

Vocational Education and Training with eTwinning

Analyses and inspiration from Polish schools



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Edited by: Dominika Tokarz

Translation: POLIGLOTA Biuro Tłumaczeń

Proofreading: Dominika Tokarz

Production editor: Tomasz Mrożek

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Home



For several years, we have observed a renaissance of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Poland and across Europe. Both the European Commission and national authorities take this sector of education into account when setting educational policy priorities. Vocational skills development is strongly promoted during the prestigious WorldSkills and EuroSkills competitions, where representatives from more than 80 countries compete in a variety of skills. In 2018, at the initiative of the Foundation for the Development of the Education System, representatives from Poland entered the EuroSkills competition for the first time. We did not have to wait long for success – already the next year, Maciej Pisarek took second place in the cooking competition during the WorldSkills World Championships in Kazan.

Vocational Education and Training is included in many initiatives managed by FRSE. This publication presents the sector of education from the perspective of eTwinning, in which modern technologies and creative teaching methods play a central role. For 15 years, eTwinning has supported vocational schools in establishing European cooperation, developing the competencies of students and teachers and achieving their educational goals.

eTwinning projects in VET sector enjoy considerable popularity. They stand out in terms of ambitious topics, variety of activities and creative use of ICT tools. They produce extremely useful outcomes – as evidenced by good practices described in the publication and the number of awards given to educators working at vocational schools.

Vocational teachers can use this book as a guide to eTwinning. However, it is addressed not only to VET teachers. I am convinced that also teachers working at general secondary schools, primary schools and even kindergartens will find inspiration and many interesting ideas here.

dr Paweł Poszytek
Director General
Foundation for the Development of the Education System

eTwinning and Vocational Education and Training in Poland



PAWEŁ CZAPLIŃSKI

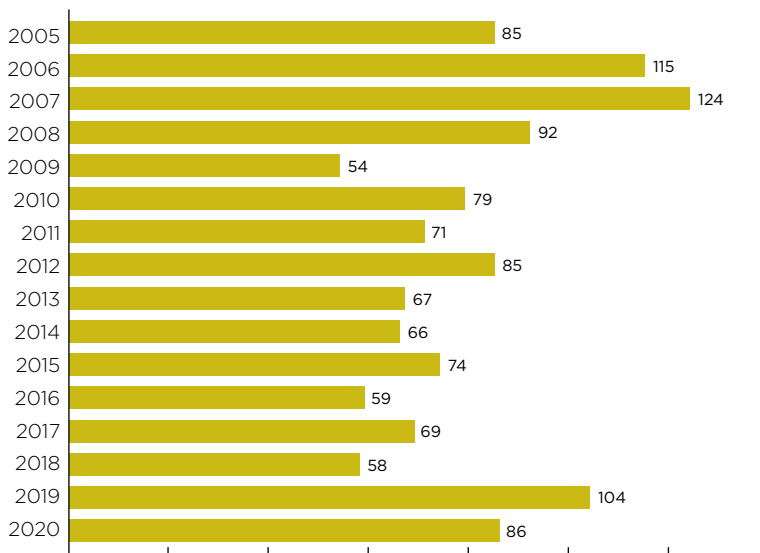
Foundation for the Development
of the Education System, eTwinning
National Support Organisation

Vocational Education and Training has been linked with eTwinning since the programme's launch in Europe and in Poland. Over the past 15 years, this initiative has benefited thousands of teachers of various specialties working at vocational schools. The following analyses illustrate their commitment to the programme and their numerous achievements.

Vocational Education and Training with eTwinning in numbers

The first Polish vocational schools appeared on the eTwinning portal at the time of the programme's inauguration in Europe. In 2005, 85 such institutions, representing 11% of all registered institutions, joined the programme. The largest number of them (124) joined eTwinning in 2007. Over the 15 years, the community has grown annually by an average of 80 institutions. Based on the analyses of applications, it can be predicted that 2020 will be a record year in terms of new registrations. At present, the eTwinning database includes 1,288 Polish vocational schools and 6,000 VET teachers of various specialisations.

The dynamics of Polish vocational schools' registrations on the eTwinning platform

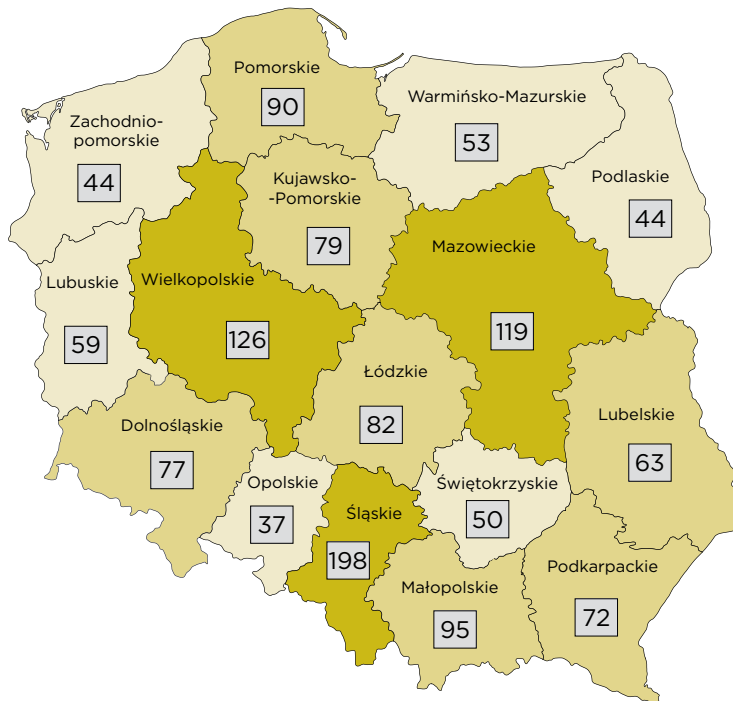


Source: own work based on the data collected by eTwinning NSO in Poland.

As for geographical distribution, from among Polish voivodeships, three stand out, where more than 100 schools have been registered. The leader is the Śląskie (198), followed by Wielkopolskie (126) and Mazowieckie voivodeships (119). These three regions account for 34%

of all institutions active in the programme. The numbers of registrations in other voivodeships vary between 37 and 95. The share of vocational schools in regional distribution is similar to the number of registrations of all institutions joining eTwinning.

The number of vocational schools registered on the eTwinning platform by voivodeship (as at 14/09/2020)



Source: own work based on the data collected by eTwinning NSO in Poland.

The quantitative analysis of teacher and school registrations clearly shows that VET sector is under-represented in eTwinning as compared to other sectors of education. Primary schools form a large percentage of registered institutions (almost 52%, including lower secondary schools transformed into primary schools). Another big group is formed by various types of groups of schools, accounting for 39% of all registered institutions. Vocational schools, i.e. trade schools and technical schools, account for over 7% of the total. The numbers of teachers registered on the eTwinning platform look similar. One in twelve registered teachers (8%) works in a vocational school. This statistical trend has continued since the launch of the programme and is linked, among other things, to the number of different types of schools in Poland.

* the list also includes 31 Polish schools operating abroad

Schools registered on the eTwinning platform by the type (as at 14/09/2020)*

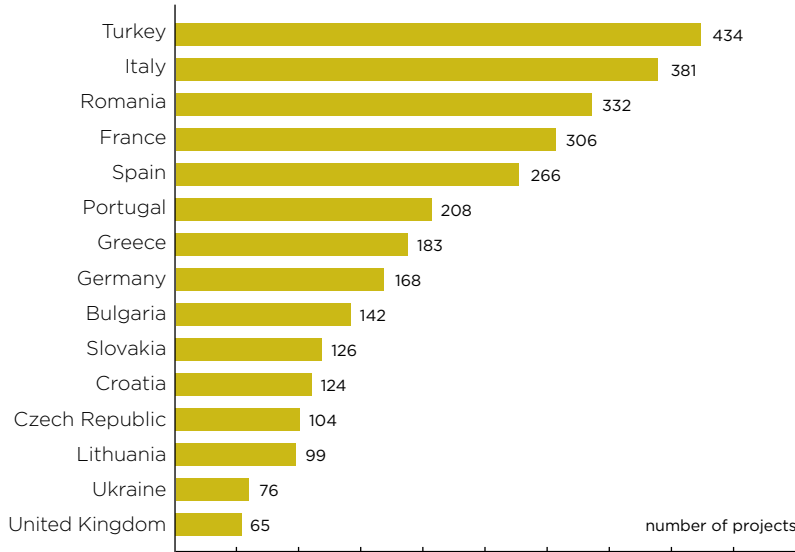
Type of school	Number	Percentage share on the platform
primary schools (former lower secondary schools)	9523	51.96%
groups of schools (excluding vocational schools and groups of vocational schools) of which:	3543	19.33%
• groups of general secondary schools	988	5.39%
• groups of schools and kindergartens	1560	8.51%
• other	995	5.43%
kindergartens	2441	13.32%
general secondary schools	1028	5.61%
vocational schools (groups of vocational schools: trade schools - former vocational and technical schools)	1288	7.03%
special needs schools	132	0.72%
care and education centres	205	1.12%
other	167	0.91%

Source: own work based on the data collected by eTwinning NSO in Poland.

Although teachers working at vocational schools represent a relatively small proportion of all eTwinning participants, they have so far carried out as many as 1012 projects on a wide range of topics (on average, 62 new initiatives are added to the database each year). The majority (90%) of them were international projects conducted with at least one foreign partner.

The choice of project partners by Polish vocational schools is in line with the general trend observed throughout eTwinning. Polish teachers can cooperate with representatives of 43 other countries participating in the programme, and more than one representative from one country can take part in a given project. The decisive factor is the availability of a partner. Most frequently, cooperation has been established with teachers from Turkey, Italy, Romania and France. The pool of the countries with the smallest number of joint projects (less than ten) includes: Iceland, Luxembourg and Lebanon. Polish eTwinners have not yet succeeded in implementing an initiative with a vocational school from Liechtenstein.

Partner countries most frequently selected for eTwinning projects by Polish vocational teachers (2005-2020)

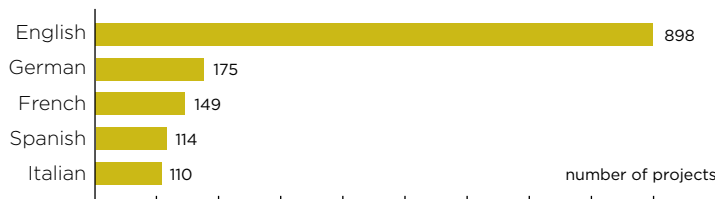


Source: own work based on the data collected by eTwinning NSO in Poland.

Communication between partners is a key element of a project, which often determines its success. Teachers from vocational schools most often use English for this purpose (88%). In eTwinning, this group of educators is less likely to use other foreign languages, which may indicate that linguistic diversity is not very important in projects at this level of education¹. It is interesting to note that Polish, which is second in the overall ranking of all languages used in eTwinning projects, and Turkish, which is fourth, are not included in the list of the five most popular languages of VET projects.

¹ It is worth noting that several languages can be used in a single eTwinning project.

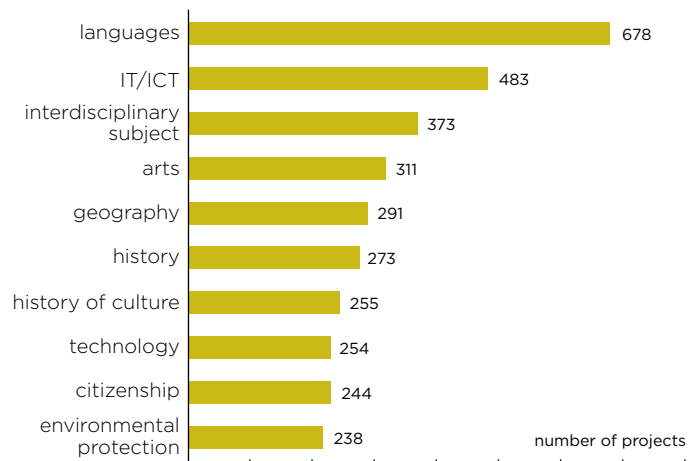
Five most popular languages used in eTwinning projects by vocational school teachers



Source: own work based on the data collected by eTwinning NSO in Poland.

At the time of registration, the partners must specify the thematic area of the project (more than one area can be indicated). They can choose from a pool of 38 general education subjects and 15 vocational subjects. On average, each project initiated by teachers working at vocational schools covers six subjects (as compared to five in the total number of all projects). Topics relating to languages and IT/ICT appear in almost every project. Interdisciplinary subjects and geography are also very popular. They have been included in over 300 projects.

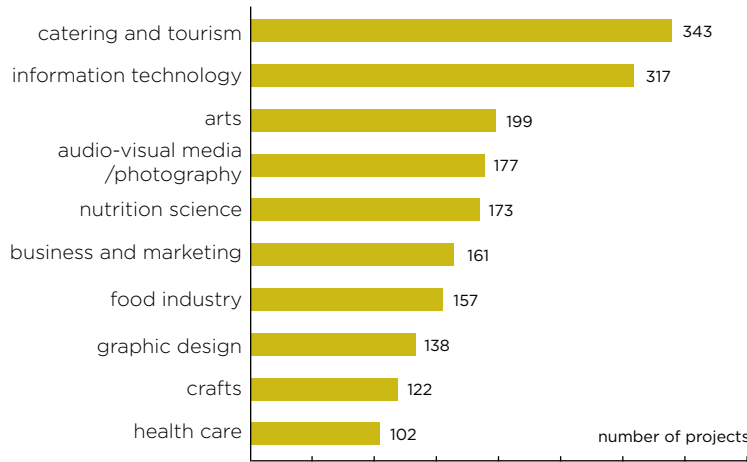
The most popular general subject groups selected for eTwinning projects by Polish vocational teachers (2005–2020)



Source: own work based on the data collected by eTwinning NSO in Poland. Subject names come from the live.etwinning.net portal.

