



*Inspiring professionalism in higher education*

# Study Tour Poland

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## Welcome

*Ever wondered how a country emerged from the devastation of the Second World War, the rise and fall of communism, and how it forged a higher education system on its own terms?*

The AUA Poland Study Tour took place between 10th and 17th May 2015. Covering three cities, a diverse range of public and private HEIs, and related organisations, it had the following objectives:

- To undertake a fact-finding mission and produce a report on the Polish HE system which incorporates analysis of similarities and differences and considers ways of sharing best practise;
- To enable participants to gain an international perspective on aspects of HE decision making, policy and practice;

- To allow tour participants the opportunity to challenge their existing notions about HE and undertake research in a non-UK environment.

Though Polish higher education has previously been reported (including an OECD report, 2007 – see Further Reading), much of what we saw provides an update on the present system, and the lessons that perhaps we can draw from it. The system has more change on the way. Demographics have been, and will be, a major driver. The Polish system had to expand rapidly post-communism to cope with increasing student numbers, and now there is a contraction that will undoubtedly lead to some restructuring.

Based on desk research, the team decided on three overarching themes:

- Governance, including the student voice
- Quality assurance
- Growing student demand, including internationalisation and the rise of the Private Sector

The report of this Study Tour will provide insights into these topics, and demonstrate how Polish higher education is moving onto a new set of challenges. We hope, as with all AUA Study Tours, that this report will help the UK's university administration community to reflect upon our own work, share practice and build relationships.

## Poland: History

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth dominated Eastern Europe and the Baltic in the 16th and 17th centuries. Although strongly Catholic, in the 16th century Poland took a comparatively liberal approach to the rise of Protestantism and avoided the tensions and violence experienced by many European states. It also embraced decentralisation of power and a form of democracy, with considerable authority given to the nobility and parliament. This allowed the country to experience a Golden Age of culture and prosperity.

From the 17th century on, however, Poland's neighbours began to cause problems and decentralisation proved a weakness. The Crimeans, Russians and Swedes all invaded. By the 18th century the diminished kingdom was easy prey to the emerging powerhouses of Prussia, Austria and Russia. Between 1772 and 1796, these three empires divided Poland between them and it disappeared officially from the map. The nation was not restored until 1918 as part of the Treaty of Versailles.

Further disaster was to follow. In 1939, Germany invaded, shortly followed by the Soviet Union. Poland became caught up in the front line of the Second World War and was divided between two occupying armies. The Polish resistance was so well organised that it even encompassed underground university education (the Germans had closed all universities). The Polish people paid a high price for their stubbornness and it is estimated that 6 million Poles were casualties of the war and the occupation.

In negotiations at the end of the war, the Soviet Union secured de facto control of Poland and arranged for a Communist government to be installed. The success of the Solidarity movement in the 1980s was a signal that helped to encourage other anti-Communist movements in Eastern Europe. In 1989, Solidarity was victorious in the country's elections, leading to the formation of a non-Communist republic.

Poland's history is evident, with monuments to the past everywhere; war dead, victims of massacres, or heroes of the Resistance, army and air force. The constant shifting of boundaries and political control has been accompanied by movements of population



groups so that ethnically, the country is surprisingly homogenous, with 93% describing themselves as Polish.

It is also a country that is very much on the up. Since 1990, the economy has been in constant growth, with no quarters of recession even during the dark days of 2008-9. There has been considerable investment in infrastructure. Although the economy is improving and employment is relatively high, wages remain low compared to the UK and Germany, and many young people still travel abroad for work.

### Overview of Polish HE

The Polish Higher Education sector is characterised by both a large number of HEIs compared to the UK, and a large private sector. The public sector consists of 132 HEIs, but note that the Polish population is little more than half of that of the UK. The high number of public universities is partly due to communist policies of dividing bigger universities. In Poznan, a university town by any criterion, there are ten public universities in a city of 600,000 (compare Edinburgh – 4 universities, 500,000). Many of the Poznan public HEIs are specialist institutions covering areas such as: arts, music, physical education, economics.

The private sector has c.a. 300 institutions (referred to here as PEIs), of which 19 have doctoral degree granting powers.

The high numbers of PEIs is largely due to the rapid growth and initial low entry requirements of a private sector that had to quickly service excess demand in the

1990s, which the public HEIs could not meet. The theme on student demand will explore this issue further, but currently, the private sector is consolidating.

By law, higher education is free for Polish students studying full-time at public universities. Students studying part-time (from outside the EU or at private universities) would expect to pay fees of 2,500-3,000 euros for an entire bachelor's degree. This, compared to the UK system, is exceptionally low.

To confirm perceptions of the exceptional Polish work ethic, part-time students typically complete a bachelor's degree over three years, studying on weekends. This intensive weekend delivery pattern is driven by the preferences of the student market.

When communism fell in 1989, only 5% of the Polish population had a degree. In response, the market was completely deregulated and many private institutions started in the 1990's. This period saw a huge growth in numbers, but present demographics are changing and student demand is in sharp decline.

The Ministry of Science and Higher Education works to ensure continued sustainability of the university system and its international standing. It also manages the funding of public HEIs.

**FACT: 20% of students in Poland are attending private HEIs**



# Theme 1. Governance and the Student Voice

*The role of legislation, challenges of involving students in decision making, private and public governance and ownership structures, and academic democracy verses management are explored in this theme.*



## Public HEI Governance

Governance in Polish HEIs can be characterised broadly by whether they are public or private, though the legal framework underpinning them is similar. For example, plagiarism is a criminal offence and HE law describes the framework for how all universities should investigate and punish plagiarism.

Public sector HEIs in Poland are owned by the state, though financially autonomous, and have both research and education missions. The governance structures would be considered, by a UK viewpoint, as rather traditional. Decisions are made through consensus of an institution's Rector, Deans and Vice-Rectors (who typically meet once per month), and Senate and its sub-committees. In addition, many important positions, such as the head of the university (Rector), are elected typically for a four year term, which can possibly extend into a second term.

In many respects, this is entirely understandable given Poland's recent past and its desire for democracy. Under communism, the Rector and key positions were appointed by the regime. Whether these structures will come under strain as the system turns to meet its future challenges remains to be seen.

## Private HEI Governance

Private sector HEIs operate using a different business model based on tuition fees. As such, they focus on education, with research activity generally aligned to supporting that.

Private universities are not-for-profit, but can be owned by parent holding companies which may be for-profit. For example, Collegium da Vinci in Poznan is owned by Vox (a furniture company), and Vistula University in Warsaw is owned by a Turkish company. Each PEI has a 'founder' who provides the initial funds.

