operation of other general education schools, including vocational, as well as other less fundamental changes, such as the introduction of a new path of dual education which is student internship. According to the trade union representative, in some cases the team also discusses, at the request of the employer side, including new occupations in the classification of occupations of vocational education (although there is a formal path to apply for inclusion through contact with the ministry).

On the one hand, the interviewees having knowledge about the team⁶ valued it as important from the perspective of their organisation. On the other hand, they indicated the limited influence that the social partners have on the fundamental shape of the changes proposed by the government.

The union has influence not so much on the [general] changes – the ministry acts rather unilaterally, or it listens more to employers - but rather on some corrections of them. (...) This is a very important team [for us] and participation in it, all partners are invited, we can discuss changes: education law, Teacher's Charter, any changes regarding education, including its vocational part... We can discuss with different stakeholders in the education system, everyone can have their say. The conclusions drawn from this team are at some point binding for the minister - not always, but they are. [teachers' TU]

Problem Team for Economic Policy and Labour Market of the Social Dialogue Council

The main task of the team is to develop common positions and opinions on matters related to the economic policy of the country and the labour market. The composition of the team is similar to the one discussed above. The chairman is the leader of the national trade union representing railway engine drivers. This team was rarely mentioned by the respondents. The representative of the employer organisation associating the craftsmanship told the most about its activities, mentioning the fact that vocational education was a secondary issue in relation to the main discussed problems. The starting point are some fundamental decisions on the direction of economic and the labour market policies, which, in turn, entail a change in the structure of the demand for occupations, and thus the need for reforms in the VET system. An example is the reduction of CO² emissions, without which the Polish economy will not be competitive. This, in turn, requires introducing new occupations and qualifications. As a much more modest, and at the same time less obvious example, the changes in the road traffic law were given, which made it necessary to change the education process of diagnosticians employed at vehicle inspection stations.

It turns out, however, that the VET system, even if secondary to the main issues discussed by the team, is nevertheless a matter of concern for social partners. It was this problem team that developed the recommendations for the development of vocational education, presented in the above-mentioned Resolution No. 48. At the very beginning, the document contained a statement regarding the importance of strengthening practical vocational training in the workplace and linking the directions and content of education with the needs of the labour market. At the same

⁶ It seems that fewer respondents have detailed knowledge of the team's work than could have been expected. This may be due to the relatively small number of people representing the stakeholders of the education system present in the team, the relatively low frequency of discussing topics related to education and focusing its members on issues related to the public health care system or public procurement law. Even a respondent with a lot of knowledge about the team, incorrectly gave its name during the interview, suggesting that it deals only with the area of education. Later, in an e-mail, she corrected this information.

time, social partners declared their readiness to participate in these changes and to share responsibility for shaping dual VET. Then a number of postulates were presented, such as strengthening early career counselling in primary schools to help students rationally choose a proper occupation, implementing a common tracking system of graduates, making the amount of the educational subsidy transferred to a given school dependent on its cooperation with employers, the fact of vocational preparation of students in a real work environment and the results of tracing graduates. Subsequently, it was proposed, among others, increasing the impact of Poviats and Voivodeship Labour Market Councils on the structure of the educational offer (e.g. by the possibility of withdrawing consent to training in an occupation that is surplus on the local labour market), participation of representatives of social partners in vocational examinations and preparation of examination tasks, or developing local partnerships connecting employer organisations, local government and schools to set up sponsored classes or schools offering dual education. One of the proposals was also the establishment of the Vocational Education Development Fund (FREZ), which would be co-managed by social partners.

The then minister of national education stated that 70% of the demands contained in the resolution were included in the drafts of acts and regulations. Although this statement should be treated as political rather than precisely reporting the facts, it should be noted that the general direction of changes in the VET system in recent years has generally corresponded to the postulates. However, perhaps the most radical of them, concerning the appointment of FREZ, has not yet been realised.

Other social dialogue bodies were also mentioned in the interviews, including the RDS tripartite sectoral teams mentioned below, which may, in some cases, address the issue of vocational training for a specific sectors. Noteworthy is also the Consultative-advisory Team for Vocational Education at the Minister of National Education, which played a role (in the opinion of a representative of one of the teacher trade unions - even a large one) in the area of informing and consulting social partners in the early phase of VET reforms in the years 2012-2015. However, it has been inactive since 2016.

There are also bodies that have an impact on the functioning of the education system, but their scope of competences is far from vocational education, not to mention dual VET. This includes, for example, the Team for the Professional Status of Education Employees. On the other hand, interviews mentioned such a body as the Parliamentary Team for Crafts and Entrepreneurship, which, however, can hardly be considered as a tripartite body - it is mainly composed of MPs, while social partners are invited as experts or commentators. Another character has the recently established Team for Vocational Training at the Ministry of Development and Technology, which consists only of representatives of the ministry and one employer organisation representing crafts. It seems that this initiative is a manifestation of some tendency to maintain bilateral relations between public authorities and certain stakeholders of the education system (another manifestation is the aforementioned dominance of the formula for submitting opinions as part of public consultations). At the same time, the fate of this team is uncertain, since shortly after the interview, significant personnel changes took place in the Ministry, resulting from strictly political decisions within the government coalition.