Teachers carrying out strictly vocational projects also choose subjects related to specific sectors of economy. The most popular are: catering and tourism and information technology. They have been included in 30% of projects. Arts is also a popular subject. It has been included in almost 200 projects. The least popular were subjects such as astronomy, geology and classical languages (less than 40 projects).

The most popular vocational subject groups selected for eTwinning projects by Polish vocational teachers (2005-2020)



Source: own work based on the data collected by eTwinning NSO in Poland. Subject names come from the live.etwinning.net portal.

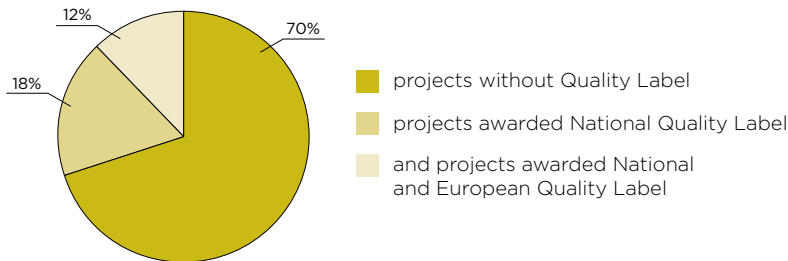
Awards, competitions, labels

Projects carried out by vocational teachers have won numerous awards in the eTwinning programme, both in Poland and internationally. The main distinction is the National eTwinning Quality Label, awarded to teachers by the National Support Organisation in Poland in recognition of the high quality of their projects². Almost four thousand labels have been awarded so far, 209 of them have gone to VET teachers.

² More information on eTwinning Quality Labels can be found at: etwinning.net.

Another level of recognition is the European eTwinning Quality Label. Teachers working at vocational schools received 141 EQLs (Polish participants in the programme were awarded 2038 times).

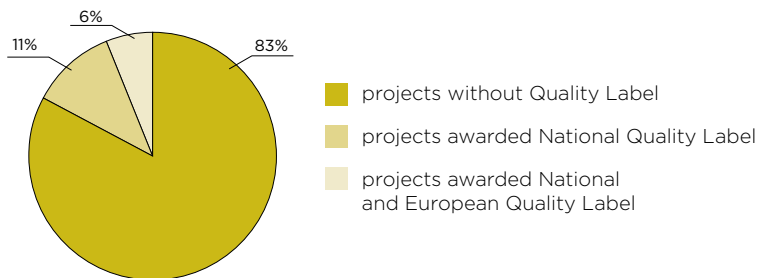
Successful projects run by vocational teachers between 2005 and 2020



Source: own work based on the data collected by eTwinning NSO in Poland.

When comparing these results with the total number of projects and Quality Labels awarded, it is clear that projects carried out by teachers from vocational schools have been proportionally more often awarded than projects carried out by all Polish institutions.

Successful eTwinning projects 2005–2020



Source: own work based on the data collected by eTwinning NSO in Poland.

³ For more information on the eTwinning School Label, go to: etwinning.net.

Vocational schools, like other eTwinning institutions, can apply for the prestigious eTwinning School Label³. It is awarded every two years to the entire school community for their commitment to the programme. In order to be awarded a label, a given school has to, among other things, carry out projects within the programme, obtain an eTwinning Quality Label, and make use of in-service development offer for teachers available on the eTwinning platform. So far, eight vocational schools have won the title (some of them twice):

- Zespół Szkół Ekonomicznych i Mundurowych im. gen. Władysława Andersa in Chełm (2017),
- Zespół Szkół Gastronomiczno-Hotelarskich in Gdańsk (2017 and 2019),
- Zespół Szkół im. prof. Romana Gostkowskiego in Łazy (2018),
- Zespół Szkół Łączności im. Obrońców Poczty Polskiej in Gdańsk (2017),
- Zespół Szkół nr 10 im. Stanisława Staszica in Warsaw (2019),
- Zespół Szkół nr 16 in Białystok (2017 and 2019),
- Zespół Szkół Ogólnokształcących in Bobowa (2019),
- Zespół Szkół Technicznych in Strzyżów (2019).

Among Polish vocational teachers there are some whose project work has been recognised at national level in the “Our eTwinning Project” competition organised by the National Support Organisation in Poland. The aim of the annual competition is to distinguish the most creative and innovative practices developed as part of eTwinning projects by Polish teachers. The competition is divided into age and thematic categories

(including Teacher and School Debut and eTwinning Ambassador)⁴. Teachers working at vocational schools have won the competition 28 times, in almost every edition of it.

The most prominent competition in the programme is the eTwinning European Prizes. The competition is organised every year by the Central Support Service of the eTwinning programme (CSS) and is attended by teachers from all programme countries⁵. We are very proud that in each of the competitions we could see laureates from Poland, and nine times the prizes and distinctions have gone to teachers working at vocational schools.

Particularly noteworthy is the project work of Wioletta Sosnowska, a French teacher at Zespół Szkół Tekstylno-Handlowych in Żagań who has been the only representative of a vocational school to have won the competition twice (in 2010 and in 2013). The projects: "Sous le ciel de la compréhension" and "Dans le cercle des signes du zodi@que" have gained recognition from the competition jury in a special category (French Language).

⁴ For more information on the "Our eTwinning Project" competition, go to: etwinning.pl [available in Polish only].

⁵ For more information on the eTwinning European Prizes competition, go to: etwinning.net.

**Find below the list of Polish winners of the eTwinning European Prizes competition:
- vocational schools**

Project	Coordinator	School	Year
"Young Reporters. The Young Reporters Project"	Anna Sosnowska	Zespół Szkół Samochodowo-Budowlanych in Częstochowa	2006
"The Pizza Business across Europe"	Andrzej Pogorzelski	Zespół Szkół Agropredsiębiorczości im. M. Rataja in Mieczysławowo	2009
"Sous le ciel de la compréhension"	Wioletta Sosnowska	Zespół Szkół Tekstylno-Handlowych in Żagań	2010
"Dans le cercle des signes du zodi@que"	Wioletta Sosnowska	Zespół Szkół Tekstylno-Handlowych in Żagań	2013
"Moi, toi, lettres à nous"	Gabryela Smolij	Zespół Szkół nr 1 im. Bolesława Krzywoustego in Choszczno	2014
"EU Games 2015-2016"	Paweł Ciesielczuk	Zespół Szkół Ekonomicznych, III Liceum Ogólnokształcące in Chełm	2017
"You are the picture - Tu eres el cuadro"	Małgorzata Prusak, Joanna Rowińska	Zespół Szkół nr 1 im. Komisji Edukacji Narodowej in Nowy Sącz	2018
	Monika Pasionek, Krzysztof Bulanda	Zespół Szkół nr 1 im. Józefa Piłsudskiego in Limanowa	
"In Sight In Mind"	Ewa Druzbalska-Kopka	Zespół Szkół nr 1 im. Kazimierza Wielkiego in Mińsk Mazowiecki	2019
"Fun with physics and technology"	Małgorzata Paszkiewicz	Zespół Szkół nr 1 in Szczytno	2020

Campaigns: “Entrepreneurship with eTwinning” and “Vocational Education and Training with eTwinning”

As the popularity of the programme grew, so did the community of teachers, and with it the needs of educators at higher levels of education, including those working at vocational schools.

In 2017, the eTwinning National Support Organisation in Poland initiated a training and promotional campaign entitled Entrepreneurship with eTwinning. The campaign was addressed to secondary school teachers, regardless of their seniority and proficiency in using ICT tools. The objectives of the campaign included improving the skills of developing innovative and entrepreneurial attitudes among students by applying the eTwinning project method and promoting the programme among the target group of teachers. The initiative was well received. The topic of entrepreneurship has proven to be the gateway to the programme for many teachers and also the first step to international cooperation. The success of the campaign was also due to the fact that the teachers gained the opportunity to implement the project at national level, with another Polish institution, without the need to communicate in a foreign language with a foreign partner. This has helped to attract new people to the programme (for more than half of the teachers who participated in the campaign, it was the first contact with eTwinning).

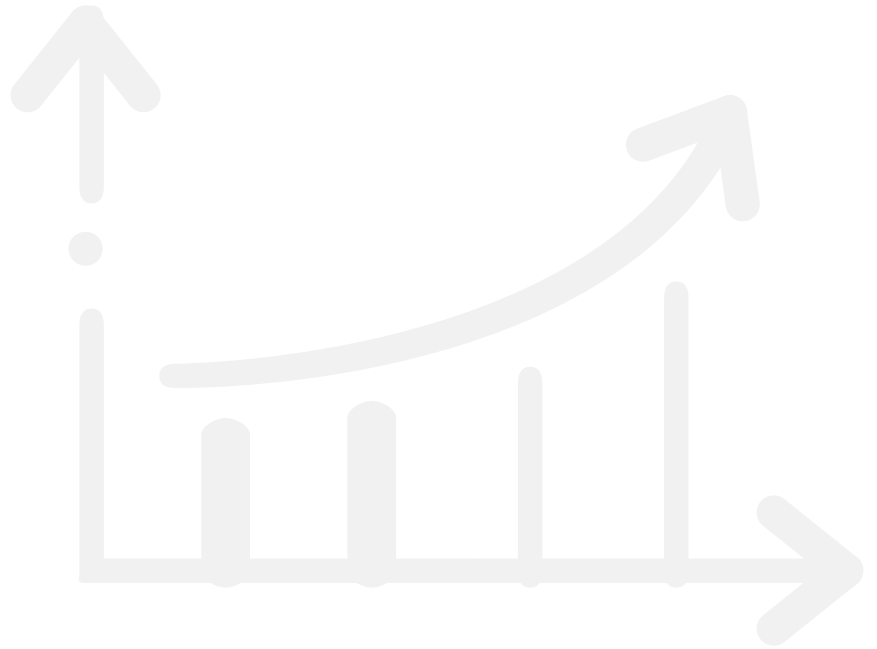
National and international seminars were the main element of the campaign. Each such training event lasted 2-3 days and was divided into plenary sessions and workshops on methodology and tools. Above all, the participants had the opportunity to initiate (often for the first time) an eTwinning project and to improve their methodological skills during various workshops. Seven seminars were organised, including four international ones, attended by 554 teachers.

Online training also formed a part of the campaign. Teachers who did not have the opportunity to attend the seminars could participate in weekly courses on the eTwinning platform or in one hour-long events on the eTwinning Live platform. As part of the campaign, a repository of materials was created on the eTwinning National Support Organisation's website, which includes examples of completed entrepreneurship projects, inspiration for future projects and interviews with experts.

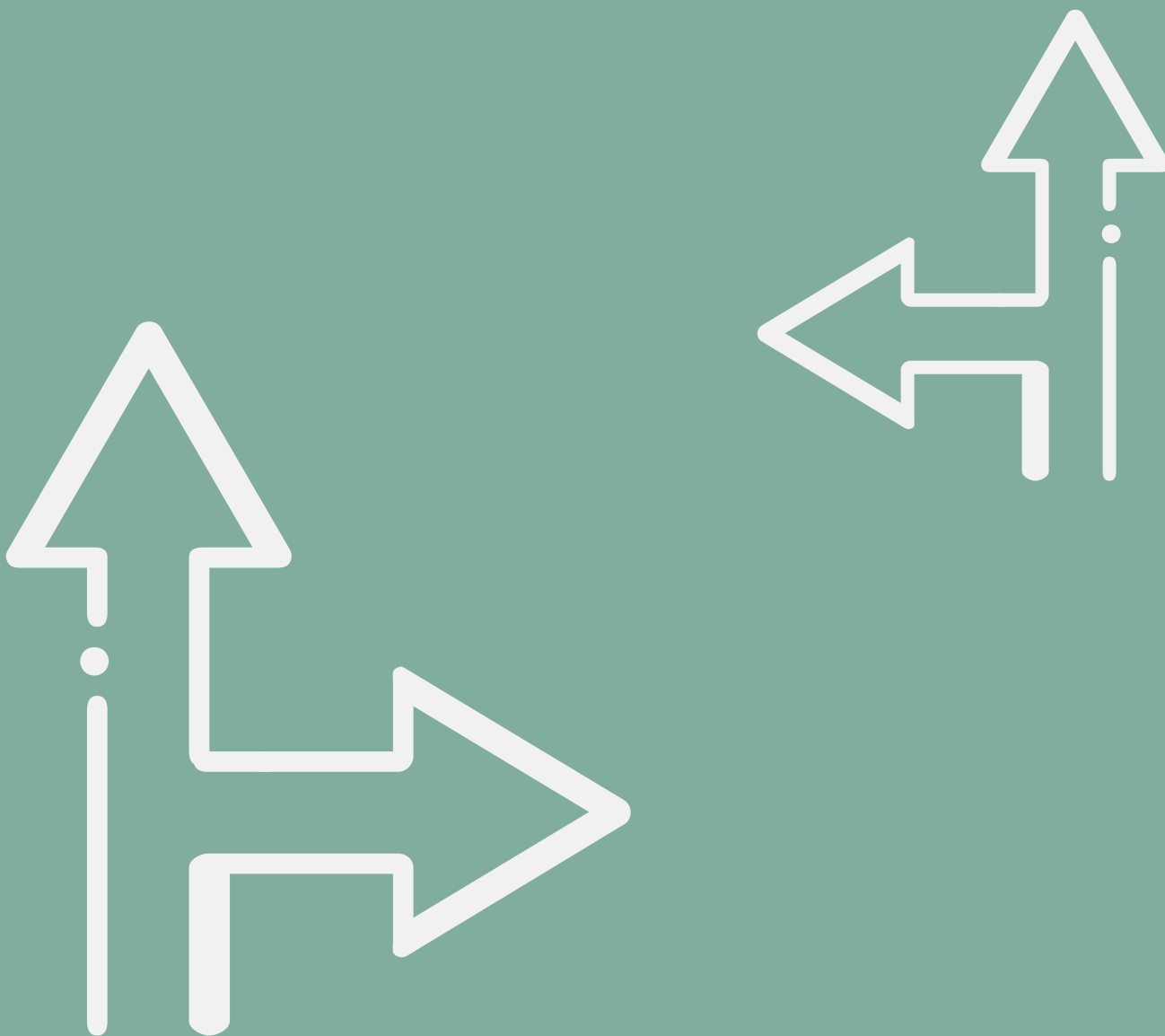
The culmination of the campaign was the creation of a special category in the national Our eTwinning Project 2019 competition: Entrepreneurship with eTwinning. The award was given to Ludmiła Mieńszkowska-Dessus and Krzysztof Wszelaki from Technikum nr 25 im. Stanisława Staszica in Warsaw for the implementation of the project: “Shipping of goods beyond the EU borders”. Project participants played the roles of employees of forwarding companies who commissioned the transport of goods outside the European Union.