Poland may be doing something right when it comes to the rules on allowing private providers. Unlike in the UK or the US, there are restrictions on ownership structures that appear to have an important effect. Profits cannot be taken directly from the education part of the business. There may be transfers for 'central services' or

property rents, but fundamentally, profits must be returned to the education provision.

Consequently, providers are generally running their business as a long-term investment, and as a source of steady income (because the founders often appoint themselves as chancellors and rectors etc. and draw a salary). Some are family businesses, or established by groups of academics who wanted to create a good working environment for themselves, to teach in the way they liked, and to supplement their low pay in the public institutions. Additionally, with the low fees offered by the PEIs, it becomes clear why private equity firms have not yet entered this market; they would not be able to realise a level of return considered worthwhile.

Unsurprisingly, PEI governance structures are as business-oriented as is permitted by the legal framework. PEIs were originally



free to determine their own internal governance but the rules were changed in 2005. Most PEIs have a charter that defines their governance, and how it can be changed. In practice, the charters have to be changed every 2-3 years to adapt to new legislation. The Ministry can veto the charter if it does not comply with their regulations. This usually leads to a clear managerial structure where strategy development includes some consultation and iteration, but is essentially similar to the process in a post-92 university.

## The Student Voice

There are commonalities between public and private HEIs: the legal requirements as regards the student voice are similar, as is the obvious interaction between governance and quality assurance covered in the next theme.

In Poland, there is a national Student Parliament and student representation is enshrined in law (20% on Senate and key committees). The extent to which students actively participate varies, with generally better engagement in public HEIs, though the privates tend to have a higher proportion of part-time students that are harder to engage with. There are also some non-governmental student organisations.

There is a Students Union (or equivalent) in all HEIs and significant representation at faculty level. Some of these have significant financial influence, either through representation on key committees or directly through budgets. For example, the Student Parliament at the Warsaw University of Technology has a budget of approximately 500,000 euros per

annum and decides how to spend it (with a veto by vice-rector for student affairs); there is also a large budget (of around 10m euros per annum) for social affairs, including student housing. The PEIs we visited regarded student involvement in a positive light, and actively encouraged and resourced student extra-curricular activities. In one such case (WSB), they proudly told us about one of their alumni who became the first president of the national student parliament.

As a response to having a higher proportion of part-time students, the PEIs we met with took proactive steps to encourage participation. For example, WSB have introduced, in the last two years, a programme whereby selected UG students are entitled to free tuition in return for acting as student reps, communicating with other students and bringing issues to the attention of the Dean.



# Theme 2: Quality Assurance

*The framework for quality assurance in Poland is explored in this theme, along with: issues of assurance vs enhancement, working with learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks, as well as the parity of public and private sector and the 'academic' and 'practical'.*

## Quality Assurance in Overview

External quality assurance is managed by the Polish Accreditation Committee, or Polska Komisja Akredytacyjna (PKA). The PKA has three main roles:

1. Evaluation of programmes
2. Evaluation of faculties / departments
3. Advising the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in relation to authorisations of new institutions and degree awarding powers.

The PKA was first established in 2002 (the name changed in 2011). In contrast, the UK's Quality Assurance Agency was established in 1997 as a successor to previous experiments in national quality audit mechanisms. Given that massification of higher education started in the UK in the mid-1980s and in Poland after 1990, the Polish timeline broadly concurs with the UK's. One difference is that the PKA is funded by central government, whereas the QAA is funded jointly by universities and the funding councils. The PKA is intended to operate fairly autonomously and advises the Minister for Science and Higher Education.

The PKA's primary business is conducting reviews of programmes. There are approximately 1000 (ex-ante and ex-post) evaluations undertaken every year. Evaluation is free of charge, but obligatory, every 5 to 6 years at programme or institutional level. The PKA is also responsible for approving new universities, and would be responsible for approving branch campuses of foreign providers

though this has not been tested yet. It should be noted that the strongest 40% of universities, those with habilitation awarding rights in a wide enough number of subjects, can decide to develop new programmes independently; otherwise Ministry approval is needed.

If an academic unit (normally a Faculty) has had at least half its programmes evaluated and none of them were assessed negatively, the unit may have what is described as 'institutional evaluation'. A successful institutional evaluation allows the unit to avoid further programme evaluations during the period of approval. This was intended to be an incentive, but universities have actually tried to avoid participating in institutional evaluation. For example, if they discover that they will meet the criteria they restructure and move programmes around. The PKA remains hopeful that this tool will be more productive in the long run, in terms of supporting enhancement. It is believed to be easier to make significant changes at departmental level, as opposed to programme by programme. Another incentive offered is a slight increase in funding for those who receive an outstanding judgement.

Most of the PKA's criteria for evaluation are as would be expected. They include, for programme evaluations, factors such as:

- evidence of a coherent strategy
- alignment of learning outcomes with their National Qualifications Framework
- alignment between learning outcomes and assessment methods
- effectiveness of internal quality assurance systems

- provision of adequate staffing and physical resources
- evidence of employer engagement

As is common practice, the procedure starts with a self-evaluation followed by a site visit undertaken by a panel. The panel is made up of academic peers, students, employer representatives and (if applicable) international experts.

## Ensuring Adequate Staffing

Poland has adopted a strict quantitative approach to verifying adequate staffing. There are legal requirements regarding the number of PhD and habilitation-holders, and professors within the department to teach degrees at different levels. These laws were introduced to address concerns that academics were working multiple jobs and attaching their name to various degree programmes, but actually teaching very little on each, leaving the bulk of the work to be done by under-qualified faculty.

In the UK, this would be seen as overly prescriptive, and it does present a number of challenges. For providers it means that they need relatively high student numbers to make it worthwhile teaching a new subject. They can only offer niche subjects as specialisms within a broader major. It can also be difficult to develop teaching in a new and emerging discipline as there are unlikely to be enough qualified staff available. Therefore, many institutions retain emeritus professors as employees for many years beyond retirement.





Private providers face a particularly acute challenge as only a small minority have PhD awarding powers to allow them to 'grow their own'. They previously relied on input from faculty,

whose main job was at a public university but who were willing to undertake some additional teaching to supplement their income. Under the new rules, there is a minimum amount of hours that is supposed to be taught for a faculty member to count. Also, academics must have only one main job. They can work for another institution only with the approval of their Rector. Sometimes reciprocal agreements are made to enable individuals to have two employers.