6. Dual VET governance at technical-strategic level

The conducted interviews reveal a relatively positive image of the functioning of the technical-strategic level of VET system governance in terms of the involvement of various important actors – especially business along with organisations representing it. Although a sceptical position was also noted, suggesting little actual involvement of companies, it seems, however, that in recent years a significant number of entities have been persuaded to co-manage the system, especially in sectors suffering from significant labour shortages. This concerns in particular the use of mechanisms enabling the introduction of new qualifications and occupations to the VET system, including the co-creation of core curricula. In the course of the interviews, it was even possible

to identify a case that can be safely described as a good practice in this area – It will be described below.

The government and social partners have the support of a number of institutions that provide expertise in the functioning of the education system and labour market or in the field of educational methodology (e.g. support in creating the a core curriculum in its pedagogical aspects). The activities of these institutions will be described in detail below, although it should be noted here that already in the desk research report it was possible to identify most of them and characterise their role. There are also social dialogue bodies for adjusting the VET educational offer to the demand for professions in specific sectors. These are the Sector Councils for Competences.

6.1. Institutions supporting the VET system

Institute of Educational Research (IBE)

A research unit well known to the majority of respondents, reporting to the Ministry of Education and Science, belonging to the ReferNet network. Involved in a number of activities for vocational education, including:

- Forecasting the demand for professional education professions. Based on various public statistics, IBE prepares a list of 24 professions for which particularly high demand is forecast across the country. Lists for individual voivodeships (regions) are created separately. Sectoral schools receive a higher educational subsidy for training in these professions.
- Developing the Integrated Qualifications System. IBE was responsible for the substantial (i.e. merits-related) side of creating the system, e.g. for developing qualification description standards. Currently, it supports ministries competent for specific market qualifications (awarded by non-public institutions), e.g. in the field of external quality assurance.
- Creating a nationwide system of tracking the graduates of various types of schools, including vocational ones. The system is currently at the stage of implementation. It is to be low-cost, incl. thanks to the use of automatic processes, processing official data allowing to determine the employment situation (e.g. from the Social Insurance Institution).

Social partners are not involved in this public institution. Their contacts with it are limited to participation in some events organised by IBE (seminars, conferences), but not include permanent cooperation, e.g. conducting joint projects, not to mention hiring representatives of social partners.

Education Development Centre (ORE)

A teacher training facility with a nationwide range. Its main tasks are: teacher training, implementation of educational policy directions created by the Ministry of Education and Science, implementation of EU projects. From the perspective of this analysis, the key task of ORE is participation in the developing the core curricula. A separate division of vocational education is responsible for this, which is commissioned by the Department of Strategy, Qualifications and Vocational Training of the ministry. The core curricula can be developed in cooperation with various entities, sometimes selected through a competition, that provide substantive input related to the specificity of a given profession. These are, for example, business organisations or research institutes such as the Institute for Sustainable Technologies described below. The role of ORE is to coordinate the entire process of developing the core curriculum and

to take care of its methodological and pedagogical aspects. An example of the process of introducing a new occupation in which the role of ORE is explained will be described below.

Another activity of this entity is the development of exemplary education programmes that can be used by vocational schools. The centre also conducts training for teachers and entrepreneurs representing various types of companies on the principles of cooperation between schools and business. The recipients of information activities gain knowledge about current reforms, educational law provisions, and are also acquainted with good practices in the field of cooperation between vocational schools and companies. As in the case of IBE, social partners are not involved in functioning of this entity.

Institute for Sustainable Technologies (ITEE)

It is a state research and development unit located in the medium-sized town of Radom in central Poland, belonging to the 'Łukasiewicz' research network. It conducts both basic and applied research in the field of machine operation in industry. The facility has a strong department dealing with the VET area. Before the 2012+ reforms of the VET system, it was involved in the creation of educational programmes, currently it is one of the entities commissioned to create the core curricula. This process is coordinated by ORE, while entities such as ITEE provide substantive input related to the specificity of the professions (although, as the respondent admitted, the institute also uses the know-how of relevant companies – experts from the vocational education department have knowledge mainly in the field of pedagogy and andragogy). ITEE also conducts other activities related to the VET system governance, e.g. it was responsible for the development of descriptions of approx. 1,000 occupations (a part of which are VET occupations) for the internet portal of public employment services. It also participates in the co-management of the Integrated Qualifications System, including the role of so-called entities of external quality assurance (PZZJ) of qualifications in this system. Social partners are not involved in functioning of ITEE.

Institute of Labour and Social Affairs (IPiSS)

A research institute supervised by the Ministry of Development, Labour and Technology, dealing with labour issues and social policy. The respondents rarely mentioned this actor, pointing at best to its general role of studying the functioning of the labour market, including the link between VET and its requirements. One respondent mentioned the activity of the IPiSS around 2016, when a special issue of the scientific journal run by this unit was published, dedicated to the issue of vocational education, including its dual formula (articles from this issue were included as sources in the desk research report from January). The interviewee noted, however, that since then a key person representing the institute interested in the area of dual VET has retired, and this issue has lost its importance, in his opinion, also in the wider scientific discourse in Poland.