In 2020, the campaign was organised under a new banner - “Vocational Education and Training with eTwinning” - but its aims and objectives have not changed. The offer is addressed not only to teachers working at vocational schools, but also to educators working at other institutions, including those in general education sector, i.e. to anyone looking for ideas for projects focussing on vocational training. Vocational training elements can appear not only in trade schools or technical schools, but also, for example, in a primary school or even in a kindergarten. The fact that it is possible is demonstrated by 709 eTwinning projects focussing on vocational education and training carried out by teachers of various specialisations.





Career guidance at school and in eTwinning



EWA GRZESIAK

career counsellor and eTwinning ambassador

1 A trend, which is visible not only in Poland, is the use and combination of the effects of formal (schools, studies), non-formal (courses, workshops) and informal (life experiences, hobbies, volunteering, etc.) learning.

In a rapidly changing world – where employment conditions are changing, some jobs disappear and others appear. The labour market is volatile and, as a result, career guidance is becoming increasingly important. Everyone of us may need advice and accurate information about opportunities to gain new professional skills and qualifications. Access to career guidance is particularly important for children and young people. Choosing the right educational pathway, which develops natural talents and predispositions, facilitates the start of adult life and the pursuit of a career¹.

The growing importance of career guidance has been evidenced by the amendment of legislation on education. Career guidance is not new. First recommendations in this area appeared as early as in 1991. In subsequent years, legal regulations have placed growing emphasis on preparing students to choose a profession and a course of study. Current legislation in Poland not only stipulates compulsory classes with elements of career guidance for seventh and eighth graders and students of all types of secondary schools, but also specifies which activities are to be carried out by younger children. Regulations stipulate that issues related to initial vocational orientation should be included in the curricula of various subjects, starting from the pre-school level. In addition, regulations require that schools implement a career guidance system and an annual plan to achieve the goals and activities included in it. This is an important part of the institution's operations and educational activities. As not all local governments are willing to employ full-time career counsellors, headteachers delegate this task to teachers of various subjects.

These are the most important reasons for bringing this issue closer not only to professionals, but also to the entire teaching community.

The project has allowed me to collaborate with students attending a similar course of study. It has allowed me to extend knowledge acquired at school and to use it in cooperation with people who deal with similar issues on a daily basis. I have also learned how to acquire new knowledge*. *[student]*

* Students' statements are quoted from an evaluation survey carried out by the National eTwinning Service in September 2020. Teachers' statements are quoted from entries to the National Quality Label competition. All statements quoted in this publication have been edited to eliminate respondents' interjections, digressions, unfinished thoughts and colloquial language and, where necessary, abridged.

Career guidance at every stage of education

Issues that can be addressed by every teacher, from the pre-school stage onwards, are: identifying talents, aptitudes, supporting interests, but also noticing obstacles that may hinder the realisation of dreams about a future profession. The sense of these activities is best reflected by a statement attributed to Albert Einstein: "Everybody is a genius.



But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid”². It is therefore worth looking for a field, activity or profession in which one can achieve success more quickly and with less effort, because it will enable you to make full use of your predispositions and talents. Career guidance can be of help here.

Already in kindergarten, children show certain interests. They like some activities and other not so much. Even children playing at princesses will provide a careful observer with some information, as each ‘princess’ is slightly different from others. Some care about impeccable dress, other about leading the group, and there are those who focus the attention of those around them on what they are doing (dancing, singing). This way predispositions worth developing and strengthening are revealed.

Early childhood education introduces children to the world of occupations. Children get an idea of what it is like to work in a particular profession and are able to play specific roles. It is worth showing them the interdependence between different fields, because society needs people working in different professions. Teachers, doctors and clerks are as important as drivers, bricklayers and hairdressers.

The older children become, the more they should know about their options, both in terms of further education and working life. The demand for specific, factual advice on careers and future work increases with age. Eighth graders are faced with choosing a school that will help them achieve their dream career. Counsellors and educators play an important role in this process, and can not only guide the choice, but also convince some parents that their child should follow his or her own path instead of following their dreams or family traditions.

The project has strengthened the students’ conviction that their chosen career path is right and that it is worthwhile to be trained in the occupation of their choice. [teacher]

Secondary schools (general, technical, trade schools) prepare young people for entering the labour market. Even if they educate in a specific occupation, they should show students ways for further development. It is not only about the choice of study programmes, but also about encouraging the use of various development opportunities: e.g. qualifying vocational courses, non-formal education, internships, job shadowing, and volunteering. Therefore, a career counsellor in a trade school or technical school must have up-to-date knowledge about occupations and possibilities for expanding and complementing qualifications. Career guidance classes should be conducted using activation methods. In this respect, the following methods perform

² This statement was first attributed to Einstein by Matthew Kelly in his book *The Rhythm of Life: Living Every Day with Passion and Purpose* (2004). The quote itself is probably derived from educational cartoons; sceptycznie.pl/falszywe-cytaty [accessed: 11/10/2020].

poorly: lectures or talks. Exercises, tests, role-plays and short videos are not only more interesting for students, but also enable them to confront their dreams of working in a certain occupation with reality.

eTwinning for career counsellors

eTwinning can be extremely helpful in carrying out career guidance activities at all stages of education. The ability to work in groups is particularly useful in this respect. Groups can be set up by all eTwinners (with the help of ambassadors or programme coaches, if necessary). Knowledge of a foreign language is not required – members of one group may be Polish-speaking teachers only. Thanks to this, career counsellors from all over Poland, working in different types of schools, can contact each other to discuss problems, but also to share experiences and exchange materials.

eTwinning prefers projects involving students, but it is possible to set up projects for teachers only. It is relatively easy to find partners, provided you have a good idea and plan for cooperation. A partnership can develop subject-specific materials, i.e. create a repository of teaching aids that are useful in school practice.

By extending a project to international partners, information can be obtained on the labour market situation in other EU countries, as well as on popular professions and sought-after specialists. Economic migration in Europe is a phenomenon with which we have already become accustomed, but we are not always properly prepared for it. The role of a career counsellor is to provide knowledge about the situation on both local and European labour market. Education systems in Europe, although similar, are somewhat different. A counsellor should be familiar with current educational policies and requirements in different countries in order to help students going abroad, as well as those returning to Poland, to choose or continue their educational path. International cooperation in eTwinning makes it easier to stay up to date.

Students of vocational schools often want to find a job outside Poland after completing their education. The help of a counsellor who explains how to prepare for this, where to start, where to look for guidance and support, can be crucial to a young person's career. Although today it is easier to find legal job offers abroad, labour migration is always a challenge and the role of a counsellor is to prepare future professional for functioning in a linguistically and culturally diverse professional environment.

In order to be able to help others effectively, career counsellors should constantly improve their skills. They can do this attending eTwinning courses and workshops. By participating in free online classes (such as: "A week with tools for the creation of interactive teaching materials" or "A week with mind maps") educators gain valuable



knowledge, for example on how to create their own teaching materials. Those who speak a foreign language have an opportunity to make contact with specialists from other countries, as well as to take part in international seminars and conferences.

Career guidance in projects

eTwinning projects facilitate the implementation of the goals of an in-school career guidance system, which is compulsory in every school. The document for such a system contains tasks for all teachers, not only career counsellors. Schools can implement diverse eTwinning projects to support career guidance as a process of student development.

In a project carried out in a primary school, students can define their interests, recognise aptitudes and develop their skills and talents. Elements of vocational orientation can be included in various activities. The tools available on Twin-Space facilitate the implementation of attractive, activating educational methods. An example would be a project on nature conservation or ecology. Students who interview a forester, naturalist, biologist or park worker learn about the specifics of these professions, and at the same time improve their communication and public speaking skills and manage their nerves. In turn, those responsible for recording interviews become more familiar with information and communication technology (ICT). If you want to describe in more detail how this type of project relates to the development of students, you need to refer to relevant regulations published by the Ministry of Education. Interviews allow for teaching curricular contents (here we only refer to the contents provided for grades 4–6):

- “Knowing yourself”: students identify their strengths and opportunities for using them in different areas of life. They take action when performing their tasks and evaluate them to formulate conclusions to be used in the future;
- “The world of occupations and the world of work”: students name different groups of occupations and give examples of occupations characteristic for each group. They describe different paths for being employed and basic job requirements. They define work and its importance in human life. They list factors influencing professional choices;
- “Educational market and lifelong learning”: students identify different ways of acquiring knowledge, independently seek information and use different sources of knowledge;
- “Planning your own development and making educational and professional decisions”: students plan their actions or the actions of a group, indicating detailed activities and tasks necessary to achieve a goal.



* Vocational Education and Training

Based on these examples, you can say that career guidance is implemented in conjunction with various school activities and is not linked to a single subject only. It is worth bearing it in mind when planning cooperation with foreign partners. International character of eTwinning projects makes them more attractive and more effective in developing key competences, which have a huge impact on an individual's adult life (also in professional terms).

eTwinning and VET* projects

Vocational Education and Training is extremely important for future activity in the labour market, which is why apprenticeships and traineeships with employers are included in the curricula of trade schools and technical schools. Many institutions take advantage of the Erasmus+ offer to send their students abroad. An added value of educational trips is to improve communication skills, the opportunity to compare working conditions in different countries and to increase participants' independence.

Traineeships abroad are usually organised by specialised companies. Their task is to find suitable employers, book accommodation (usually hostels or dormitories), and provide a tourist and cultural programme in free time. Is there a place for eTwinning, too? Yes, although few sending institutions take advantage of this opportunity. Establishing cooperation with a vocational school with a similar profile in another country can be helpful in organising trips and increase their educational value. A foreign partner greatly facilitates the organisation of vocational training thanks to its contacts in the local labour market, its knowledge of the education system and experience in providing practical classes for its students.

Several hundred thousand schools are registered on the eTwinning platform, so finding a partner yourself should not be a problem (although the process can be time-consuming). An eTwinning project can be an introduction to work placements in the VET programme (a partner school can involve Polish students in its own extra-curricular activities, which will make the placement more attractive). There is no obligation to use intermediaries during the implementation of vocational mobility, so a project prepared on the basis of previous cooperation in eTwinning will not only be more attractive and tailored to the needs of participants, but will also contribute to broadening their professional horizons.

If you decide to use intermediary companies, you can use eTwinning to improve the communication skills of prospective participants. A project with a school from the destination country can be carried out a few months before the planned mobility. Participants in the mobility will get to know local living conditions, traditions, history

and customs. This will ensure that students and their tutors are well prepared for their mobility. The eTwinning platform can also be useful after the completion of a placement. It is a great place for sharing impressions, experiences, new skills (which is important in the context of dissemination of results, and affects the final evaluation of VET projects).

Meetings with enterprises and contacts with the world of work are very important elements of career guidance and are included in the educational contents at all stages of education. Sharing knowledge and experience through eTwinning projects facilitates this. The materials developed during the collaboration can be helpful in school practice long after the project has ended.

eTwinning and qualification exams

Each person trained in a given occupation (both in schools and in adult education) must pass a relevant examination before obtaining a qualification. One of exam requirements, which also forms an important element of a course of study itself (in trade schools, technical schools and courses for adults leading to a qualification), is the use of a foreign language for professional purposes³. Therefore the knowledge of basic terms used in a given occupation is required, and it is not solely due to prospects of economic emigration. Such knowledge is useful, for example, in business-to-business contacts between companies, during meetings at trade fairs and exhibitions or in the process of recruiting foreign professionals.

Teachers may find it very difficult to teach a professional jargon in a foreign language due to the fact that they do not receive adequate training in this respect. When studying languages, not a single teacher to be is taught the difference between an angle grinder and a belt sander, and this type of vocabulary may be needed during lessons at a vocational school. Getting in touch with teachers from another country who may have similar problems, and doing an eTwinning project together, makes it easier for language teachers to prepare for lessons. Participation in such activities and contact with other eTwinners is more creative and effective than paging through dictionaries alone.

During vocational subject classes, students learn about the operation and use of various devices and working methods in a specific field. On this basis, they can prepare, for example, multilingual user manuals (in the form of presentations or films) or glossaries in relevant subject area. The exchange of such materials in eTwinning projects can contribute to the creation of a database of resources useful in educational practice. An additional benefit of such cooperation is a significant enrichment of students' and teachers' vocabulary. Industry-specific projects motivate

³ As for languages, English and German are the most popular choices.

students to learn foreign languages by giving them the opportunity to communicate in real life with industry specialists.

The possibilities of eTwinning are much wider – they are only limited by the imagination of project participants.

The project offered students a glimpse into the world of work. The participants gained self-confidence and made sure that the knowledge imparted at school was indeed very useful. I have found that every student, even if they did not commit much to learning before, can unlock their potential and show their strengths. They can get involved and devote their time to achieve the goal. It was a great success to find a school willing to carry out the project and vocational teachers ready to get involved in this venture. Thanks to them, the project has been of high value.