### Upholding Academic Standards

No external examiners are used in Poland, at least not in the UK sense. During a PKA review, the panel examines samples of assessments in a broadly similar way to how accrediting bodies in the US operate. In the UK, HEIs appoint external examiners and run the process, whilst the QAA checks that the processes are in place and functioning. In the Polish approach, the use of external experts in PKA inspections supplies external oversight of standards.

The possible introduction of an external examining system has been discussed, but feedback from the sector was that it could be considered intrusive.

Most countries in the world operate without external examiners, except when it comes to PhDs. Other methods of maintaining academic standards across a diverse sector include agreement of subject benchmarks or generic learning outcomes, and agreement of a qualifications framework. In Poland, much of the discourse around quality relates to learning outcomes. The programme review committee approves the learning outcomes, and the assessment formats used to assess them. If the PKA is satisfied that the programme review process is working properly, the academic standards of the programme is considered acceptable. Markers are trusted to know what they are doing and grade students appropriately.

### Enhancement and Sharing of Practice

Forums for sharing best practice across the sector are being developed. The PKA's role is primarily that of an auditing body. It does conduct some training for the people acting as reviewers (academics, and student and employer representatives). They organise a 'Quality Forum' on a regular basis. Its format varies – sometimes it is a regular conference and other times it is more of a training/workshop event, depending on the current topic.

Internal programme monitoring and review involves employer representatives and student feedback, but there is no requirement to have an external academic input. Instead, various external reference points are used for curriculum design, especially the Polish National Qualifications Framework (NQF) generic learning outcomes and subject domain outcomes, accrediting bodies and sometimes the UK's subject benchmark statements. Whilst the use of these reference points helps to make all curricula broadly similar, the opportunity for discussion and debate with peers could be lost.

Similarly, the lack of an external examining system means that programme teams miss out on that conversation with a critical friend. External examiners help programme teams to deal with problems and can offer suggestions around changes to assessments or modules. Similarly, acting as an external for another institution can be invaluable for academics to gain inspiration for their own programme. There is a smaller role for externality in the Polish quality system (see also below) and this possibly hinders enhancement.

Desire was expressed to increase opportunities for fora to encourage academics and quality professionals to share innovative practice and update themselves on developments across the sector. We also heard from some individual institutions that they were placing a greater focus on internal staff development in learning, teaching and assessment (e.g. the Jagiellonian and WSB).

There was some concern that faculty tended to stick with one institution throughout their careers and this might also be limiting the exchange of ideas. That said, most Polish academics were very interested in EU-

funded activities and there appeared to be good willingness to seek opportunities for international staff exchange visits.

### Operationalising Quality Enhancement

All of the institutions we visited took quality very seriously. We observed a diversity of structures in support of this from full centralisation of quality, to devolution to faculties and oversight of different sites in a multi-location HEI.

The publics saw the process as more of a confirmation of the standards that they already upheld. As such the PKA systems were seen as very formalised and quantitative, and lacking emphasis on discussion of how to teach or how to do things better. A specific example was a focus upon formal descriptions of learning outcomes rather than the real review of programme content.

The view of the private HEIs was subtly different. They saw the PKA system, and a strong performance within it, as a clear status marker and endorsement of their educational offer. They also proactively seek accreditation from other outside bodies. For example, WSB Poznan is seeking IACBE accreditation of its 2 business programmes: Finance and Accounting, and Management. (International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education, a US based accrediting body for teaching-led colleges and universities.) We have focused on Kozminski as one example of good practice in quality assurance; it holds three international accreditations: EQUIS, AMBA and AACSB, and the distinction from PKA for programs in Management, Administration and Law.

Student surveys were a common feature of all the HEIs we visited. As in the UK, they are used to evaluate module teaching, and more strategically around satisfaction of courses and student services. They manage to achieve, in some cases, impressive response rates of up to 50%. In both public and private HEIs they considered use of module feedback developmental rather than punitive. That said, some private HEIs would appear to use them as part of their appraisal process.

Talking to academics and quality professionals in Poland, we found they often referred to learning outcomes – whether the

### Learning Outcomes and Qualifications Frameworks

The Polish National Qualifications Framework has recently been introduced and is aligned with the European Qualifications Framework. Generic level descriptors have been developed for qualifications at levels 6, 7 and 8 (first, second and third cycle). Underneath that, there are domain-specific learning outcomes for the eight knowledge areas which have been defined in Polish legislation on higher education:

- Humanities
- Social sciences
- Mathematics and science
- Environmental studies
- Engineering and technology
- Medical studies
- Agriculture, forestry and veterinarian studies
- Arts

Outcomes are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and social competences. Universities and faculties may then define the learning outcomes for their programme but must map against the domain specific outcomes that are relevant (may be more than one domain). In reviewing programmes, the PKA would check that the learning outcomes are suitably aligned.

The generic outcomes are very broad and are in line with what would be expected, given that they have to fit in with the European Framework and the Bologna process. The domain specific outcomes are a little more detailed. Compared to UK equivalents, there is perhaps slightly less emphasis on research and critical evaluation, and less mention of concepts such as equality, social responsibility and global citizenship. Responsibility for lifelong learning, ability to work both autonomously and in teams, and ability to relate the subject of study to the wider social and political context are all present.

The Ministry is keen to see Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) used more widely, though institutions remain unsure how to approach this. For students, this means there are still many obstacles to credit transfer and articulation. The vocational post-secondary sector has not been brought into the Framework and there is no easy articulation between this type of education and university.



learning outcomes were right, or whether they had been met. So those concepts were firmly embedded within the institutional discourse. The NQF project has evidently been important in Polish HE as a means of establishing some kind of consistency between the programmes offered by different providers.

Plagiarism at university has led to some development of the responses against it. HEIs reported the use of plagiarism checking software, though not as yet universally. As in the UK, students tend to find writing essays and working in groups difficult. Note that in Poland, academic misconduct is covered by the penal code.

At WSB, retention was discussed in some detail. Strategies included: identifying somebody in each institution with responsibility for student retention;

monitoring marks in different courses and taking action if there was a high fail rate; providing a hardship fund; spreading 'tough exams' more evenly across the year; offering extra tutorials (normally free) in the most difficult subjects, e.g. mathematics.

Following from the above, we also saw structured approaches to course development and review. As in the UK, various stakeholders such as industry panels and market information were employed. Though student surveys have proved useful feedback in operationalising modules, some HEIs have found that the responses are not always so informative on the more strategic level of course review.

Overall, there was evidence of a movement from a compliance based quality culture to an enhancement based one.