Representatives of pick-level organisations of social dialogue are among members of the Programme Committee of this institute, providing some informative input to the planning of its research activities.

Sectoral Councils for Competencies

Interviews with representatives of sectoral social dialogue organisations made it possible to get acquainted with the functioning of the Sectoral Councils for Competencies – dialogue bodies operating as part of a five-year project implemented by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP). There are currently seventeen of them. They are composed of representatives of employers' organisations, business associations, chambers of commerce and companies, as well as research institutes and universities. Some councils include representatives of trade unions – it is so, for example, in the case of the Council for the construction sector. The general idea of this project - which is currently under discussion as to what form to adopt after

the current financing period - is, in the respondent's opinion, to combine education with the labour market. This is done by discussing the staffing needs reported by business representatives from a given sector. The councils work a bit like 'labour market observatories', as an interviewee put it, referring to projects implemented by public employment services at the regional level.

In the opinion of the respondents, councils show considerable activity and initiative in formulating recommendations for ministries relevant to professions in a given sectors in terms of introducing new occupations or modifying the core curricula. An interviewee representing the trade union expressed an opinion that the councils have a strong legal basis – he indicated the Act on PARP, the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System and the Education Law Act. Thanks to this, in his opinion, they constitute a relatively strong tool of putting pressure on the authors of public policies.

These are bodies that associate industry organisations, trade unions and entities from the formal and non-formal education segment. In order to connect these two worlds - education with the labour market, and provide relatively up-to-date information and reports, to be able to introduce new market qualifications in the system or modify the existing core curricula or show trends in which direction a given industry is heading. [expert institution]

Sectoral councils – some at least – are already starting to play the role of labour market observatories. And here is a whole set of recommendations with which the government has to do something and they cannot be completely put in a drawer, the advice is quite tiring in demanding an answer to your question, especially since they are already anchored in Polish and European projects. [sectoral TU]

The project of Sectoral Councils for Competences is implemented under the Operational Program 'Knowledge Education Development' (POWER) and is co-financed by the European Social Fund. Its end is scheduled for August 2022. According to the information provided by the respondents, a discussion on the continuation of the project and its shape was beginning during the survey, but no details have been known yet.

Stakeholder Council of the Integrated Qualifications System

The Integrated Qualifications System (ZSK), as indicated above, is treated by some respondents as a significant (potential) supplement to the formal VET system. One of the headmasters of the vocational school hopes that students will be able to obtain market qualifications in the future as an additional specialisation within the educational path. The stakeholder council of this system is an advisory body to the Minister of Education as the ZSK coordinator. In addition to government representatives, it includes representatives of social partners (both trade union and business/employer associations), local government, education, academic and professional communities, as well as public and commercial training institutions. The role of all these board members is primarily of an advisory nature. The body deals with the general functioning of the system, but also gives opinions on the descriptions of qualifications added to it and the level of the Polish Qualifications Framework that is assigned to them.

6.2. Involvement of social partners at the technical-strategic level

Although in the opinion of the respondent representing the teacher trade union, '*on the fingers of one hand you can count employers involved in the creation of the core curricula*', it should be noted that there are cases of such companies and their activity sometimes brings tangible results. The interviews showed that there are sectors in which business organisations have learned to use the solutions introduced since 2012 to better match the vocational education offer to the needs of

companies in terms of the demand for professions and qualifications. In general, organisations representing business, including employer organisations, have the possibility to propose the addition of a new profession to the classification of VET occupations. They can also participate in the next steps in introducing the profession, including creating a core curriculum. Employers' representatives may also propose changes to the core curricula of already existing occupations, if they deem that an update is needed. They can also participate in the process of creating a new profession by giving opinions in the course of public consultations. In recent years, employers have also been encouraged to propose new examination tasks. As part of the project implemented by the Central Examination Board, the creation of the so-called 'task banks' was initiated, which should ultimately cover approx. 80 thousand examination tasks.

The role of trade unions in all of the aforementioned areas is rather limited. It is possible for trade unions to join the process of creating a new occupations, which sometimes takes place, as in the example below, in the role of an organisation supporting the employers' initiative. However, it is also possible for trade unionists to participate in the discussion on substantive issues regarding the characteristics of the occupation, based on the knowledge of trade unionists regarding the specificity of work in a given sector.

A representative of one of the sectoral business association, which is the Association of International Road Carriers in Poland (ZMPD, affiliated to the national-level employer organisation Employers of Poland), described the process of restoring a driver-mechanic occupation to the classification of VET occupations after many years of its absence from public schools. This case seems to be a significant success. We are talking about a sector very important for the Polish economy which is road transport, which has been suffering from significant and troublesome labour shortages for years. Shortly after the introduction of the possibility for business organisations to propose new occupations and to influence the content of the core curricula on the wave of reforms from 2012, the discussed organisation, in cooperation with other associations in the sector, took steps to restore the profession. Initially, it encountered the reluctance of the representatives of the then Ministry of National Education, which, in the opinion of the interviewee, was probably related to the opposing lobbying activities of commercial training centres related to this occupation. An additional difficulty was the fragmentation of the sector with a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises and a certain number of sectoral associations, which made it possible to question the representativeness of the analysed organisation. The change has taken place since 2015, when a new government took power. Ministry of Education officials turned out to be more sympathetic to the organisation's proposal, which managed to conclude the required agreement to introduce a new profession into the classification. The largest sectoral trade union, i.e. the National Section of Road Transport Workers of NSZZ 'Solidarność', supported the organisation at this stage, showing its approval for the restoration of the occupation, joining the appeals to the government and participating in joint events related to it.