[teacher]

eTwinning and other tools developed by the European Commission

Teachers implementing eTwinning projects are well aware that they form a part of much wider activities coordinated by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System. FRSE, just like the European Commission, promotes, among other things, the use of standardised documents useful for career promotion (such as: Europass Mobility, Europass CV, Language Passport, and cover letter). Encouraging students to use universal templates can bring many benefits to them. It not only shows them how to organise their skills and knowledge, but also facilitates the preparation of documents recognised across Europe. eTwinning contributes to the dissemination of knowledge on the subject and, thanks to virtual collaboration between teachers and vocational schools, it enables the preparation of documents in several language versions. This is important because employers require from candidates for jobs not only to give the name of the occupation or specialisation, but also a description of the knowledge and skills acquired during education.

Conclusion

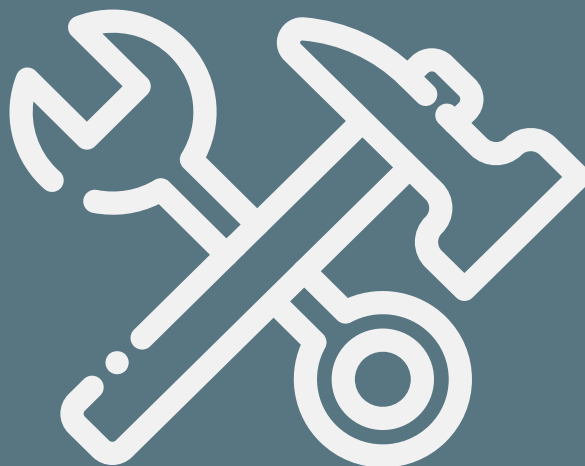
eTwinning, which aims to initiate, promote, monitor and support virtual collaboration between educational institutions, plays an extremely important role in education. Looking at the world at the time of the pandemic, it is clear that the importance of the programme will

continue to grow. This is not only due to the temporary difficulties in travelling, but the challenging time has also made shown that a lot of work can be done successfully online. Students have learnt remotely for several months. Also online training, conferences and meetings have taken place, which is a clear sign that knowledge of ICT tools is useful in virtually all areas of life. This is also a clear suggestion to career counsellors. When assessing a candidates' aptitude for certain jobs or guiding someone on a career path, they should take into account the opportunities to develop digital skills that can be useful in a given job and more broadly in building a career. eTwinning is a free platform for testing and using different tools that can be used by students and teachers alike. Therefore, it is worth encouraging participation in the programme, and even more - including projects in the school career guidance system.





Selected eTwinning projects focussing on VET



DOMINIKA TOKARZ

Foundation for the Development
of the Education System, eTwinning
National Support Organisation

EWA GRZESIAK

career counsellor
and eTwinning Ambassador

We would like to present eTwinning projects focussing on vocational subjects and career guidance carried out by Polish teachers. We also recommend becoming acquainted with project kits and project descriptions posted on the etwinning.net under Get inspired tab. These include several model projects, which step-by-step present how to carry out a project focussing on VET.

“Express Yourself With Your Hairstyle”

The project aimed to develop occupational, linguistic and social competences of its participants by learning about the systems of education in partner countries, comparing hair salons and hairdressing techniques used (TwinSpace: bit.ly/EXYRSHS).

“Langsam, aber sicher”

The project was awarded in the 2018 “Our eTwinning Project” competition and was carried out by students trained to obtain qualifications of a logistics technician and IT technician. It focussed on e-safety. In a gamification-based project, students created an animation and developed games on how to stay safe online (TwinSpace: bit.ly/LANGSAM).

“Let’s Do a Comic Book! (Bridging applied art students)”

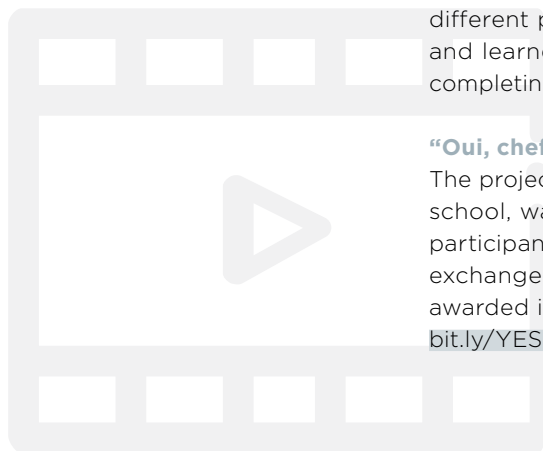
The project made it possible to introduce elements of culture and arts during classes in graphic design and English lessons (TwinSpace: bit.ly/COMBOOK).

“Literary Heroes Are Looking For a Job”

The aim of the project was to discover the most important skills (including soft skills) that students need to develop in order to succeed in the labour market. The participants deepened their knowledge on different professions, learned about career guidance services offer and learned how to write cover letters (among other things, while completing Europass CVs) (TwinSpace: bit.ly/LITHEROES).

“Oui, chef!”

The project, carried out in French by students of a catering technical school, was an innovation in Vocational Education and Training. Its participants learned about culinary traditions of other countries and exchanged experiences with peers from abroad. The initiative was awarded in the 2011 Our eTwinning Project competition (TwinSpace: bit.ly/YESCHEF).



“Sell Your Skills”

As part of the project, hospitality school students made instructional videos to present their professional skills acquired at their schools (TwinSpace: bit.ly/SELLYOURSKILLS).

“Sharing Cultures Through Food”

Winner of the 2020 Our eTwinning project competition. The project’s initiators showed many facets of the culinary arts by involving students of a catering and hospitality school, local community and a renowned chef (TwinSpace: bit.ly/CLTRFD).

“Shipping of Goods Beyond the EU Borders”

The project awarded in the 2019 Our eTwinning Project competition focussed on a simulation of a shipping company. Counsellors can find information about jobs in the forwarding sector on the project website (TwinSpace: bit.ly/SHIPEU).

“STEP – Share, Test, Exchange, Practise”

Students of agricultural schools in several partner countries remotely prepared a plan to green a concrete swimming pool at one of the schools, and their idea was put into practice (TwinSpace: bit.ly/STEPRC).

“Teens and Money”

A career should be about pursuing passions, using aptitudes and talents, but it must also bring in an income. The project entitled Teens and Money introduced money to students: its value, how to earn it and how to spend it purposefully. The results of the project can be discussed in vocational classes (TwinSpace: bit.ly/TNSMONEY).

“Trucks of Taste”

As part of the project, students dealt with the topic of food trucks while learning about how to set up and run a business. Each participant had a specific role to play in the team in line with the profession they were learning. The project combined training in several fields: entrepreneurship, marketing, catering and English. The project was awarded in the 2017 Our eTwinning Project competition (TwinSpace: bit.ly/TRUCKSOFTASTE).

“Working Together in Europe: Creating a Job Search Guide”

The project was initiated in 2015 by a group composed of partners from Poland, Spain, Romania, Croatia and Turkey. As part of the project, guides were produced on how to effectively prepare for a job interview and write a CV (TwinSpace: bit.ly/WORK2GETHEREU).

“Young Entrepreneurs: Getting To Know What We Have Best”

The project addressed economic, marketing and commercial issues, including the improvement of selected professional skills in English (TwinSpace: bit.ly/YOUNGENTR).

“Youth, Multilingualism and Work Perspectives in Europe”

Among the project results one can find materials facilitating conducting interesting career counselling classes (including plans of lessons during which different trades are presented and sample CVs prepared by students from partner countries) (TwinSpace: bit.ly/YMWPE).



Not only mobility



IZABELA LASKOWSKA
ANNA KACZMAREK

Foundation for the Development
of the Education System,
Erasmus+ Vocational Education
and Training Team

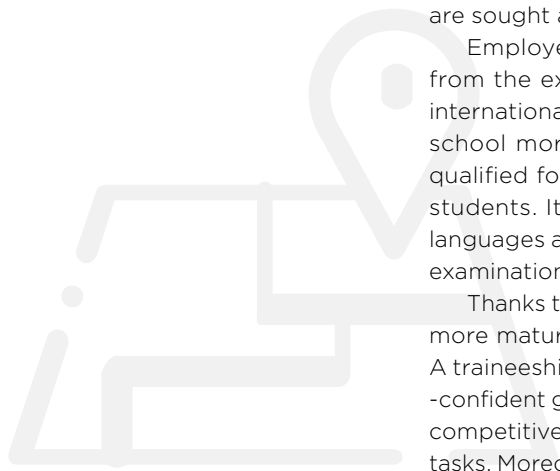
Erasmus+ is mainly associated with higher education students, although its offer for students of trade and technical schools is also rich and attractive. A growing number of upper secondary vocational schools is taking part in this EU programme by offering its students international mobility to serve traineeships and apprenticeships in renowned hotels, restaurants, IT companies, modern car workshops, farms and agro-tourism operations or exclusive beauty and hairdressing salons. Each year, the Foundation for the Development of the Education System allocates more than 30 million EUR from the Erasmus+ programme and the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development (OP KED) to finance traineeships and apprenticeships abroad for more than 20,000 vocational school students from all over Poland.

Serving a traineeship abroad is a new quality in practical training and a real chance to find a better, more attractive job. Many employers are more willing to hire candidates with international experience. No wonder. Thanks to international traineeships and apprenticeships trade school students gain new vocational competences that they would not have had the chance to acquire at their school, school workshop or in a local company. Participants in this type of projects also become acquainted with the requirements and working conditions in enterprises abroad, learn the occupation using modern technologies, master the use of new machines and tools, and become familiar with innovative solutions, working methods and techniques.

The European Commission's analyses show that more than 90% of companies look in candidates for qualities developed during placements and traineeships abroad. These include independence, good organisation, taking initiative, teamwork skills, resistance to stress, and openness to change. This is why participants in Erasmus+ projects are sought after on the market.

Employers in the country are keen to employ them and benefit from the experience they gained during their mobility. In addition, international traineeship offer makes studying at a trade or technical school more attractive. What is more, the very prospect of being qualified for a traineeship has a motivating and mobilising effect on students. It improves their performance in vocational subjects and languages and in the long term translates into better results in external examinations.

Thanks to experience gained in a foreign company, students become more mature, build self-confidence and learn more about their skills. A traineeship served abroad helps to develop a fully independent, self-confident graduate who is creative, communicative, open to the world, competitive in the labour market and prepared to perform job-related tasks. Moreover, students returning from international mobilities are well



aware of the importance of acquiring new qualifications after leaving school.

Can eTwinning help schools to achieve such goals? Absolutely, the platform is a perfect choice at the stage of preparing for your trip. Thanks to eTwinning tools, students can improve their language skills and learn about the history and customs of the country they are about to visit. eTwinning can also be used during theoretical preparation for a traineeship. Nothing stands in the way of learning the ways of training in a given profession, its specifics and safety rules remotely, before going abroad.

The students were very satisfied with the international project (carried out with the participation of, among others, peers from France). Its results can be used as teaching aids. The project integrated school community. It contributed to the dissemination of knowledge about eTwinning (e.g. during Languages Days) and to promotion of the school in the local community. The participation in the project was also a valuable professional experience for me and an opportunity to learn new methods of working with students, new ICT tools and exchange experiences with other teachers.

[teacher]

It is worth noting that Erasmus+ is really broadening educational horizons. Many graduates of international traineeships change their attitude towards the occupation they are trained in, become more involved in their studies and look for new ways to improve their knowledge and skills, e.g. by serving apprenticeship in Poland or taking part in skill competitions. It can be said without exaggeration that the programme improves young people's life chances and professional opportunities, and the watchword – "Changing lives, opening minds" – fully reflects the essence of this initiative.

With the support of the programme, schools can also provide industry-specific training for vocational teachers. Erasmus+ provides opportunities for vocational teachers, traineeship supervisors and career counsellors to experience new teaching methods and innovative technical and organisational solutions abroad. During mobilities abroad (lasting from two days to two months), teachers serve work placements in companies or VET institutions, conduct job shadowing or take part in activities organised by foreign partner institutions. Participants in the mobility do not incur costs related to travel and stay abroad and the

sending organisation receives support for organising and managing the trip and organising language training for teachers.

Schools can provide practical training in a foreign company in any occupation. Students of catering and hospitality as well as IT, mechanics and agriculture schools often travel abroad. Technicians also benefit from mobility: mechatronics technicians, landscaping specialists, veterinarians and future digital graphic process specialists also benefit from mobilities. The list is very long. An organisation planning to send students for training abroad should prepare an application with a description of how it will be carried out. The usual deadline for submission of documents is early February¹. An application should include, among other things, ideas for the use of eTwinning tools in the implementation of the project and information on dissemination of its results. The results produced by students and teachers (e.g. photos, presentations) can be uploaded on the platform. They can be used as training materials for subsequent groups of students.

¹ A few months earlier, FRSE, in cooperation with Regional Information Points, organised all over Poland free training on the programme and the rules of applying for funding.

A beautiful agreement

Serving a traineeship at the other end of Europe can be like meeting old friends... provided you have met them before through eTwinning. Zespół Szkół Budowlanych i Plastycznych (Group of Construction and Arts Schools) in Grudziądz and a Technical School in Paralimni, Cyprus began their collaboration by exploring students' national identities through visual arts as part of the eTwinning project entitled "Art & Design Expressions". This relationship was developed thanks to students' visits to Poland and Cyprus. In two editions of the project entitled Adobe Illustrator in practice (Erasmus+), students from Grudziądz performed professional tasks using Adobe Illustrator mainly. What results can be achieved in a project in which the partners know one another well, have common goals and the division of tasks is only a formality? Simply outstanding. During two two-week mobilities, tutorials on Adobe Illustrator were produced and used by students not only during their traineeship. An exhibition of photographs entitled "Impressions from Cyprus" was organised. Classes on Adobe software and icon painting were included in school curriculum and the contents of the classes were supplemented with drawings and photos taken in Cyprus. Zespół Szkół Budowlanych i Plastycznych in Grudziądz returned invitation to the partner organisation and hosted Cypriot students who served a traineeship focussing on graphic design and visual arts.