## Theme 3: Internationalisation and Student Demand

*In this section we examine the boom and 'demographic cliff' facing Polish universities, the market drivers, and the drivers for internationalisation.*

### The Boom and Rise of the Private Sector

Much of the story of Polish higher education in the last 25 years can be accounted for by demographics. The end of the Cold War saw an explosion in demand for higher education, partly due to a surge of young people and pent up demand. We are thankful to TEB Akademia for preparing the two following graphs from official data. The first graph illustrates the important trends in student numbers.

Student numbers climbed rapidly from less than 500,000 in 1990 to a peak of around 2 million in 2005 (we will cover the decline later). As can be seen from the graph, the ability of the public universities to absorb the unleashed demand (and that of a new democracy to fund it) was limited. For a generation, this led to a very strong teaching focus in Polish universities.

As a response to this, the Polish government allowed private sector entrants with a very light regulatory regime; presumably due to a reaction to the former communist command and control regime. The new PEIs grew rapidly and absorbed the excess demand and grew quickly to over a quarter of the market. As the cost of living over that period rose faster than academic wages, many academics in public universities had second part-time positions in private HEIs.

The private HEIs tended to focus on employment focused subjects such as (UG) management, languages and informatics; (PG) education and management, leaving minority areas to the publics where efficiency of scale and excess demand was lower. They also tended to operate more in the part-time market and take students from lower socio-economic groups; these patterns have been observed in other HE systems and they are sometimes described as the 'Brazilian Effect'.

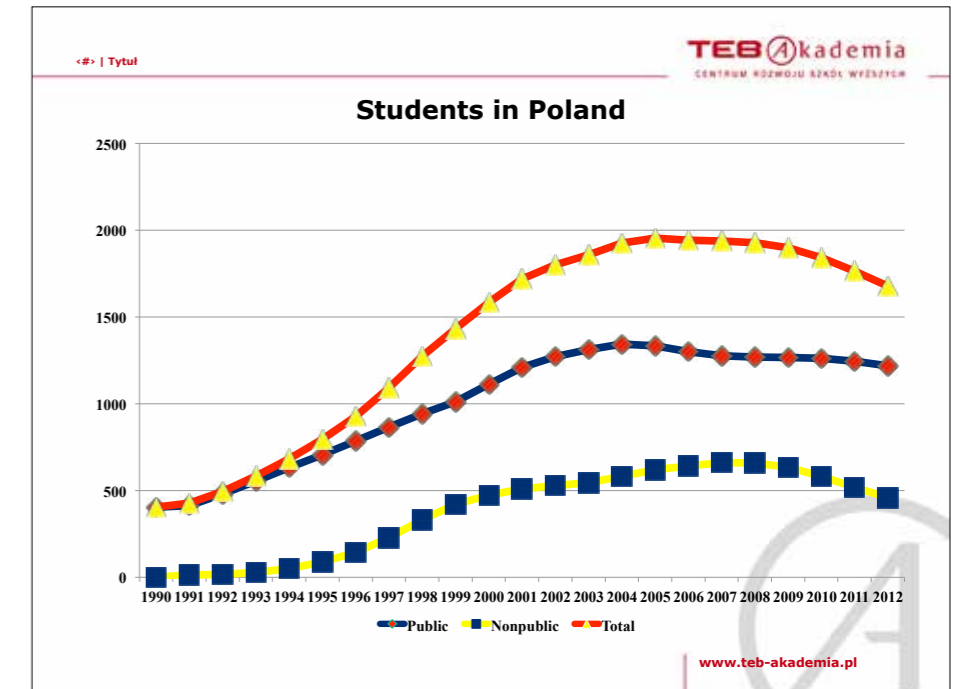


Figure 1: Student Number Trends in Poland 1990-2012

### Consolidation: the Demographic Cliff

Figure 1, also shows a strong decline in student numbers since 2005: referred to as a 'demographic cliff'. Please note that, unlike the HEPI report which predicted a decline that the UK system has managed to avoid, this is an actual decline. Total numbers are expected to continue to decline in the medium term.

The effect of this on the public universities is less pronounced (as full-time studies there are free, this is not unexpected). The demographic cliff is hitting minority fields (such as ancient Greek) but the more popular subjects still recruit well, and the publics can



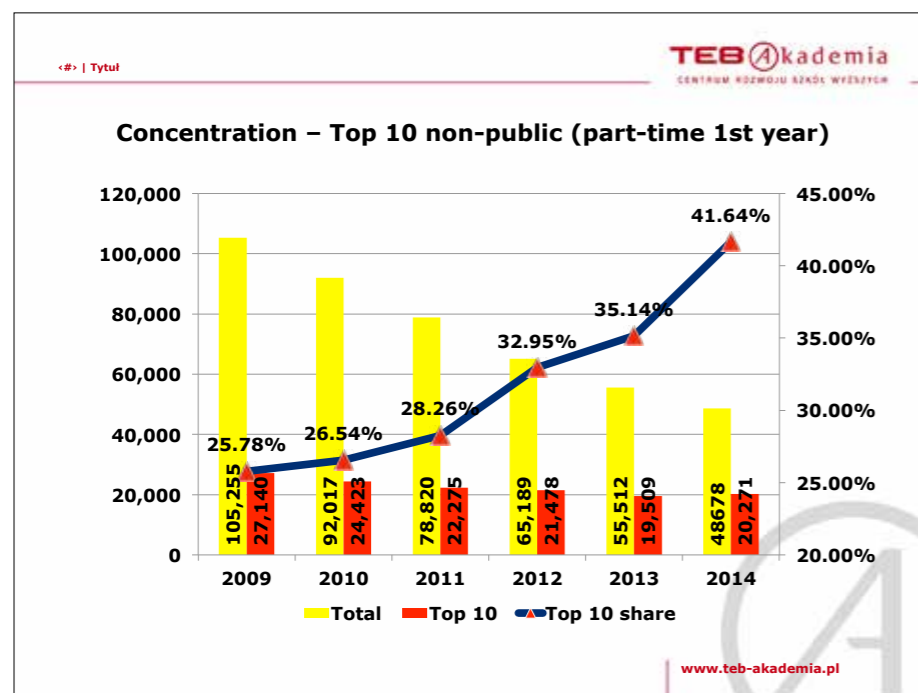


Figure 2: Student Number Trends in Poland 2009-2014

still recruit those with the best Matura scores. At the moment HEIs are coping by freezing staff recruitment in the smaller subjects and shedding emeritus professors. There may be some department mergers or changes to programmes.