The organisation then participated in the development of the core curriculum, although the Education Development Centre which coordinated the process had care of its methodological aspects - as the respondent admitted, experts of his organisation lacked knowledge in the field of pedagogy. However, they ensured appropriate knowledge related to the specificity of the occupation. It was not the end of the association's efforts. The next step was an information campaign in numerous localities, addressed to local education authorities and school headmasters. So far, its effect has been the introduction of the occupation in 120 sectoral schools throughout the country in which about 5 thousand students are taught.

The next activities of the organisation were related to the low pass rate of vocational examinations of students educated in this occupation. Interventions at the ministry and the Central Examination Commission to adapt the content of the exams to the abilities of the sectoral programmes' students were successful. Currently, the efforts of the organisation are focused on conducting information and promotion activities aimed at students, so that they remain in the occupation after graduation. Its beneficial sides are presented in an attractive way by organising events and competitions. In the future, consideration will be given to submitting an application to the ministry to modify the

core curriculum due to technological changes. Advanced knowledge of mechanics is now less important than various social competences. The interviewee expressed optimism that the organisation would have partners in this process on the part of public authorities.

The above story is an example of a long-term and carefully conducted process aimed at strengthening the human resources of companies by the business environment that looks at the situation of companies with foresight and operates in a systematic and long-term manner. It seems this is not a common phenomenon in other sectors. As indicated by some respondents, many companies in Poland are not interested in co-managing the vocational education system, and they try to acquire qualified employees on an ad hoc basis. For instance, they recruit them from other companies by offering them more favourable employment conditions. At the same time, the respondent confirmed that most of the activities took place through bilateral contacts with the ministry, ORE and the Central Examination Board. On the other hand, there was time to discuss the problem even at the plenary meeting of the Social Dialogue Council or to organise the abovementioned joint conferences with trade unions.

'We can differ fiercely with trade unions, for example regarding drivers' salaries, but when it comes to driver training, we even organised press conferences together, there were joint statements and appeals to the government.' [EO]

'We stay active and follow the situation. We assume that if you don't wind up this mechanism from time to time, this spring, it won't run well. The resistance of matter is continuous and it has to be broken over and over again.' [EO]

7. Dual VET governance at technical operational level

7.1. State or social partners institutions

The interviews confirmed the knowledge gained from the desk research analysis as regards the shape of the institutional framework related to the provision of dual vocational education and the evaluation of learning outcomes. Basically, the VET system in Poland is based on public vocational schools - two-cycle vocational schools and technical secondary schools - whose governing bodies are local government units. At the same time, there are about 40 non-public sectoral schools run by craft guilds throughout the country.

The examination system is based on the Central Examination Commission (CKE) reporting to the Minister of Education and supported by eight District Examination Boards (OKE) covering one or several voivodeships (regions). Graduates of vocational schools take external vocational exams. In parallel, there is an examination system organised by regional chambers of crafts. The examinations taken under this system lead to the title of journeyman or master and are preferred by students. They are taken by graduates who were educated as juvenile workers employed by craft companies, but with the consent of the employer, they can also be taken by juvenile workers employed by entities that do not have the status of a craft company.

The VET system is supported by public institutions and social dialogue bodies such as:

Voivodeship Labour Market Councils (WRRP)

A body of social dialogue composed of representatives of educational authorities, trade unions and employer organisations, discussing various issues related to the functioning of the regional labour market, employment situation and the demand for professions and qualifications. One of the main - and in the opinion of the respondents the most absorbing - task of the councils is to issue opinions on the applications of school headmasters to include a new profession in the school's educational offer, based on the demand for professions in the regional and local labour markets. In the opinion of one of the respondents, this is a relatively routine procedure. The

decision is made by voting, sometimes the headmaster takes part in the debate, justifying the need to introduce a new profession.

Voivodeship Labour Offices (WUP)

These are institutions of public employment services at the regional level, not directly related to the VET system. However, they play an important supporting role in at least two areas. Firstly, they monitor the demand for professions and qualifications on the basis of aggregated data from local units of public employment services (Poviat Labour Offices) and research conducted as part of projects such as regional labour market barometers or regional labor market observatories. These data are used, among others, by Educational Research Institute defining 24 priority VET professions, education in which is associated with a higher educational subsidy. Secondly, WUP directors - also based on the demand for professions - annually prepare a list of professions for which remuneration of juvenile employees may be reimbursed in a given voivodeship.

7.2. The role of trade unions and employer organisations

The most important social partner involved in the governance of vocational education at the technical operational level are - at the local level - the guilds of crafts that belong to regional chambers of crafts, subject to an organisation representative at the national level which is the Polish Craft Association (ZRP). Guilds, with the support of chambers of crafts, supervise craft companies that provide professional training for juvenile workers under the dual scheme of vocational training. They also provide support to these companies, promote vocational education among young people, and support students, e.g. by funding them scholarships. Craft chambers, in turn, as indicated above, organize journeyman and master exams.