Remote collaboration in a virtual restaurant

Interaction in a team whose members you do not meet every day, communication at a distance, taking care of the quality of activities in virtual reality - these are the issues that teachers are very familiar

with because of an experience of remote learning. The next level of advancement is overcoming the communication barrier resulting from language and cultural differences and carrying out a project with a foreign partner. Teachers of vocational subjects and languages working at Zespół Szkół Ogólnokształcących (Group of General Secondary Schools) in Bobowa and the Lycée des métiers Louis Blériot in Trappes, France worked together this way long before the pandemic. They agreed on the topic of their remote collaboration, chose the tools, developed the schedule, monitored the implementation of the activities and conducted evaluation of the eTwinning project entitled “Trucks of Taste”², which promoted entrepreneurship and healthy eating. The stages of project implementation listed below correspond to subsequent phases of a typical student or staff mobility, which facilitates the implementation of this type of project in the Erasmus+ programme. This is how it was done in this case. A proposal for a student mobility project submitted by the school in 2018 was its first initiative to obtain funding directly under Erasmus+.

² In 2017, the project was awarded the National and European Quality Label and a prize in “Our eTwinning Project” competition in Poland.

10 steps to success in Erasmus+

The road to success in a call for proposals starts with continuous improvement of the concept for the development of the school and school community. The following tips will make it easier for prospective project implementers to join the Erasmus+ programme. They range from making informed decisions and good choices to getting the maximum benefit from a successful international mobility project.

NOTE!

The project always comes first! A clear and coherent project concept should be prepared and then presented in the form of a proposal.

Step 1. Needs versus project objectives

At the beginning, make a diagnosis of the needs of project participants, the school and its stakeholders (other institutions, people, region, industry sector, etc.). Project objectives should take into account the requirements of all stakeholders. The more precisely you define them, the easier it will be to attract partners and to continue planning and managing the project. The subsequent assessment of your project will also be more successful. Specific objectives should be coherent with the European Development Plan of the applicant institution and general objectives should be in line with the priorities for a given Key Action and the sector concerned as set out in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide. Specific objectives relate directly to the project and should be defined in as much detail as possible (think about how you will measure their achievement at the outset).

NOTE!

Mobility itself is not an objective of a project, but only a tool to reach the goal!

Step 2. Learning outcomes

When preparing a project, it is important to be clear and specific about what a trainee will learn – both from vocational and personal perspective. Learning outcomes should be planned in terms of knowledge, skills and competences. They should be realistic – achievable under specific conditions (taking into account factors such as length of placement, location, and language).

A training programme should be developed for mobility. It must be coherent with learning outcomes and objectives of the project. At this stage, it is worth using the eTwinning platform to agree the traineeship programme with the school abroad.

Step 3. Partner Selection

A good partner is an important part of a project. It is necessary to present the needs of the participants to the partner, to agree learning outcomes with it, to agree traineeship programme, its duration, and to make sure it is able to help with the implementation of the planned activities and the achievement of the desired outcomes. Before choosing a host organisation, you should check its potential, qualifications, consult opinions and recommendations. If the partner acts as an intermediary organisation, a list of traineeship openings and their exact description must be obtained. It is also important to agree the division of tasks between partners.

You can find your project partner here:

- **eTwinning** – a European school community, a collaborative space for school staff, which allow them to participate in contact seminars (etwinning.net).
- **EPALE – Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe** – allows you to search for project partners and organisations and individuals interested in exchanging best practices (ec.europa.eu/epale/en/partner-search).
- **TCA (Transnational Cooperation Activities)** – allows you to network with representatives of organisations from other countries (bit.ly/3nK5bnU).

Step 4. Selection of participants

You should identify the groups to which the project will be addressed, their needs (you need to take into account the requirements of

participants from a particular school, stage of education, occupation). In addition to students, the selection strategy should also address the representatives of the teaching staff. It is best to write it down in the form of regulations, stipulating:

- rules on providing information to prospective participants (including equal access to information);
- the selection criteria;
- persons responsible for the selection of participants;
- a reserve list.

Step 5. Preparation of participants

Proper preparation is the foundation for a successful traineeship abroad! Before mobility, pedagogical, cultural and language training should be planned according to the needs of the participants. It should be relevant to the tasks they will face abroad. It is worth consulting the host companies, to learn their expectations. Linguistic preparation should cover both the working language of the traineeship and the basics of the language of the host country. The eTwinning programme can help, as it offers space and tools for linguistic and cultural activities (in some cases, it is a more attractive way of learning about the history and customs of another country than learning in a classroom).

NOTE!

The preparation of participants for mobility concerns not only students, but also the teaching staff.

Step 6. Assessment and recognition of learning outcomes

In the planning phase, methods for the assessment of learning outcomes (using the Europass Mobility document or the ECVET system) should be agreed with the host organisation in order to allow for the recognition of knowledge, skills and competences acquired during the mobility experience. Detailed information can be found on the websites of the ECVET system (<https://www.eksperciecvet.org.pl>) and the National Europass Centre (europass.org.pl).

Step 7. Project management

Further tasks concern project management, monitoring and evaluation of various aspects of the project. It is important to:

- adopt a coordination method, set up project team, divide responsibilities between partners and specific individuals, prepare work schedule and the concept for team and student group management;
- conclude an agreement with a partner – especially if it is an intermediary organisation. This document should include a Commitment to ensure



the quality of mobility (an annex to mobility agreement concluded with a given participant);

- plan how participants will be monitored, who will be responsible for the process and their tasks;
- plan practical aspects of mobility (travel, accommodation, insurance, mentoring, support, etc.);
- allocate appropriate budget categories.

Step 8. Dissemination

This task should not be underestimated, as project outcome sharing significantly increases its impact. When planning the dissemination and exploitation of results, target groups and ways of reaching them should be identified. It is important to involve project participants at this stage. The eTwinning platform can be used as a place to share results, outcomes and experiences from a placement abroad.

Step 9. Evaluation

Evaluation should cover all stages of the project: selection, preparation, management, cooperation with partners, mobility, learning outcomes achieved, dissemination and further impact. The evaluation methods, techniques and criteria (adapted to the scale of the project) should be defined and the persons responsible for conducting the evaluation should be identified. Properly implemented monitoring can help.

It is worth anticipating how evaluation results will be used. If the project involves several mobility cycles (multiple groups), evaluation should be carried out for each one of them and the results of the analyses be used to improve subsequent activities.

Step 10. Budget

The budget generally includes three categories: travel, individual support and organisational support. They are calculated automatically (lump sums), which greatly simplifies making cost calculations. A good budget calculation is a very important part of preparing a good project.

Looking at individual items on the list above, it is easy to notice that eTwinning can very well complement actual mobility. It is worth taking advantage of it and involve students and teaching staff in it.



The eTwinning platform in Erasmus+ projects



DOMINIKA TOKARZ

Foundation for the Development
of the Education System, eTwinning
National Support Organisation

Mobility is not only about exchanges and courses, school visits and placements abroad. Project activities also include careful selection of project partners, preparation, management, and continuous and transparent communication, developing a strategy for dissemination of the results and planning an evaluation of the objective achievement. The implementation of these phases of a project is made possible thanks to a secure, freely accessible eTwinning digital platform¹. It was created for schools working together via the Internet. It supports their activities by providing innovative, interactive ICT tools.

The platform offers significant opportunities for the planning, implementation and dissemination of international cooperation projects – both those taking place online and those involving students and staff travelling abroad. Take a look at some of the ways eTwinning can be used in Erasmus+ mobility projects.

Searching for a partner

In addition to standard eTwinning Live networking tools (allowing for browsing profiles of other users or searching for individuals and institutions), it is worth using two functionalities designed especially for vocational schools. The first one is the partnership forum Erasmus+ Partnerships: 16-19, where new proposals for cooperation – in both general and vocational education – are regularly posted. You can post there, too.

Thematic groups on eTwinning Live are highly recommended as online meeting and collaboration tools. Their members learn from one another, and the cooperation established very often goes beyond activities on the Internet, and results in the implementation of other types of joint projects. Noteworthy is the featured group Global Community of Practice – Vocational Education, VET. Established and moderated by the eTwinning Central Support Service, the group brings together teachers working in the Vocational Education and Training sector. Participants in this group share information on ongoing projects, including those involving students from trade schools.

Another interesting group is Entrepreneurship in Education. Here you will find interesting ideas for developing young people's skills for everyday life and work.

Preparation for mobility

Regardless if it is students or school staff who prepare for a mobility project, cooperation must be established and cover such topics as documents, joint action plans, regulations and presentations. TwinSpace is ideal for this. A virtual classroom allows you to share and store files in a secure place, have forum and chat discussions, vote, post quizzes,



schedules, videos and external documents (e.g. Google), as well as hold video conferences. Using ICT tools during preparation for mobility, participants (or prospective participants) in an Erasmus+ project increase their digital competences. TwinSpace is an excellent tool for continuing collaboration and documenting its progress.

The TwinSpace platform, which allows for the creation of student accounts, is a safe environment for online interaction of project participants (in eTwinning this can only be teachers and students). Although organisations and companies cannot join the TwinSpace, project participants serving work placements abroad can collaborate with students in their placement region or use the space to connect with students from their own school. It is worthwhile to involve the participants in the project preparation by including them in the tasks performed in international teams at the Twin-Space.

During mobility

During mobility, the TwinSpace can serve as a virtual repository for consents, rules and instructions, and as a secure channel of communication with project partners (allowing for videoconferences, file storage and uploading of digital material). Monitoring of project activities can be extended to include tasks on the TwinSpace. In addition to traditional reports and daily notes, students can use the platform's possibilities and give their accounts in the form of a blog, forum posts or using the TwinBoard tool – an interactive board used for uploading various types of materials (e.g. videos, images, presentations, texts). It is very important to involve in the cooperation project participants who are not involved in the mobility at a given moment. TwinSpace can help with this.

After mobility

The return from mobility does not imply the end of project activities. On the contrary, this is when the intensive work of disseminating the results usually begins and conclusions are drawn. The eTwinning portal allows such activities to continue even after the official end of an Erasmus+ project.

Selected parts of the TwinSpace can be made public, so that interested people can access the material posted there without having to log in. This way, project outcomes can be disseminated widely (at European level), while other TwinSpace elements are accessible only to logged-in users. Compendiums, learning materials, video guides, as well as links to articles or information materials about the project posted on social media are ideal for posting on the platform. A project group can use the eTwinning platform to continue collaboration and stay in touch. They can also invite new partners with similar interests and needs, thus ensuring the sustainability of the project even after its

funding ends. The potential of the eTwinning platform as a 'contact box' for project participants or as a virtual classroom connecting students and teachers from different schools can be successfully exploited at any stage of mobility.



Implementation of the core curriculum and cross-curricular integration



ŁUKASZ KAMIŃSKI

English teacher,
Zespół Szkół Gastronomiczno-
-Hotelarskich in Gdańsk

¹ The quotes presented in this chapter are taken from the Regulation of the Polish Minister of National Education of 16 May 2019 on the core curricula for vocational education arranged by sector and additional vocational skills for selected occupations identified within vocational education with annexes, and in particular from the core curriculum for the hospitality, catering and tourism sector and the Regulation of the Polish Minister of National Education of 30 January 2018 on the core curriculum for general education in general secondary schools, technical secondary schools and stage II sectoral vocational schools with annexes.

Teachers who are familiar with eTwinning projects most often associate the programme with interesting and engaging activities for younger pupils – games, songs and activities that stimulate children to work and learn. Yet, eTwinning projects carried out with older students are not only possible, but also easy and fun. What is more, eTwinning activities form a part of core curriculum and can be successfully integrated into Vocational Education and Training. I can confirm this from my own experience. For almost 10 years, I have been running projects with students in four vocational subjects: hotel management technician, food and catering technician, waiter service technician and chef. The examples presented in the text refer to selected elements of the core curriculum for vocational and general education¹.

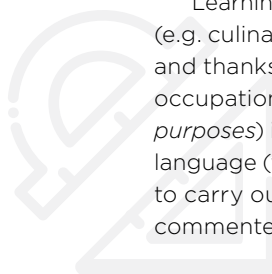
Activities correlated with vocational subjects

The project “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are” was the first project I completed that included elements of vocational education and training. The aim was for students coming from different countries to get to know each other by preparing traditional regional dishes together. Project participants created multilingual glossaries of occupational terms (names of food products, verbs related to cooking, names of cooking equipment), developed their own recipes (as text or video) and prepared dishes based on their partner’s recipe. They documented their work in the form of photographs or videos. All these activities were directly reflected in the core curriculum:

“To carry out the professional tasks for the qualification HGT.O2. *Preparing and serving dishes* it is necessary to achieve the following learning outcomes (students):

- can describe products and their use in gastronomy (e.g. recognise spices, distinguish and name fish, seafood, fruit and vegetables, types of meat),
- can identify technological processes used in the preparation of dishes,
- can describe small catering equipment for food preparation,
- can use international terminology appropriate to gastronomy,
- can use dish recipes,
- can describe the cuisine of different nations”.

Learning outcomes are achieved during classes in vocational subjects (e.g. culinary workshop, catering technology and commodity science), and thanks to the project they have been integrated into language for occupational purposes classes (HGT.O2.6. *Language for occupational purposes*) in which students “have a basic command of a contemporary language (with particular emphasis on vocabulary), which enables them to carry out their work”. Students communicated with each other and commented on their recipes on the TwinSpace forum. The final output



was a cookbook posted online containing the materials developed during the project (glossary, recipes, videos and photos). Students from three different countries chose similar recipes, which proved that despite our differences, we are all part of the European community (certainly in culinary terms). The project has been very successful, as evidenced by the awards it has received (National and European Quality Label), and the collaboration of the partners on further projects. The project owes its success not only to the well-planned activities and the involvement of the students, but most importantly to frequent and effective communication with the partners and a clear division of responsibilities (among students and teachers).