An interesting story is playing out in the private sector, where the decline is felt more strongly. In addition, the regulatory regime has tightened, as noted already. Therefore, there is now a higher cost base in terms of academic staffing and compliance as well as expectation of delivery. Nor can privates charge more, as these fee levels are all the market can afford. Although the Polish economy is growing, wage levels remain low in comparison to the wider EU.

The private sector is therefore consolidating, with many smaller providers leaving the market. Figure 2 illustrates this, with the top ten providers moving from c.a. 25% of the PEI first year bachelor's intake to over 40%. This trend is expected to continue.

The response to this by the private HEIs we spoke to was consistent: in a difficult market, quality is the only sustainable business model in education. As such, they look to develop their educational offer and the perception of it, such as external

accreditation, employability, research, university rankings as well as building on disciplines in marketing and cost control to maximise value.

### Internationalisation

The UK experience would suggest encouraging recruitment of international students to fill the gap. Numbers have been increasing by 15% a year from a low base (international students generally means non-Polish students on full courses, i.e. not Erasmus.) The government target is for 5% of all students to be international by 2020. It is currently less than 3% system wide, though this varies. Poland has c.a. 46,000 international students, though around half of them are from Belarus or the Ukraine where many have family connections that exempt them from fees in the public universities.

One would think that this could be higher; the price point of Polish HE and the cost of living is attractive given the quality that can be obtained. It is not so straightforward, as there is to some extent, a shortage of English speaking faculty who can deliver programmes in English (necessary for the international market).

There was some scepticism that good quality students could be attracted who

would be willing to pay the level of fees needed to make a difference (bearing in mind extra costs of teaching in English and providing Polish language classes). 'All the good students go to the UK or Germany' was an oft heard lament. The BRICs market is a possibility, but in these countries people tend not to have heard of Poland or Warsaw, and some profile building needs to be done. Europe and North Africa are the easiest locations for recruitment at present.

Vistula University has had some success: in the last three years they have increased their international numbers from zero to 2000+, roughly 30% of total numbers. They are aiming for 50%. The major source of students was Ukraine, followed by Azerbaijan. 'We are the window to Europe'. In order to support this, they are adapting their curricula to make them more international (e.g. covering EU policy and economics, but also Eastern Europe). Vistula described their intensive marketing campaign in Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa. They articulated the benefits to students of studying in an intercultural environment that broadens their perspective and develops their skills.

Most of the HEIs we visited were not seeking to aggressively increase their numbers for financial reasons (it was not seen as a quick nor easy solution to the demographic cliff). This brings us to a clear difference in the approach to internationalisation. Though the money international students would bring in is welcomed, that is not the driver (even for the more heavily internationalised HEIs). The driver was, in various ways, to improve the standing and capacity of the universities.

The public universities would like to attract more non-Polish academics, e.g. visiting professors. The Ministry will pay towards this if visiting faculty undertake at least 60 hours of lectures. Research collaborations and high quality research are the strategic priority. That said, they have embraced student programmes such as ERASMUS (see HEI Profiles and Good Practice: Student Mobility).

The private universities also see international links and collaborations as a way to build the quality of their academic offer in order to build their reputation and standing in a crowded market.



# Other emerging issues

*This section examines the number of issues that arose during the study tour including: management of research, professionalisation of administrative roles, finance and infrastructure and employability.*



## Staff Development and Professionalisation

Interestingly professionalisation of administrative staff is an issue as the demands upon them increase; currently no equivalent of the AUA exists to support this or to disseminate practice. In this respect, the private HEIs appear to have developed further, given their commercial focus and more managerial style. Consequently, in functions such as finance, planning and marketing, we observed a level of maturity comparable to UK HEIs.

In the private sector, administrative staff can be further influential than the faculty because they were more frequently employed on a full-time basis and remained at institutions for longer durations. Back in the 1990s there was a shortage of well qualified faculty, which gave them bargaining power; this is less the case now.

The development of the academic base is also important. Research is covered later, but Polish HEIs now have centres set up to train faculty and PhD students and spread good teaching practice (e.g. Jagiellonian in October 2014). A new law says that PhD students must take at least 30 hours of teaching skills training.

The classes are popular with the students. Engagement from established faculty varies. A cross-faculty advisory board sets the programme of workshops.

Teaching observations are conducted across the sector. In the case of WSB for example, teachers are observed in class once a year by a member of their Teaching Methodologies department, and also by a programme manager or dean. New teachers are always observed. They receive face-to-face feedback on their performance and will be offered support on how to improve. Data from their students' exam performance is also analysed. Every two years a comprehensive report is made on all staff, covering research, teaching and admin performance. WSB say it is "useful to discuss with someone, not to judge you but to help you".

As in the UK, Polish HEIs reported that faculty are often reluctant to change their teaching styles and may resist the pressure to update their methods, or describe the LTA workshops as 'trivial'. But the hope is that attendance at least provokes them to think a little bit more about what they do and reflect. Of course, engagement in such activities is more challenging for part-time staff who may have multiple jobs (in PEIs this could be over half their teaching staff).

## Employability and professional vs academic degrees

The ministry identified employability as a theme and this is evident in the ready responses from HEIs when asked about the use of employer representatives in programme design etc. Obviously the private providers were particularly focused on this as they use career prospects as a selling point.

This links in with recent developments such as the NQF and requirement to introduce systems for RPL. None of the people we spoke to were confident that RPL systems were understood or felt that they knew how to map non-standard qualifications to the framework.

As in the UK, employers were not always clear as to what intellectual and transferable skills and attributes graduates could offer beyond their subject specific knowledge; often relying on stereotypes. One example cited was the difficulty in securing public acceptance of a relatively new discipline such as International Relations because employers did not understand how it was applicable to them, though cogent arguments can be made for the skills acquired to be very relevant in a business context.



There is a familiar tension related to 'vocational' qualifications. A phenomenon known as 'academic drift' was identified with programmes tending to become more academic/theoretical in order to achieve public credibility. The government is trying to introduce a framework for professional, degree level qualifications. In order to be considered 'practical', 50% of contact time must relate to practical skills and there are minimum numbers of weeks of placement

that must be undertaken. This creates a logistical difficulty for part-time students if they cannot complete the placement in their normal workplace, as they may be unable to take the necessary leave from work to fulfil these requirements.

The Polish system does not include sub-degree qualifications (equivalent to HNDs or BTEC diplomas). There are post-secondary qualifications known as 'Technik'

that take 1-2 years and are primarily practical in nature. Approximately 20% of young people take these. There is no direct route from a Technik to a degree: no articulation or entry with advanced standing. At present, there are no sector skills councils in Poland who could work to vertically integrate educational provision by industry sector.