A role similar to that of craft guilds – that is, coordinating the cooperation of local business with vocational schools in order to provide more qualified staff, supporting companies and promoting the cooperation – can also be played by other organisations representing business. An example identified during the study is a chamber of industry and commerce located in a medium-sized city, operating in the metal sector. The companies associated in it have created a cluster that currently cooperates with two sectoral schools in the area of training two occupations.

The interviews showed that trade unions play practically no role at the analysed level of VET governance. This is due to the structural conditions described in Chapter 4: a low level of unionisation, especially in craft companies, and a lack of collective bargaining practice. Teachers' unions in schools mainly deal with the issue of employment conditions for teachers. Potentially, trade unions in large companies, especially those with the participation of the state treasury and with foreign capital (domestic private companies are the least unionised), may play a certain role in ensuring proper working conditions for juvenile workers. The trade unions are responsible for, among others, the so-called social labour inspection dealing with health and safety issues.

Respondents generally failed to make remarkable proposals to strengthen the role of the social partners at the technical operational level. The representative of the teachers' trade union admitted that the leading role in ensuring the quality of dual education should belong to the employer organisations. Other union representatives spoke in a similar vein, suggesting that the main competences in this regard lie with the governing bodies of schools and employers. They also found that certain problems at school level can be communicated to higher levels of the union structure, whose representatives in turn can engage in discussions with the authorities at the national level. Yet another trade unionist admitted that unions are little involved in ensuring employment conditions for young workers at the workplace level. However, he did not present a way to remedy this problem. In turn, representatives of expert organisations sometimes expressed a clear scepticism about the role of trade unions both in VET governance and in the economy in general.

On the employers' side, the most far-reaching postulate of strengthening the role of social partners is probably the view of a craftswoman's representative on the benefits that would result from the obligatory membership of craft companies in organisations representing them.

8. Dual VET in practice (cross-case study analysis)

The mini-case studies covered three 1st stage sectoral schools with different characteristics. One of them is located in the country's capital, while the other two are located in a small and medium-sized town. Two schools base their practical training on cooperation with a large number of mainly small companies (even several hundred entities), one of which - run by a guild of various crafts - mainly with craft companies. In turn, the third school, next to small entities, permanently cooperates with several large companies with foreign capital, which sponsor entire classes in specific professions. All these schools provide a dual education scheme based on the employment of juvenile workers, although the school running sponsored classes at the same time bases cooperation on framework agreements between the school headmaster and the cooperating employers. The case studies were supplemented by an interview with the headmaster of a technical secondary school located in the capital of the country, which, like one of the few schools of this type, offers practical training partly in a dual scheme. In addition, one interview was conducted with a representative of a local sectoral organisation – a chamber of commerce and industry - in a medium-sized town, supporting local businesses in providing practical vocational training.

Dual VET – main advantages

The interviews reveal the fundamental advantages of dual education from the perspective of all parties involved. Sectoral schools, running multi-vocational classes, can offer their students mainly education in general professions (e.g. mathematics, history), while even the theoretical part of vocational education for a large part of the offered occupations is conducted in external training centres, as part of a course lasting several weeks. Schools usually do not have workshops or laboratories for practical training, therefore all of this area is devoted to the employers involved.

From the employers' perspective, the main advantage is the possibility of recruiting employees with qualifications strictly matching their needs. The interviews confirmed that some of the students later find employment in the company where they were trained. For companies associated in the studied guild, specific benefits resulted from the fact that its authorities established its own sectoral school. It gave a possibility to adjust the weekly schedule to the needs of associated enterprises better than in the case of a public school. Students spend one whole week at school and the next week at the company, while in public schools the common solution is to split the week: two days at school, three days at the company⁷. As the representative of the employers and the chairman of the guild explained, this allows the student to complete certain production processes, such as producing a complete piece of furniture.

The perspective of students has not been directly studied, but based on interviews with other actors, it can be concluded that they gain important competences - both professional and 'soft' - thanks to their presence in a real work environment. In addition, sometimes they spontaneously

⁷ Other schemes are not prohibited by law, but school running bodies - as some interviews show - may not have a sufficiently flexible approach to the way dual education is organised. In the opinion of the representative of the local sector organisation, the involvement of companies in practical training is sometimes not fully appreciated and facilitated.

gain support in life problems from the employees who take care of them. In a way the workplace may become their second home.

Main difficulties in organising dual VET

In the course of the case studies, a number of difficulties encountered both by schools and companies cooperating with them have been identified. A constantly persistent problem is the negative image of vocational schools - especially sectoral programmes - and the characteristics of students resulting from it. It is a youth who at the earlier stage of education reached an average of worse learning outcomes than people who are studying in general high schools. In addition, these students have often negative social background, come from disadvantaged communities, experiencing problems in family and private life, such as addiction or conflict with the law. Some of them may be covered by the supervision of a probation officer. This is an additional challenge from the pedagogical point of view, both for schools and employers. An interviewed entrepreneur admitted that the problems that students come to the place of work are sometimes additional mental load for other employees. In general, the interviewees reported the difficulty of the employees to work with young people, even those not experiencing problems. It requires specific skills that must be acquired within a certain period of time, while in Polish companies there is a relatively high employee turnover. As a result, not every employer decides to send their employee to pedagogical training, since it is not sure whether they resign from employment soon.