Tourism and travel is another topic that allows elements of different subjects and core curricula to come together in a natural way. In the case of international projects, students have the unique opportunity to use a foreign language to communicate with their peers from other countries². It doesn't have to be English, as French, German and Spanish are also popular languages in eTwinning. Activities can be implemented in such a way as to combine vocational elements with general education subjects, such as geography. In the It's my life project, students planned three-day trips to different cities in Poland and presented the effects of their work in the form of mind maps. Their presentations included the following elements: accommodation, where to eat and how to travel, local attractions and recommended activities. The eTwinning project enabled the implementation of selected points of core curriculum for vocational education (HGT.03. Guest service in a hotel facility and HGT.06. Reception service) indicating that:

"students:

- can list the types of establishments providing hospitality services,
- can define nutritional needs of the guests and their expectations,
- can offer additional services according to the offer of the establishment providing hospitality services,
- can provide information to tourists".

The project also made it possible to meet the requirements of core curriculum for general education, which includes not only knowledge and skills (Geography XV.14: "[students] can design, together with other students, an excursion route taking into account selected groups of tourist attractions in a town or region"), but also shaping of attitudes (Geography III.8: "[...] understanding and respecting the traditions, culture and civilisational achievements of Poland, its regions and local communities, and people representing other cultures and traditions"). This way, vocational aspects (organising hotel accommodation and catering), cultural awareness (identifying tourist attractions), communication in a foreign language and IT skills (creating online mental maps) were combined in one activity. It is worth emphasising

² As indicated in the Polish Core Curriculum for General Education in Four-year General Secondary Schools and Five-year Technical Schools: "One of the most important tasks of general and technical secondary schools is to develop linguistic competence and communicative competence, which are key cognitive tools in all disciplines of knowledge. What is important in this respect is the combination of linguistic theory and practice".

at this point that these are key competences that form the basis of modern teaching (they are developed in practically every activity in an eTwinning project).

Nutrition is another topic close to everyone, which forms an important part of vocational education and training. Together with my students, we have carried out several eTwinning projects which addressed this issue. In the project entitled Health issues among teenagers in European countries devoted to a healthy lifestyle, students not only prepared recipes from the partner countries, but also made a challenging attempt to modify traditional Polish recipes. Their task was to change the ingredients or proportions to make the dishes healthier. The task proved to be a challenge and students had to put in a lot of effort to achieve the final result. This way one of the points in the core curriculum (HGT.O2.4. Food preparation, which requires that students “can select methods and techniques used in the preparation of dietetic dishes, including boiling or steaming, use substitute products, and describe dishes of different national cuisines”).

The classes were very original. We worked outside the school. You could improvise and learn a lot of new, interesting, things in the process. For sure, the project has boosted my creativity, which is very important in the hospitality industry. *[student]*

In another project – “Eat right, be bright!” – participants compared healthy eating pyramids in each partner country (HGT.12.3. Nutrition planning – students “can interpret the recommendations presented in the healthy eating pyramid”). Students could prepare their pyramids in any way they wished, which resulted in varied educational materials. These included: food posters, multimedia presentations, an interactive game and a structure made up of cardboard cubes representing different products (fruit, vegetables, fish, water, etc.). As this task was implemented simultaneously within the Erasmus+ and eTwinning programmes, partners from different countries were able to become acquainted with a ‘moving’ pyramid and, by rearranging the cubes accordingly, show the nutritional structure in their countries. This activity was carried out during a mobility (under Key Action 2 School Cooperation in Erasmus+) and proved to be very informative and fun for the students.

Another initiative related to nutrition, or rather to mistakes made in the daily diet, was the creation of infographics on diabetes. This activity was linked to the World Diabetes Day and formed a part of work in Erasmus+ and eTwinning project “Eat right, be bright!”. Infographics included



posters containing various types of information and data. The main part of them were images accompanied by a minimum amount of text. Students were given information about diabetes by their teachers to be included in their work. Posters could be made using any technique, resulting in both drawings and collages created from official diabetes material, as well as professional infographics developed using graphics software. In this case, the eTwinning project combined vocational subjects³ with the development of IT skills⁴ and language skills⁵. It is worth noting that, apart from the guidance and clear instructions from the teacher, students were tasked with acquiring knowledge⁶. They decided how the materials were to be developed and (to some extent) what content they featured. In addition, they learnt about different methods of searching and selecting information, which often proved to be a difficult and demanding task. Such a structured learning process is more effective. Pupils are more willing to acquire knowledge (sometimes 'in passing' when performing other activities) and assimilate it better.

Educational materials

Another issue is the creation of educational materials – not only for the needs of eTwinning projects, but also (and perhaps above all) for the use in everyday teaching. Both individual activities and whole projects can be based on joint creation and implementation of different types of tasks – quizzes, games, presentations or films – prepared using modern information and communication technologies (ICT). The core curriculum considers as essential “the use of authentic source material (photos, videos, audio recordings, texts), including the use of ICT-related tools”.

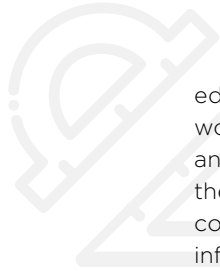
How can eTwinning be used in this respect? The National Support Organisation offers a very wide range of training courses on modern ICT tools. During one of the seminars, vocational teachers asked me why there are so few courses addressed to them. This is a wrong assumption, because the tools for creating educational materials are still just tools that only in the hands of a teacher take on a new meaning. It is important to remember that they serve to make education more attractive and to engage students in work and learning, but it is up to you to decide about the content you will teach or test using them. Impressive quizzes or presentations are not an end in themselves. What matters are the goals you want to achieve with them. Teaching English for occupational purposes, I cannot complain about the lack of teaching materials, however the textbooks are often inadequate and too demanding for students of technical or trade schools. Thanks to participation in eTwinning training, I have learnt about many interesting solutions, which facilitate the adaptation of the content to the skills of my students and support the development of materials corresponding to their needs.

3 Principles of human nutrition: HGT.12.3. *Nutrition planning.* Students “plan dietary meals used in lifestyle and chronic diseases, and identify risk factors for diet-related diseases”.

4 Computer Science IV. *Developing social skills.* Students “actively participate in the implementation of IT projects aimed to solve problems in different fields, while taking on different roles in the team carrying out the project and presenting the results of joint work”.

5 HGT.12.6. *Language for occupational purposes.* Students “communicate in a contemporary language information contained in visual materials (e.g. diagrams, symbols, pictographs, formulas”.

6 HGT.12.7. *Personal and social competencies.* Students “demonstrate creativity and openness to change, take responsibility for the tasks they perform, and modify their own actions based on a jointly developed position”.



I have used my new skills on many occasions, when developing educational materials that I used both in projects and in my daily work at school. My students, as part of project work, created quizzes and language games using the tools I suggested to them. In this way, they developed “skills in the efficient use of modern information and communication technologies [...], the ability to independently find information, to select, synthesise and evaluate it, and to make reliable use of sources”. In the project “ER: Escape Rooms”, we developed thematic games related to general subjects (e.g. a quiz on knowledge about Poland) and vocational subjects (a game concerning the names of traditional Polish dishes). I can say with confidence that applications such as Kahoot! can be used by teachers of any subject, including vocational ones, to summarise or test the material covered, and to introduce new topics. The same applies to interactive multimedia presentations Genial.ly or Prezi, which can be prepared by both teachers and students.

The project was a break from typical classes. eTwinning has made me learn new English vocabulary which I use in practice. I have become more confident in communicating and by making videos I have improved my accent. Thanks to eTwinning I am more willing to participate in out of school activities. Contact with people from other countries has made me open to new challenges. eTwinning has this advantage that it allows for carrying out international projects at the time when Erasmus+ mobility is suspended.

[student]

Unilateral projects

Another important aspect of eTwinning is the possibility to implement unilateral projects, e.g. Polish-Polish ones. The only condition to be met is that teachers must represent at least two different schools (during the pandemic, it was temporarily possible for teachers from the same school to carry out projects). Such projects can use all the possibilities of eTwinning, apart from, of course, language education in an international environment. It is therefore worth asking the question: What are the benefits of unilateral projects?

The first benefit arises, paradoxically, from the lack of language barrier. To many teachers, using a foreign language can be an obstacle that discourages them from carrying out international projects. Here this obstacle is non-existent. It should be noted that unilateral projects

do not differ in quality from international ones and are equally effective in supporting the implementation of the core curriculum (e.g. in the area of communication in the mother tongue, both in speaking and writing). Carrying out a project in Polish can be the first step to start an adventure with eTwinning, also on a larger scale.

Already at the stage of defining the objectives, the project assumed interdisciplinarity and integration of several subjects. This is the nature of all tasks: they combine information technology, English, introduction to entrepreneurship, marketing and a foreign language for occupational purposes. *[teacher]*

Another advantage, which is particularly important for vocational teachers, is the opportunity to carry out activities resulting directly from the core curriculum for occupations. In cooperation with another Polish school with the same profile, it is much easier to plan and implement a project closely related to the contents required during the examination confirming qualifications in a given field. Moreover, the completion of such a project does not prevent the partners from cooperation on an international forum. On the contrary, after gaining experience in domestic environment, becoming involved in a project carried out in a foreign language comes much easier. You can carry out very similar (or even the same) activities as in a national project, but this time with a school from another country. In consultation with new partners, it is possible to modify certain solutions or plan further ones, change the tools used, and above all, enable Polish students to get to know representatives of different countries and cultures.

Mistakes and how to avoid them

One of my projects entitled How can I help you?, which contained elements of vocational education and training, can hardly be considered a successful venture. However, it is worth mentioning to show what mistakes to avoid and also to prove that almost any idea can be realised under the right conditions. The main objective of the project was for the students and partners to develop rules for guest service in hotels and restaurants, taking into account professional ethics and savoir vivre. We planned, among other things, to develop a glossary of relevant terms in English and in the languages of the partners, to prepare role-plays on how to solve potential problems in the field of guest services, to record them and to include the materials in an online guide.

We have managed to invite two partners only to the project, which was the first mistake. The lack of activity on their part blocked the

activities of my students. Today I know that this is not a problem. Thanks to eTwinning Live forum or Facebook groups, you can quickly and easily find new institutions to collaborate with. Another challenge was such that the partner schools provided education in other sectors than mine (a catering and hospitality school). The planned activities turned out to be too closely related to the occupational profile of my students, which made it too difficult for other project participants (e.g. from a general secondary school) to carry out. Fortunately, eTwinning Live now allows a search with the option “vocational subjects”, which makes finding the right partner very easy. Today I also know (and I did not realise that during project implementation) that it is extremely important to cooperate with other teachers in your school, and in the case of technical and trade schools with teachers of vocational subjects. It is also worth participating in a wide range of training courses and seminars and read publications on eTwinning projects and ICT tools useful in teaching different subjects at different stages of education.

However, this does not mean that no valuable activities were conducted as part of this project. Initially, cooperation went smoothly, but over time the partners stopped delivering on time and – more importantly – there was virtually no communication between us, and this is an element without which no project can be carried out. Not only students, but also teachers collaborate in eTwinning projects. A great deal depends on them (good contacts, joint planning, getting students involved), so it is worth planning how and even how often to communicate. Today, in addition to the tools available in eTwinning Live and TwinSpace, such as the internal mail, the forum or the project chat, we also have external channels at our disposal to facilitate contacts (apart from e-mails, these include groups on social networking sites). As part of the project, my students carried out some of the planned activities, e.g. they developed a glossary of terms useful when serving a guest. Another issue required close cooperation with partners, as students were asked to prepare a list of problem situations (in a hotel room, in a restaurant, at reception), which they managed to do, as well as preparing role-plays in written form. Then, project participants were to record short role-plays, which would serve as a video guide and an important element of the final product. Activities concerned the implementation of the core curriculum (HGT.02.7. Personal and Social Competence), according to which “students:

- observe the principles of professional ethics and culture,
- communicate effectively, respect and do not judge their interlocutors, offer and receive criticism,
- provide constructive solutions to problems,
- respect the rules of teamwork”.

Unfortunately, as communication with partners at this stage was already very poor, students lost the motivation to work. Being a non-experienced eTwinning, I didn't know how I could revive the project. Now, in such a situation, I would probably look for new partners (also in a Polish school), extend the project time, modify the planned activities or ask for help from vocational teachers.

Our project made it possible to use practical (occupational) and linguistic knowledge. It was attractive to students and teachers and combined education on culinary traditions, language and information technology. Most important, however, were the intangible benefits for the students: learning cooperation skills and opening up to other cultures. *[teacher]*

In conclusion, I would like to mention a situation that occurred during an international seminar on eTwinning projects carried out in vocational schools. One teacher asked me how he could start a project in construction school, as not all the teachers are architects or engineers. I agreed with him, while making my point. I mentioned that a project can involve any activity that follows from the core curriculum and the school syllabus, which we would do anyway, working in the classroom. The difference is that the project uses more ICT tools, allows students to communicate with their peers (also from other countries) and gives them more freedom and decision-making in their learning. Only a few people will build a house, but anyone can decorate a bedroom, for example.

I hope this is also a useful tip for you when planning your eTwinning initiatives. I strongly recommend carrying out both unilateral and international projects, as the programme gives us a lot of freedom and offers many ideas for activities, also in the field of vocational education and training. In addition, such projects support the implementation of the core curriculum and cross-curricular cooperation. I have already carried out more than a dozen of different projects, infected many teachers with my passion, motivated students to learn and now... I am planning eTwinning activities for the next school year.