## Research Management

We were of the impression that Polish universities do not feel they are in a position to compete globally – both in terms of the money nor the reputation. The government wants to see more Polish universities appearing on world ranking lists; faculty tend to be more interested in how they are ranked within Poland. (See <http://www.ranking.perspektywy.org/2015/> for Polish league tables.)

Similarly, much of the private sector has a reputation as teaching only; though the better quality PEIs are actively building research and seeking PhD awarding powers as a marker of quality.

A system of metrics based loosely on the UK REF has been adopted. Needless to say, it has its limitations. Research has become especially important in public universities given the expected decline of students, in contrast to the last 25 years when the focus was more on handling a surge of students and thus on teaching delivery.

Research has been conducted on the management of research assessment and how this affects academics' behaviour. In general, the sciences are more research-focused than humanities. The younger generation of academics are, however,

being forced to be research active; for example research students have to publish during their PhD to get their full stipend.

Another area of tension/insecurity relates to language. The research assessment system (and university ranking systems) accord more esteem to teaching and research in English. Publication in international journals is more prestigious. Conducting research in Polish about Polish issues is downgraded at the expense of international impact. The system also does not cap the number of papers that are scored, as the UK REF does, so there are the same concerns about quantity over quality that have arisen in other countries.

There is also a capability development challenge. Academic staff had made a living through teaching in the 1990s and 2000s. Many now find it difficult to adapt to a more research-led set of expectations. On the other hand, there is some concern that the older generation will not retire as they need the money, and that there are few opportunities for new academics. In this context, there was a feeling that capacity needs to be developed to support researchers to improve, such as

help with grant writing or proof reading in English.

It would appear that comparatively little research takes place outside of universities, e.g. in industry or charity-funded. PhD holders have to remain with academia, and often with only a single institution, as the route from PhD to habilitation to a professorship is simpler if you stay in the same place. Lack of mobility may be a problem in terms of exchange of ideas, competition, etc. This contrasts to the policy in German universities where to be appointed professor, academics must move from the HEI where they took their habilitation.

The sector would like to recruit non-Polish staff and bring their ideas with them. Academic staff turnover is generally low with maybe 10 new people a year in a faculty of 200. But obviously job security is important compared to life on fixed-term contracts, so there is a trade-off. Academic salaries are still comparatively low, a point made in the 2007 OECD report. Of course there is a question whether this may hinder the retention and attraction of academic staff in the Polish system (noting that of course the cost of living in Poland is much lower).

## Funding, Finance and Infrastructure

Funding underpins much of the behaviour in higher education: the OECD Education at a Glance 2014 report is informative. Poland ranks fairly low in terms public and private expenditure on HE as proportion of GDP at 1.3% (c.f. OECD Average 1.59%) though this is comparable to both Germany at 1.31% and the UK at 1.23%.

If international rankings and other policy drivers are to be considered, then the balance between funding of research and teaching is clearly of interest. The OECD data on the research spend in HE indicates that Poland is spending less on research (Germany 0.52%, Poland 0.22%, UK 0.31%, OECD Average 0.46%). Of course, this is expected in a system that has been focused on servicing a boom in student numbers and growing a post-communist economy.

Poland is investing in upgrading its legacy infrastructure with assistance from the European Social Fund. Apart from its obvious impact on transport infrastructure, there was also clear evidence of investment in Polish public higher education in terms of new teaching and research facilities.

We asked if there might be a case for the public HEIs to charge student fees, to put more money in the system. The concern was raised in some quarters that if any more fee money came in, the government could simply subtract the fees from their own contribution, as HE has to compete against other spending priorities. So it would appear that it is wider economic growth, rather than the share of the pie, that is the issue in financing the future ambitions of Polish higher education.

It is worth considering the student viewpoint. The OECD has also calculated the Internal Rate of Return for degree study in various countries from the point of view of the private individual. For a man taking a bachelor's degree, it would be: Germany 13.4% Poland 24.6%, UK 14.3% against an OECD average of 13.9%. (The pattern is similar for women, with the exception of a much lower return for women in Germany). As such, the financial incentives for Poles to engage in HE are strong.

So although the system is perceived to be under-funded, it may be considered to be efficient in that retention rates are good, standards are generally good, Polish graduates compete well in the wider European employment market, and fees are low.

The related subject of how finance is managed showed some differences in maturity of practice between the private and public HEIs. As the private HEIs were not under such direct financial management from the state, they described generally more mature practices. The public HEIs have more recently been implementing practices that were introduced to UK universities over the last 10-20 years. For example, they are decentralising budgets so that individual faculties have to pay for the central resource and estate that they use. As was the case in the UK, this has sharpened their thinking considerably regarding the actual costs of their activities and what they should be doing. It was evident that there was an emerging need for specialist administrative support in the areas of finance, planning and business systems development.

Salaries account for most of the cost in the system; there are nationally agreed minimum salary levels for academics at different grades in the public universities. That said, it is very difficult to lose permanent academic staff as they have special legal protections; though it is easier to make administrative staff redundant. Emeritus professors are starting to leave the workforce as the high demand for teaching is quieting down.

Of course the declining student numbers will add to the pressure on finances. Therefore the public universities are adopting practices and disciplines that have been common in well-run UK and private Polish HEIs, and the private sector is consolidating.



# Reflections and Further Reading

*The Polish people we met were generally proud of what their country had achieved in the last 25 years, and optimistic about the future.*



The team were impressed by the hospitality shown by our hosts. They were open, welcoming and answered our questions with candour and humour, though there was an undercurrent of self-deprecation and a fear that while Poland, and Polish higher education, might have much to offer, they were not in a position to compete with the big fish.

The institutions we visited were very cognisant of the challenges they face and what they need to do. Though there may be structural and internal barriers to change, one could just as easily find this in the UK system. All higher education systems are bound by their previous challenges and the decisions taken then, and the trajectory of Polish HE should be considered in this context.

In fact, the team readily found examples of good practice that compare well with the UK equivalent. Many of the basics are in place. Academic standards are sound. Polish graduates compete well on the European job market. Infrastructure has improved. New systems and disciplines are being put in place. New research active academics are entering the system. It will take time to see the full payoff and as the Polish economy grows there will be more to invest, but this is not unusual in any higher education system.

It is clear that there has been considerable development in recent years around key administrative competences such as student recruitment and quality assurance. The next step may be to encourage more quality enhancement and sharing of practice across the sector. Greater

professionalisation of administrative staff will be needed, and indeed, it can be seen that this is already happening.