The biggest problem, a nuisance for every employer ... it's not about bureaucracy anymore, but the problems of these children themselves. Because they are with us, they are for so many hours. So they behave with us as they do with their peers. Freely. We hear what they say. If they spend so much time with us... how do they behave, what are their problems, what do they do in private time. We are automatically involved in it, drawn into it, if they are of the age known to be... so we cannot pretend that we do not hear it, pass by indifferently. We are often very involved in their private lives.
[employer, CS2]

A feature of students accompanying the previously mentioned is a frequent confusion as to the direction of education that they should choose. Choosing a profession, in connection with the still insufficient early professional counselling, as well as often reluctant to further learn, makes many students starting professional education in what profession should educate. In the opinion of one of the headmasters, only about half of the students finish the full cycle of education and pass a professional exam. The most common cause of early school leaving or changing the occupation learned are the problems with choosing the right occupation, and in the further order some life problems or events such as pregnancy. Sometimes the student wants to educate in a given profession and they have a gift for it, but a defective mechanisms of occupational medicine certification (e.g. decisions based on an interview with a parent) causes that even after a longer period of education, for example, allergy to hairspray is revealed, which prevents continuing education in the occupation of a hairdresser.

A significant difficulty of the parties involved in dual education, already mentioned in chapter 2, is the multitude, extensiveness and lack of clarity of educational regulations. This causes difficulties especially for small companies that do not have extensive administrative staff. One of the headmasters declared that his school is trying to help companies,. For instance, at the beginning of the year, they are only given excerpts from the core curriculum for a given occupation so that instructors can learn precisely what the compulsory content is without browsing through dozens of pages of regulations. Cooperation between schools and companies is also not facilitated by the instability of regulations, which results in situations such as the influx of very young students (under the age of 15) described in Chapter 2. This creates difficulties of both a formal nature (a juvenile worker must be 15 years old) and sometimes a practical one, for instance when students trained as car mechanics do not reach the car's chassis while standing in a pit in a car repair shop.

If to treat the company's involvement in the dual education of juvenile workers as an investment in the area of HR, in the light of the above-mentioned problems it should be considered as a high risk investment. This is the case also because the company can obtain a refund of its costs related to providing training (about 1800 EUR for an entire three-year education cycle) only when the student passes a professional exam⁸. Even this can be some trap: as the school headmaster indicated, it happens in some cases that the student 'disappears' after graduation, because they did not have a good relationship with the employer. The school has already developed a procedure in the event of such a situation: All diplomas after sending them by OKE are immediately photocopied before handing them over to students, and copies are stored in the secretary's office.

Coordination of dual education at the schools' level

Coordination of dual education of juvenile workers in two of the three surveyed schools, based on cooperation with a large number of small companies⁹, most often employing juvenile workers, is not strongly institutionalised nor formalised. As the directors declared during the interviews, cooperation can be established quite spontaneously. For example, a student comes to school expressing a desire to learn in a specific occupation. However, the school does not cooperate with any relevant employer - but such an employer contacts the headmaster the next day, which proves that the student has made an effort to find a company. It should be noted, however, that this is not a common situation, which is why schools are active in the search for companies willing to cooperate with them and keep lists of employers with whom they have already cooperated. At a more advanced stage of cooperation with a given enterprise, it is rather the school that makes inquiries about the possibility of the student taking up practical training at its premises. At the same time, 'black lists' of companies that turned out to be unreliable in the course of educating students may be also kept. If there is no relevant company on the school's list, it is a duty of the student and their parents to find such an enterprise, with support of the school.

The student chooses an occupation. If we have an employer in this profession, we propose, if not, then the parent is responsible for finding an internship, but we help, support, suggest. We also have people who deal with career counselling. If we feel that the student does not fully know what profession he or she wants to learn, or we have doubts as to whether he chose it correctly, then we immediately refer him to the people who deal with it. [headmaster, CS2]

With regard to the coordination of already undertaken cooperation, in the case of involving small companies in the training of juvenile workers, its model is simple and in most cases does not include such elements as negotiating the content of education in order to adapt the curriculum to the company's needs. Although there are no formal reasons for the lack of cooperation in this area (the core curricula can be supplemented to a fairly wide extent), both sides usually lack the resources (time, employees) to develop a curriculum tailored to the specificity of a given enterprise or local labour market. We are talking here about usually micro or small companies employing a few or a dozen people and admitting one or several students on the one hand, and about a school cooperating with several dozen of such companies, on the other. Therefore, frequent and active communication between the company and the school is not necessary and would even be difficult to implement. It takes place mainly in problematic situations, e.g. in the event of educational difficulties of the student. Routinely, the students receive a monthly assessment of their training from the company instructor (in accordance with the Polish grading scale), which they then submit to the school. It can therefore be concluded that the roles of both

⁸ In addition, for selected occupations which list is relatively extensive, the reimbursement of students' remuneration is paid on a regular basis. However, here is also an important condition: the student cannot repeat a year.