Learner autonomy, agency and responsibility versus the development of vocational competences



LUDMIŁA MIENSIKOWA-DESSUS

vocational teacher
Zespół Szkół nr 10
im. Stanisława Staszica
in Warsaw

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime. (Confucius)

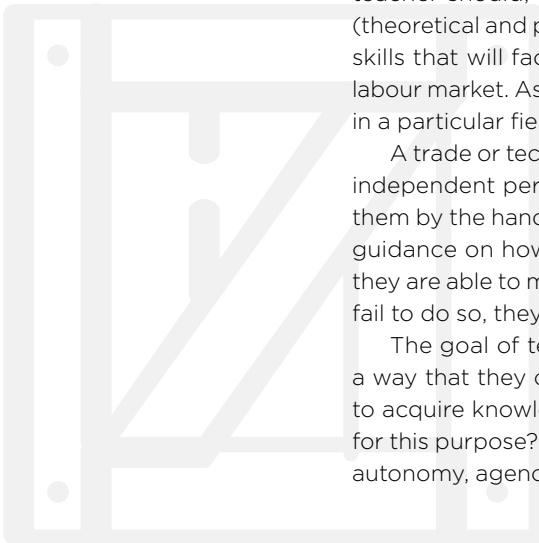
One of the key issues concerning contemporary teaching is the role of the teacher in the education process. In Poland, parents and subsequently their children have become accustomed to a traditional relationship at school: that of a master and apprentice. In contrast, state authorities and education centres promote another function of the teacher, that of a guide leading the students to develop independently. Such duality can cause conflicts. If a teacher dictates something in class, s/he risks criticism (“I can read from a book too, prepare something else next time”), if, on the other hand, s/he gives students the opportunity to learn on their own, they do not know how to manage their time and how to learn.

Both attitudes have positive and negative sides. Taking into account my experience (both as a vocational teacher and in the TFL (transport, forwarding and logistics) industry, I can say that a teacher should act as a mentor who leads the learning process, sets goals and limits, and provides guidance, with the assumption that the whole process of acquiring knowledge and skills rests with the students. It is advisable that some part of the class is devoted to the introduction of new topics and the rest to the autonomous learning of the material by the students. Can this be achieved? Absolutely. Should every lesson be taught this way? Once more: yes. Why does it make sense? Because today’s students will operate in a similar way in the labour market.

Projects carried out at school can be used to develop soft skills. The teacher should, on the one hand, prepare students for examinations (theoretical and practical ones), and, on the other hand, develop in them skills that will facilitate effective functioning in private life and on the labour market. As research shows, knowledge alone is not always enough in a particular field.

A trade or technical school is supposed to prepare future workers for independent performance of their work. Their employers will not lead them by the hand. As new recruits, they will be given the right tools and guidance on how to use them. Their success will depend on whether they are able to master knowledge and acquire skills on their own. If they fail to do so, they could lose their jobs after their probationary period.

The goal of teachers is therefore to prepare young people in such a way that they can cope with different situations and, above all, learn to acquire knowledge effectively. How can eTwinning projects be used for this purpose? This will be demonstrated by analysing the concept of autonomy, agency and independence.



As defined by David Little¹ **learner autonomy** is the ability of to take charge of one's own learning. This involves taking responsibility for all learning decisions, including:

- goal setting;
- defining content and progress;
- the choice of methods and techniques to be used during learning;
- monitoring the progress of learning;
- evaluation of acquired knowledge and skills.

Agency is about taking action and being ready to act, being able to operate in a constantly changing world. Student agency is defined by four dimensions:

- setting advantageous goals (awareness, foresight, ability to plan);
- initiating action toward those goals (own voice, free choice, freedom, independence and own initiative);
- reflecting on and regulating progress toward those goals (self-reflection, self-discipline, receiving feedback from peers and adults);
- internalising self-efficacy (development orientation, self-control, empowerment, belief in efficacy).

Another very important skill that schools should develop is **independence** in the learning process. A company employing workers very often verifies their skills in this respect. Independence is defined as “the readiness to act and commit to one's own activity. It is motivated by the desire and acceptance of specific goals”². The school should pay particular attention to these elements when preparing young people for personal and professional life. In eTwinning projects, it is possible to apply the acquired theoretical knowledge in practice. Working in teams, setting goals, solving problem situations – all these elements prepare students for their jobs and shape their professional competences. Such projects should link the core curriculum with the realities of the labour market in a given vocational area. Teachers do not always have all the knowledge in this area, but they can go directly to companies for inspiration. It is worth spending a week or two getting to know market realities so that both the teaching staff and the students benefit as much as possible from the project.

Trade and technical schools should enter into close and ongoing cooperation with businesses to learn about their requirements and needs. By introducing these criteria into teaching we will much better prepare students for entering the professional world – graduates who know the realities of working life have a competitive advantage in the marketplace right from the start.

For this purpose, eTwinning can be used, which will be shown based on the example of the 2018–2019 project “Shipping Goods beyond EU

¹ Little, D. (1996). Learner Autonomy: Some steps in the evolution of Theory and Practice. *The Irish Yearbook of Applied Linguistics*, 16, 1-13; bit.ly/2T0ptes [accessed: 15/10/2020].

² Kubala-Kulpińska, A. (2019). W drodze do samodzielności, czyli wspieranie mechanizmów uczenia się dziecka, *Życie Szkoły*, 43; bit.ly/3kr68PW [accessed: 23/10/2020].

borders". The project concerned the organisation of transport of goods outside the European Union. The project participants were students attending a course leading to the award of freight forwarding technician (28 students) and IT technician (5 students) qualifications.

Forwarding group

As part of the project, students learnt the realities of a freight forwarder's job. Their task was to organise, without the help of a teacher, the transport of goods from Poland to Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. They could only use a computer and a phone – the basic tools used by freight forwarders in their work.

As part of an introduction, the teacher discussed the basic issues and requirements with project participants. Other than that, students were not given any further guidance. Freight forwarders must be able to cope with any order, even if they have not carried out a similar one before. Students were given a chance to demonstrate their autonomy, agency and independence while using knowledge they had acquired in class. They had to find transport companies, customs agencies, suitable border crossings, organisations issuing permits for the transport of goods outside the European Union, and perform a number of other activities necessary for the performance of the main task. For a few months, the class acted as a shipping company and the students became its employees. They were divided into three units – each group was responsible for one country to which it exported goods.

During classes, I spent more time searching for information on the Internet. We met specialists from a shipping company who advised us on what to change and improve in our project. I overcame my fear of public speaking. I prepared and delivered presentations in front of people I did not know. *[student]*

Initially, the students very cautiously approached their task. They used online resources, but soon found out that this source of information was not enough for them. They found transport companies and sent emails to them asking for their support in the project, they also contacted government offices and customs agencies. At the final stage, they met specialists from a logistics and forwarding company to whom they presented their achievements. Together, they discussed the materials developed in the project and, above all, learned about the requirements of a freight forwarder's job directly from the people who practice the profession on a daily basis. It was very motivating for the students when the company representatives praised them for their

professionalism, for asking pertinent questions and taking the right steps during project implementation.

In addition to learning the skills of searching for information, writing letters and holding business talks, the students also learnt a very important lesson: although things do not always go according to the plan and according to their expectations, one cannot give up. They were confronted with a refusal to cooperate on part of several companies, no answers to e-mails, and disrespect from interlocutors, which had a demotivating effect on some of the project participants. There were doubts on their part (“I sent more than 20 emails and got no response.”; “What am I doing wrong that nobody wants to talk to me?, Why is this happening? Maybe I’m just out of luck?”). This was also a valuable experience – especially for future employees in an industry where long searches for a transport company or lack of response from contractors are not something unusual.

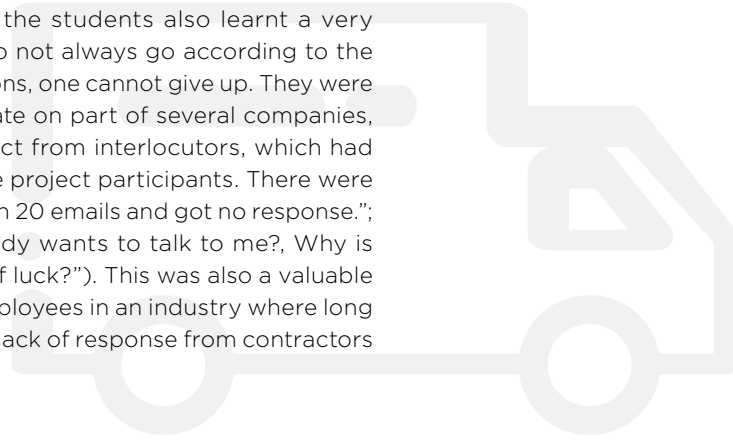
IT group

Most forwarding companies have an IT department. The IT group in the project was to provide services to the freight forwarder group. It organised video conferences with the partner school from Romania, uploaded materials on the project website and, after the end of the project, published its results on a website it had launched.

The project helped the students develop a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship. Thanks to the implementation of consecutive tasks they also acquired soft competences useful in the labour market, such as communication, teamwork (also international and multicultural one), and critical and creative thinking skills. The project contributed to a wider use of ICT tools at school, facilitated cross-curricular integration and cooperation of the team of teachers.

[teacher]

The teacher set specific goals for the project participants and deadlines for achieving them. The methods in which the tasks were carried out were chosen by students themselves. The progress of their work was discussed in meetings, after which corrections were made, work was revised, and the teacher gave further deadlines and motivated them to meet them. At some point, when time began to run out, the supervisor wanted to take over the management of the activities, and the group protested wanting to defend its autonomy (in the end the deadlines were met). A crisis was provoked by the



adopted style of work, as each student was responsible for his/her part of the activity, and the blame for any problems that arose was put on one person (who, for example, did not deliver on time). Initially this had a mobilising effect on project participants, but as a result the work of the whole group came to a standstill. In the end, it was possible to make the whole team responsible for tasks, and any internal and individual settlements were postponed until after the project was completed. It is worth emphasising that the teacher supervising such a project should be flexible and know the line between the so-called greenhouse reality (preferred by the school) and the market reality.

Thanks to contacts with managers working at a transport and logistics company and with peers from other schools, students acquired specific professional skills during the project (communication in English, communication with contractors in the TFL industry, sending requests to various institutions, creating and running a website). The contents of the project were also fully correlated with the curriculum for relevant grades, so it was possible to test the knowledge gained in practice.

Competence development

The obligation for schools to develop students' key competences stems from the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (OJ EU C189, pp. 1-13). The recommendation lists eight competences which can be effectively developed in eTwinning projects. This was the case in the "Shipping goods beyond EU borders" project.

1. **Communication in the mother tongue** – working in groups, writing e-mails, making phone calls to employees of companies, agencies, and offices;
2. **Communication in a foreign language** – communication with students from abroad both to discuss informal matters (introducing oneself, presentation of the school) and in formal matters (project-related issues, translation of materials into English, presentation of developed materials during online meetings);
3. **Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering** – calculation of transport costs, preparation of exports documentation, estimation of driver working time;
4. **Digital competence** – using specialised computer software, searching the Internet, creating websites, using the eTwinning platform;
5. **Learning to learn competence** – independent project work, searching for information and resources (successes motivated students and strengthened their self-confidence by showing that although learning can be tedious and labour-intensive, it pays off and the knowledge can be used in real-life);

6. **Social and civic competence** – working with students from abroad and thus learning about their culture, customs, how the labour market works abroad;
7. **Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship** (bringing project ideas to life) – opportunity to demonstrate creativity, innovation, planning and risk-taking skills. In the project, students were successful and faced difficulties (which helped shape their entrepreneurial spirit; students who were given a degree of autonomy were more likely to take independent action);
8. **Cultural awareness and expression** – participating in artistic activities in cooperation with a partner school (musical performances), making a video summarising the project (it is worth finding students who have specific interests and allow them to develop them).

The students, especially shy and withdrawn ones, gained confidence and boosted their self-esteem. During the project they had an opportunity to overcome not only the language barrier, but also the fear of failure. With each successive task they developed their social skills. By observing themselves and seeing the effects of their actions, they became more and more eager to do ‘more’ and ‘better’, and became motivated to continue their work.

[teacher]

If eTwinning projects are developed in line with the core curriculum, key competences can be taught in the classroom, and there is no need for mobilities (as in Erasmus+) – it is enough to integrate the project into the regular teaching cycle.

Employers more and more often require from job candidates to display competences other than just job-related ones (research shows that often young people have deficiencies in this area)⁴. The teachers’ task is therefore to prepare their students to make independent decisions, to cope with stress, to develop their ability to adapt quickly to changes in the environment and the labour market and to increase their self-confidence. Is it easy? Certainly not, but it is worth making the effort, setting the goals and achieving them.

For me, the biggest reward for my work were phone calls from my former students and participants in the project. One of them was offered an independent position as a freight forwarder (“During the job interview, I heard I was trained very well and could start work immediately”). Another student became a group leader in a freight forwarding company after 16 months of working there. He thanked me

⁴ Pachocki, M., Rybińska, A. (2019). Rola zagranicznej mobilności edukacyjnej we wstępnej fazie kształcenia zawodowego. In: *Wykształcenie zawodowe. Perspektywa systemu edukacji i rynku pracy*. Warsaw: Foundation for the Development of the Education System.

for giving him self-confidence and the opportunity to make independent (autonomous!) decisions.

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Remote education from eTwinners' perspective



JADWIGA FIŁA
MICHAŁ PACHOCKI

Foundation for the Development
of the Education System,
Analytical and Research Team

This article presents the results of a survey addressed to the users of the eTwinning portal conducted at a special time – during the COVID-19 pandemic, just after the end of the 2019/2020 school year. The study referred to the time of the lockdown, the direct consequence of which was that education had to be provided remotely between March and June 2020. In connection with the introduction of remote (online) education in Polish schools, teachers, headteachers, students and their parents were faced with new challenges and problems. At that time it was particularly important to prepare teaching staff for online teaching. To a large extent, the success of this process depended on digital competence of teachers and their previous experience in using ICT.