Research and global rankings will remain a challenge, not helped by the US, UK and Germany presenting attractive opportunities for academic talent. However, the first priority is of course a system that meets the needs of its Polish stakeholders, international norms notwithstanding.

Given the challenges that the system faces into the future, we wish the Polish HE community well. They have what they need (or can acquire it); but they must believe that they can to develop their future.

## Appendices

### Itinerary

#### Monday 11th May (Warsaw)

- Kozminski University
- Warsaw University of Technology
- PKA

#### Tuesday 12th May (Warsaw)

- Ministry of Science and Higher Education
- Vistula University

#### Wednesday 13th May (Poznan)

- TEB Akademia and WSB Poznan Campus

#### Thursday 14th May (Poznan)

- Adam Mickiewicz University
- Collegium Da Vinci

#### Friday 15th May (Krakow)

- Jagiellonian University

## Further Reading on Polish Higher Education

A lot of context can be found from the OECD report published in 2007.

<http://www.oecd.org/poland/publicationsdocuments/reports/>

Prof. Marek Kwiek from Adam Mickiewicz University has also published a wide range of academic papers on Polish HE.

<http://www.cpp.amu.edu.pl/kwiek/publications.html>

Further links can be found on the AUA Poland Study Tour blog at:

<http://auapoland2015.blogspot.co.uk/>

## The Study Tour Team

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- Angela Pater, Head of Secretariat, University of Bath
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- Dr Andrew Tuson, Study Tour Coordinator, independent consultant and interim manager.

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# Good Practice

## Good Practice: Marketing

Efficient marketing is key to success as a private provider and TEB Akademia and WSB Schools of Banking have a marketing office that collects huge amounts of data, and utilises it to good effect. Marketing tactics including adverts (internet, out-of-home, radio), direct emails, education consultants to sell CPD, and a central call-centre for all the partner institutions. They collect contact details of high school students through school visits. They use cookies to generate pop-up ads to people who've looked for higher education on the web. This has provided a massive increase in the number of people visiting their websites.

## Good Practice: Quality Assurance

Evaluation of learning outcomes on the course level is one of the tools employed in the quality assurance system of Koźmiński University. It has been designed to monitor the process of achieving the course learning outcomes by the students, and to encourage the faculty to design and introduce quality improvement activities systematically.

The instructors use dedicated software to assess the extent to which course participants have achieved the defined learning outcomes after course completion. Based on this assessment, the instructors, if necessary, may suggest the corrective and improvement measures to be implemented in the next academic year. These are the subject of the discussion at the chairs meeting, which provides a flow for exchanging the good practice and effective corrective actions between the faculty members. The instructors in the next academic cycle evaluate the effectiveness of the agreed measures.

## Good Practice: Student Mobility

The Jagiellonian University sees student and staff mobility as important factors to fulfilling its mission. The International Relations Office manages and coordinates bilateral agreements and staff exchange in the frame of agreements, Erasmus+ agreements (1209 agreements) and staff mobility, governmental research projects of academic staff, coordinates contacts and participates in works of International Research Universities Network, participate in the Utrecht Network Research Mobility Task Force and coordinates SYLFF programme.

The International Students Mobility Office (ISMO) manages comprehensive services for over 900 undergraduate and graduate students of foreign universities, including the Erasmus+ programme (over 700 people) and

other international exchange programmes. Furthermore, the ISMO manages services for over 350 students and doctoral students, studying at the Jagiellonian University with a scholarship. International students can apply for a place in the student dormitory through the ISMO.

Moreover, the unit manages the US Department of Education's Direct Loan Program, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs - Educational Benefit Programs and Canada-Ontario Integrated Students Loans. The ISMO also gives opinions on agreements for joint international doctoral degrees.

## Good Practice: Infrastructure

Constructed over the last 20 years, the AMU Morasko Campus is now home to seven out of 15 University Faculties and two largest research centers in the region: the Wielkopolska Center for Advanced Technologies and the Nano-bio-medical Center. The campus covers 100 hectares and lies adjacent to a forest preserve. There is a direct tram line connecting it with central Poznan within 15 minutes. Morasko is a favourite location for many student events and activities during the year, such as live concerts, picnics and sporting events. Each faculty building has its own cafeteria and its own library. All buildings are connected to the European university wifi Network (Eduroam). Several thousand students commute back and forth to the Morasko campus, but with the construction of new halls most of them will be staying directly on campus instead of the dorms closer to the city.

## Good Practice: Distinctiveness in Mission

Collegium Da Vinci was created in line with the renaissance spirit combining rational thought with passionate vision. Students engage daily in projects covering modern engineering, IT, business and design. Da Vinci provides an artistic environment, an ethos echoed by friends and colleagues to create a friendly and inspiring atmosphere. Within the Da Vinci Network, there are college-level degree programmes and other opportunities to become involved with from a young age. It hosts schools on university premises and offers an educational project for senior people, called the Silver Age Academy. Students have a chance to adopt a hands-on approach in connecting the best of two worlds; the very young and the senior students; who engage in various projects together with undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in full degree programs.

# HE Profiles

- TEB Akademia is a founding company for the WSB Universities. Established in 1994, it is Poland's largest system of private Higher Education Institutions. With locations in 9 cities in Poland (Headquarters in Poznan and major campuses in Wroclaw, Gdansk and Torun), WSB Universities enrol approximately 50,000 students. Focused originally on Business Studies, WSB Universities run programmes in Law, IT, Finance, Tourism and Hospitality, National Security and Educational Studies. Since 2015, doctoral programmes are offered. The WSB Universities are considered a practically-orientated, high-quality choice for working adults.

- Kozmiski University (KU) founded in 1993, is a private institution of higher education. The university has obtained Polish and international accreditations, as well as excellent results in global and national educational rankings. The university offers various Bachelor, Master's, MBA's as well as Ph.D. programs in management, economics, finance, sociology and law. It is listed by the 'Financial Times' – Business School Rankings, which include the best universities from around the world. For the past 15 years it holds first place throughout private universities in national educational rankings. KU holds three international accreditations: EQUIS, AMBA and AACSB. It is the only private institution in Poland with the power to award a habilitation degree in management and economics. It boasts the highest first category ranking for Economics.

- The Jagiellonian University (JU) is the oldest higher education institution in Poland and one of the oldest in Europe. It was founded on 12 May 1364 by the Polish King Casimir the Great. The Jubilee year 2014 marked its 650th anniversary. It was positioned on the QS World University Rankings as the best Polish university among the world's top 500 and the ARWU as the best Polish higher-level institution. Some of the

Jagiellonian University students and academics have been major historical figures, including world famous scholars, such as Nicolaus Copernicus or Karol Olszewski, as well as Karol Wojtyła, the future Pope John Paul II.