⁹ An attempt was made to cooperate with a large employer, but it was discontinued after a few years due to high employee turnover - it was not possible to keep apprenticeship instructors in the company.

entities are quite strongly separated, which is undoubtedly caused by the frequent lack of direct involvement of the school in theoretical professional education in the case of most of the occupations offered (as stated before, they are mostly involved in providing general education).

For a long time we had the impression that the heads of vocational schools did not understand the fact that it is the training master who directs theoretical training, and not that the school is the main disposer of this entire cycle of vocational education. (...) The theory is not a leading factor. [employer, craft guild representative, CS1]

A more advanced coordination of the cooperation since its establishing, including negotiating curricula, concerned the third of the schools surveyed, cooperating with several large employers sponsoring entire classes or large parts of them. In this case, the content of education was adapted to the needs of the companies - it was the employer who was responsible for developing the curricula, which was influenced by the different situation in which the school was this time – we are speaking about a process that took place more than 10 years ago, when vocational schools were not yet properly prepared for cooperation with employers to such an extent. In order to better prepare for participation in cooperation and to learn about the specifics of the technologies used by the company, teachers completed free internships during the holidays preceding the school year in which the first classes were run, which should be considered a rather unusual solution. The current cooperation of the analysed school with employers is more complex and multidimensional than in the cases described above. The main reason for this is the greater involvement of the school in vocational training and the more complex pattern of dual training. Only in the third grade, students participate in practical training conducted alternately with theoretical education (three days at school, two days at the company's premises). In the first two classes, training takes place mainly in school laboratories equipped by the company, and within apprenticeships lasting several weeks.

During the interviews, no specific difficulties related to the coordination of cooperation were reported - the source of difficulties was mainly the above-mentioned external circumstances (specificity of young people educated in vocational schools, unclear law). To this can be added the difficulty of recruiting employees from companies such as those cooperating with a school with sponsored classes, who would like to work as apprenticeship teachers for the salary rates offered in schools – much lower than in big private companies. Therefore, it is the teachers employed by the school who update their knowledge during the summer holidays, continuing their ‘internships’ in the company.

The support from public bodies and business organisations

The schools surveyed as part of the case studies could count on the support of business organisations to a varying degree. In the case of a craft industry school located in a medium-sized city, this support is provided to a very large extent. This is due to the fact that the governing body of the school is a guild of sundry crafts, and a large part of the companies providing practical training are craft enterprises associated in it. The guild coordinates the cooperation of companies with the school and supports companies in fulfilling their formal obligations related to the implementation of practical training. In the case of a school with classes sponsored by large employers, local guilds of crafts also support the implementation of dual education, but this only applies to multi-occupational classes, not sponsored by any large company, which are also present in the school. In the case of sponsored classes, support during their creation, consisting mainly in the transfer of knowledge about foreign solutions, was provided by the largest bilateral chamber of industry and commerce operating in Poland, which is the Polish-German Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

Quite unexpectedly, support from the side of craft organisations is practically absent in the case of the sectoral school located in Warsaw. Most of the employers cooperating with it are not covered by the local guilds, and those which are, in the headmaster’s opinion, do not receive any tangible support – their membership is only formal. The school has never received any tangible

support from the guild either – whenever it asked for proposals from companies that reported a need for juvenile workers, it turned out that the offers provided were out of date or the companies were on the school's blacklist. In the opinion of the same headmaster, craft organisations actively support vocational schools in smaller towns, where they effectively mediate in the process of adjusting the educational offer to the demand for professions on the local labour market by giving exact numbers of students that should be taught in particular occupations in the coming year. However, other respondents suggested that the activity of guilds depends not so much on the size of the town, but on its location on the country map: western regions, more economically developed and industrialised, with long traditions of civil society and economic self-government, are also characterised by greater activity of craft organisations.

A public institution which is often involved in supporting vocational schools in providing dual education are Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP). It is a labour market institution which is a state budget unit. It specialises in activities for the benefit of young people, especially those at risk of social exclusion, up to the age of 25. People aged 15 to 18 with reduced life chances can apply for admission to the OHP. Its services include social and professional activation, educational care, rehabilitation and correction of social deficits, practical vocational training, job placement and career counselling. Currently, there are nearly 30,000 pupils of the OHP throughout the country. The role of this institution was particularly emphasised in the interviews conducted as part of the case study of the school in Warsaw, where its two main elements were indicated. It supports students in the field of career counselling and - if necessary - broadly understood social integration and upbringing. At the same time, it helps employers cooperating with the school in the formalities related to dual education. Under the educational law, it is also responsible for the distribution of funds awarded in connection with the reimbursement of employment costs of students educated in priority occupations.

The role of workers' representatives

As indicated above, the case studies failed to obtain views directly from trade union representatives. Only in one case, including cooperation of the school with large companies sponsoring classes, was there a chance to contact employee representatives due to the presence of a company organisation, but it was not established despite many attempts. The interview with the employer cooperating with the school shows that trade unions are regularly informed about activities in the area of educating young workers. This happens during the meetings of the information and consultation body called the Personnel Affairs Committee. The company also has a social labour inspection that is responsible for controlling the working conditions and health and safety issues with regard to all employees, including juvenile workers.

Overall assessment of the stakeholders on the main benefits and costs of dual VET

The overall balance of benefits and costs of participating in dual education as assessed by the respondents representing the schools and companies included in the case studies is clearly favourable. Particularly from the perspective of the headmasters of sectoral schools, cooperation with enterprises is a necessary condition to ensure proper professional preparation of students. Without being present in the real work environment, they would be deprived of basic skills related to both the particular occupation and the role of an employee.

In the employers' assessments, the balance is also clearly positive, although their situation is slightly more complex. On the one hand, in the current labour market situation - which even the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has not changed - it is difficult to find a qualified worker with skills well suited to the company's needs. Some respondents declared that a significant part of their current employees were recruited from among students admitted to practical vocational training, although they also admitted that some juvenile employees chose a different career path, e.g. by emigrating to Germany or other countries where they could count on higher salaries.

On the other hand, business representatives indicated significant difficulties, mainly resulting from the administrative burden related to the provision of practical vocational training. The representative of the craft mentioned the uncertainty resulting from the principles of reimbursement of education costs described above and the inconvenience related to the reimbursement management by OHP - in his opinion, the administrator of these funds should be the guild. He also assessed that the administrative burden is the same for large and small companies, which creates serious difficulties for the latter, which do not have sufficient human resources to handle complex procedures.

Another entrepreneur, not belonging to the craft, said that these procedures are not that problematic and they can be learned quite quickly. In the opinion of this person, the greatest challenge for employers is the above-mentioned specificity of young people studying in sectoral schools.

I have a very good experience, because my current employees are employees who started their education with me, they are now 40 years old, this plant is the only workplace since the beginning of their activity on the labour market. I think that such preparation, educating an employee, and then also a business partner, is very important. So the employee who has been trained by him is definitely better for the training master than the person he acquires from the labour market. [employer, craft guild representative, CS1]

Of these four of my employees, three are educated at my plant. [employer, CS1]

Technical secondary schools – a short comment

Technical secondary schools demand a separate comment. The field study revealed that dual education has limited application to this most important type of vocational schools in Poland. The interviews show that it is difficult to reconcile with their formula, which is assumed to prepare students to pass the maturity examination and enter tertiary education. This, in turn, makes it practically impossible to continue employment in the host company for practical training, depriving the dual formula of a significant advantage from the perspective of employers. A significant obstacle indicated by the respondents is also the much greater content of the core curriculum in the case of technical secondary schools compared to sectoral programmes, which makes it difficult to find time for training on a larger scale outside the school walls. That is why the majority of technical secondary schools offer their students only a few weeks of internship. Against this background, one of the technical secondary schools located in Warsaw, with the headmaster with whom an additional interview was conducted, is quite unique. In the school, students of fourth grade (in the future, as a result of the recent reform, the fifth one) participate in dual education at the premises of employers cooperating with the school. One can speak of a significantly different approach here compared to sectoral schools. Most of these students are adults and do not have the status of juvenile workers. They learn alternately at school and in a real work environment within various specialisations, after completing the core curriculum. For some occupations, practical classes take place only in school laboratories, adequately equipped with modern equipment thanks to cooperation with employers. However, the headmaster admitted that the school prefers to conduct practical classes on the premises of the involved companies.

9. Conclusions

The field study shows a complex image of social dialogue and involvement of social partners in reforms and co-governing of the VET system in Poland, including the schemes of dual education, which is difficult to unambiguously assess. At the political-strategic level, the involvement of social partners corresponds to the general characteristics of social dialogue institutions in relation

to the main directions of shaping public policies. For years, numerous authors have pointed to the façade or even false nature of social dialogue at the national level in Poland (cf.: Czarzasty 2014: 151). Also in the case of education policy, we are dealing with unsystematic involvement of social partners, which varies over time depending on the will of political decision-makers and the negotiating power - which is usually unsatisfactory - of pick-level employer organisations and trade unions. In recent years, fundamental reforms have been introduced for the functioning of the education system in Poland. They also encompassed vocational schools. Dual vocational training schemes have been better recognized by policy-makers and statutory reinforced. Social partners were able to contribute their views to the government-proposed projects, sometimes also initiating a debate on key issues. However, the last word belongs to the government side, which in a highly arbitrary manner decides to take into account the opinions of stakeholders.

At the technical-strategic level, mechanisms were introduced allowing social partners to participate in shaping the educational offer of vocational schools. This was accompanied by other changes aimed at making the system more flexible in terms of the content of education and its ability to meet the needs of the labour market, such as a new classification of occupations or a standard for the description of qualifications. All these mechanisms should be considered at least a moderate success, although the improvement of the legislative environment of VET is still needed along with the promotion of new solutions among social partners representing various sectors. Undoubtedly, the activity of rather few representatives of the academic community, as well as public institutions supporting the functioning of the system, contributed to the success.

At the technical operational level, again, the mechanisms which make it possible to adjust the educational offer to the needs of local labour markets should be considered relatively successful. Apart from them, the presence of social partners at the local and company level is, however, very small, apart from the long-standing tradition of engaging craft guilds in supporting dual education.

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