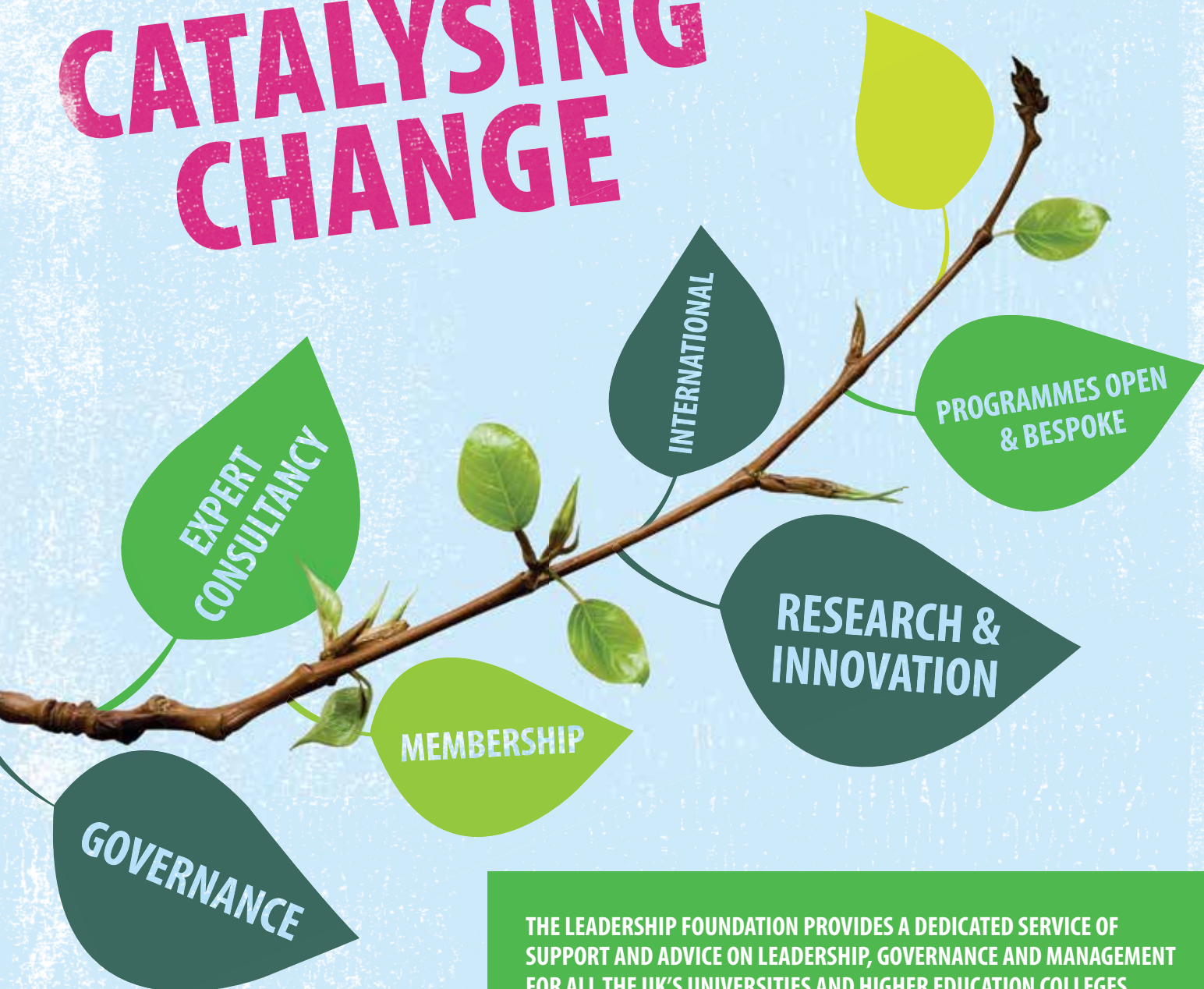
- Vistula University (VU) (Akademia Finansów i Biznesu Vistula) was founded in 1996 and is one of the first private universities of Poland. The university is among the top 10 top private universities in Poland – 5th place in the 2014 ranking developed by Perspektywy and Rzeczpospolita. Vistula University is also the most international university in Poland according to the ranking of universities prepared by Perspektywy and Dziennik Gazety Prawna in 2014. Vistula is highly regarded in the business environment: it was awarded the "Best Partner in Business" title by the editors of Home&Market and the European Medal by the Business Center Club for the best internship and internship program for students.

- Adam Mickiewicz University (AMU) in Poznań is the major academic institution in Poznań and one of the top Polish universities. Its reputation is founded on tradition, the outstanding achievements of the faculty and the attractive curriculum offered to students. In addition to its facilities in Poznań, it has campuses in Gniezno, Kalisz, Piła and Ślubice/Franfurt-Oder. The University currently employs nearly 3,000 teaching staff, including 264 tenured professors, 439 associate professors and 1617 adjunct professors and senior lecturers. The University was founded in 1919 and currently its student population is nearly 49 000 students (over 1000 are international students). Students may choose between 180 possible professional specialisations. In recent years the educational offer has become increasingly diverse. New educational projects include: integrated studies in humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and programmes carried out in cooperation with other institutions both in Poland and abroad.

- The Collegium Da Vinci in Poznań, Poland (CDV) is the oldest private university in Poznań. Throughout its first 18 years of existence on the Higher Education map of Poland, it was attracting some 1,500 students each year. Now, as it has undergone a rebranding process to better fill the needs of the dynamically changing job market, Collegium Da Vinci has proudly established its position in the university sector with a unique range of study at B.A., MA. Postgraduate Diploma level. The CDV offer is closely interconnected with relevant institutions and companies in Poland and abroad (such as IBM and Microsoft), to create a practical curriculum, based on economic forecasts and the development of the job market in the world, which is why CDV places such an emphasis on practical classes led by valued professionals and potential future employers. CDV Flexible Study Paths provide students with opportunities to combine their professional and family commitments.

- Warsaw University of Technology (WUT) is a technical research university with traditions dating back to the nineteenth century (1826). It is a forward-thinking institution where high-quality education meets world-class research and innovation. The WUT priority is an interdisciplinary study programme supported by advanced scientific research. In response to market demands, a broad range of professional and technological programmes are offered which prepare students for their future careers. The University authorities and the academic staff do their best to acquaint students with the up-to-date knowledge and skills useful in today's world.

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