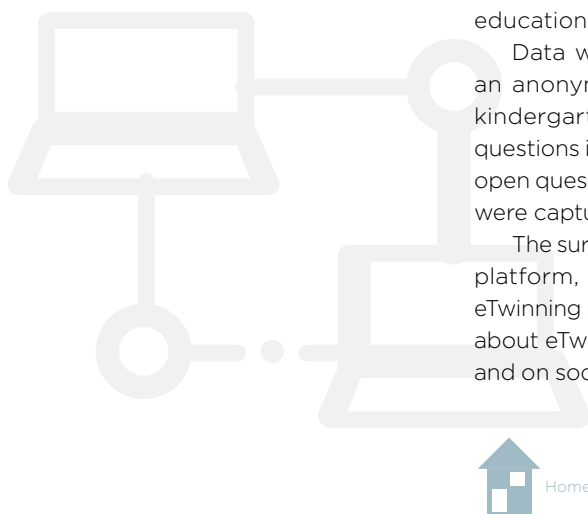
For many years, eTwinning has actively supported the community of teachers collaborating over the Internet. The programme gives teachers the opportunity to use tools that support remote communication. Thanks to collaboration, teachers coming from different countries, including Poland, improve their digital competence and enhance their skills in information and communication technologies (ICT). As a result, it can be assumed that the experience gained by participants in eTwinning projects should be reflected in the quality of their distance learning. Therefore the aim of this study was to find out how eTwinners are using new technologies in distance learning and to what extent eTwinning offer has helped them conduct these activities. The study also allowed us to identify the main problems and difficulties faced by teachers during the pandemic and learn their opinion on the remote form of knowledge transfer. We also found out which functions and areas of the platform are most useful to them.

Survey methodology and sample description

Three areas were identified in the study: digital competence as reported by teachers, the use of new technologies in remote teaching, and a qualitative evaluation of the eTwinning offer in the context of online education.

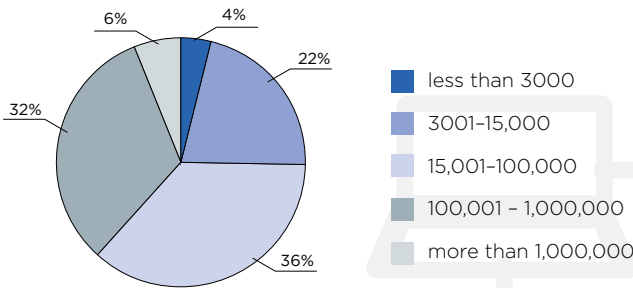
Data was collected from respondents using the CAWI technique an anonymous online survey. Survey participants were school and kindergarten teachers, and headteachers of these institutions. The questions included in the questionnaire were quantitative (except for one, open question), mostly closed (single or multiple choice), and the answers were captured on a scale.

The survey was primarily addressed to registered users of the eTwinning platform, and an invitation to participate in the survey was sent via eTwinning newsletter distributed among teachers interested in information about eTwinning. The link to the survey was posted at www.etwinning.pl and on social media. As the authors of the survey wanted to reach actual



users of the platform, the questionnaire included an initial filter question, which made it possible to eliminate people who had registered, but had not used platform’s resources. All registered users of the platform (over 38,000 people) were invited to participate in the survey, so the sample was exhaustive. The questionnaire was completed by 1621 teachers, 102 of whom teach vocational subjects on a daily basis. As this publication focuses on vocational education and training, further analysis will apply to this group of respondents only.

Number of residents in localities where the surveyed VET teachers work (N=102)



The vast majority of VET teachers participating in the survey were residents of cities and large towns. As many as two-thirds of them worked in towns with more than 15,000 residents, and more than 38% worked in cities with more than 100,000 residents. People living in small towns (less than 3,000 inhabitants) made up less than 4% of the sample.

Type of vocational education and training institutions where respondents work (N=102)

Type of school	Number of respondents	Percentage of all respondents
technical school	88	86.27%
trade school (stage 1 and 2)	34	33.33%
another institution	6	5.88%

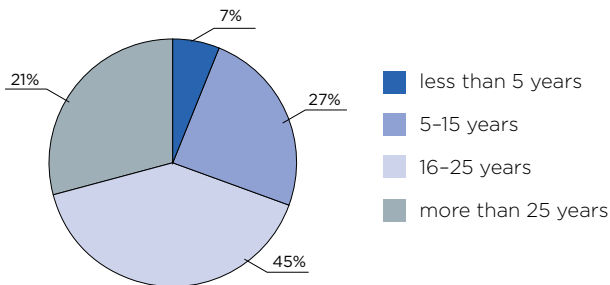
The majority of the respondents were employed by large educational institutions with more than 500 students. Teachers working at schools attended by less than 100 students made up less than 6% of the sample. More than two fifths of the surveyed teachers work in technical schools, slightly more than one third in trade schools. Less than 6% of respondents indicated “other vocational education and training institutions” as their place of work. It should be added that some of the respondents worked in several schools of different types at the same time.

The size of vocational education and training institutions where respondents work (N=102)

Number of students	Number of respondents	Percentage of all respondents
less than 100	3	2.94%
101-300	21	20.59%
301-500	26	25.49%
more than 500	52	50.98%

More than two-thirds of the respondents were teachers who worked for more than 15 years in the profession. Teachers working in the profession for less than five years accounted for only 7% of those surveyed. It can be assumed that this distribution of answers reflects the real situation not only in the VET sector, but also in the whole Polish system of education, which experiences growing problems with employing young staff at educational institutions. As a result, mainly teachers with long seniority work at schools.

Teaching experience of the surveyed VET teachers (N=102)

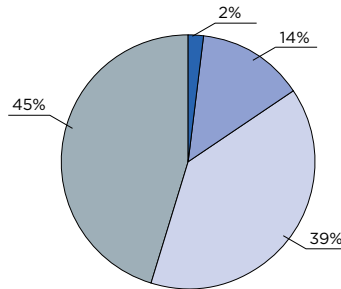
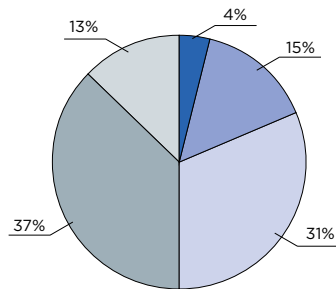


The majority of the respondents reported that they had at least two years of experience in eTwinning and the highest percentage of them had used the platform for less than five years. Those with the longest experience in eTwinning lasting more than ten years represent less than 4% of all the respondents. Also noteworthy is the high number of vocational teachers who registered with the platform after the introduction of mandatory distance learning, already during the COVID-19 pandemic (13%).

Surveyed VET teachers' experience in using eTwinning portal (N=102)

For how long have you used eTwinning?

How often do you use eTwinning?



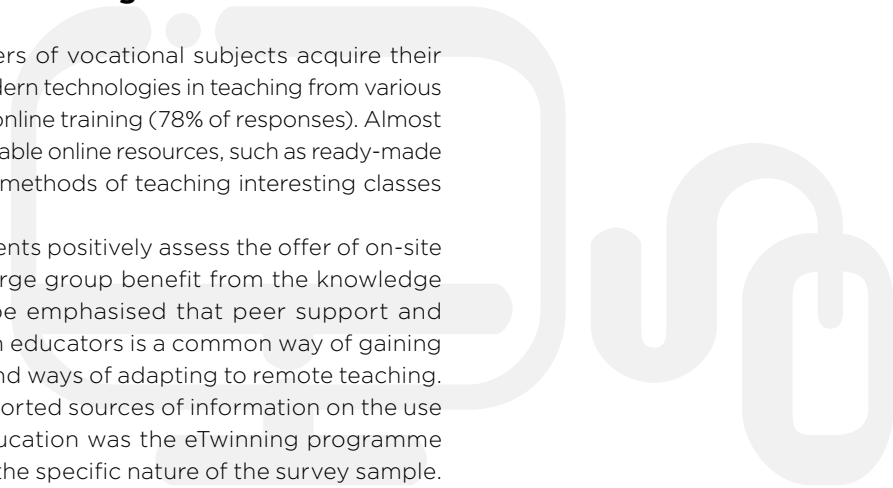
- more than 10 years
- more than 5 years
- more than 2 years
- I have registered in the last 2 years
- I have registered recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic
- every day
- several times a week
- several times a month
- rarely, occasionally

The survey results show that a large proportion of respondents relatively rarely visit the platform. Although in total more than 50% of the surveyed vocational teachers use the platform several times a week or several times a month, less than 2% do so daily. Over 45% of respondents visit the platform occasionally.

Digital competence and knowledge of new technologies

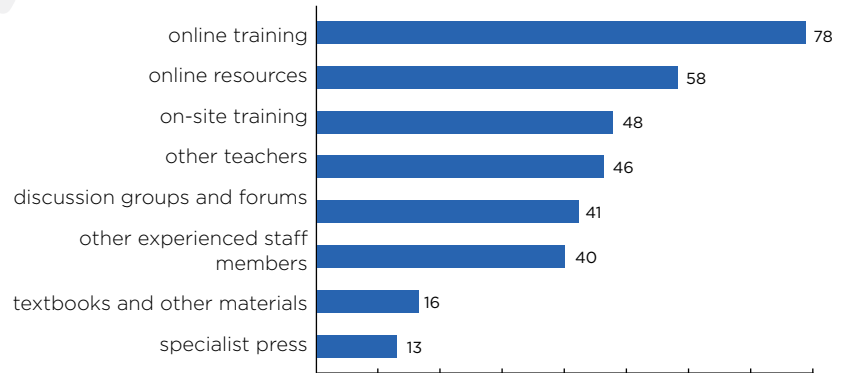
The study showed that teachers of vocational subjects acquire their knowledge about the use of modern technologies in teaching from various sources. The most important is online training (78% of responses). Almost 60% of respondents use the available online resources, such as ready-made teaching materials and proven methods of teaching interesting classes to students.

Almost 50% of the respondents positively assess the offer of on-site training, and almost equally large group benefit from the knowledge of other teachers. It should be emphasised that peer support and information exchange between educators is a common way of gaining knowledge, finding solutions and ways of adapting to remote teaching. One of the most frequently reported sources of information on the use of modern technologies in education was the eTwinning programme itself, which is primarily due to the specific nature of the survey sample.





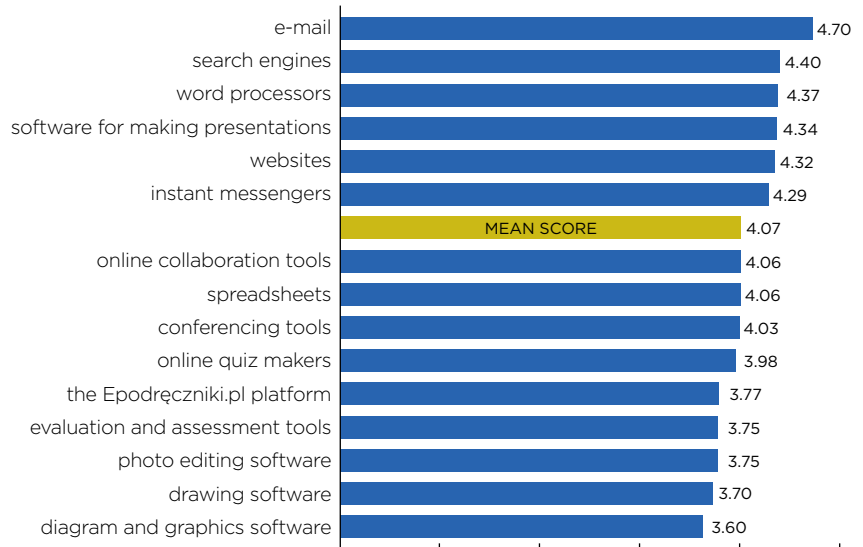
Sources of knowledge about new technologies used by surveyed teachers (percentage of answers, more than one possible, N=102)



Self-assessment of respondents' digital competence was also an important area of the survey. Vocational subject teachers using the platform rated this area very highly - the overall average score was 4.07 (on a scale of 1 to 5). This score was significantly higher than the average for teachers at all levels of education (3.86).

The reported digital competence - knowledge of software and Internet tools among the surveyed teachers of vocational subjects (N=102)

How would you rate (on a scale of 0 to 5) your ability to use...



Vocational subject teachers highly rated their skills in using email and search engines. They believed they were almost equally skilful at

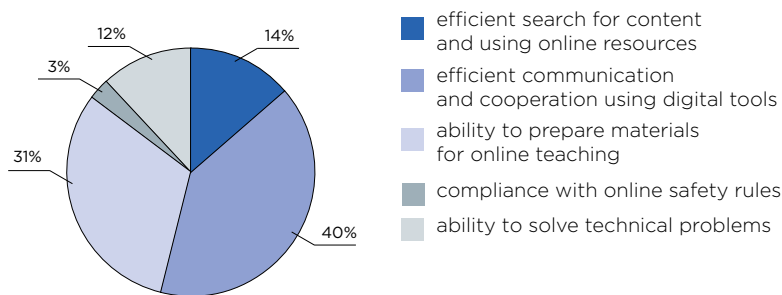
the use of word processing, presentation software and the use of web resources and instant messengers. Respondents reported poor ability to use graphics software, which is probably due to the field in which the teachers specialise.

eTwinning and remote teaching

An important element of the study was the assessment of individual aspects of remote teaching during the COVID-19, pandemic by users of the eTwinning platform. Questions asked to teachers mainly concerned such aspects as the implementation of core curriculum, evaluation of online tools supporting remote teaching, and assessment of students' progress.

When asked about the most important factors influencing the quality of remote education, the respondents first of all emphasised the role of efficient communication and cooperation in the teaching team (over 40% of answers), as well as the relationship between the quality of distance learning and the ability to prepare materials useful for its implementation (over 31% of answers). Other factors; efficient information search and the ability to deal with technical problems, were mentioned less frequently (both less than 15% of answers). Least frequently mentioned were issues related to ensuring safety on the Internet.

Factors affecting the quality of remote teaching according to the surveyed teachers (N=102)

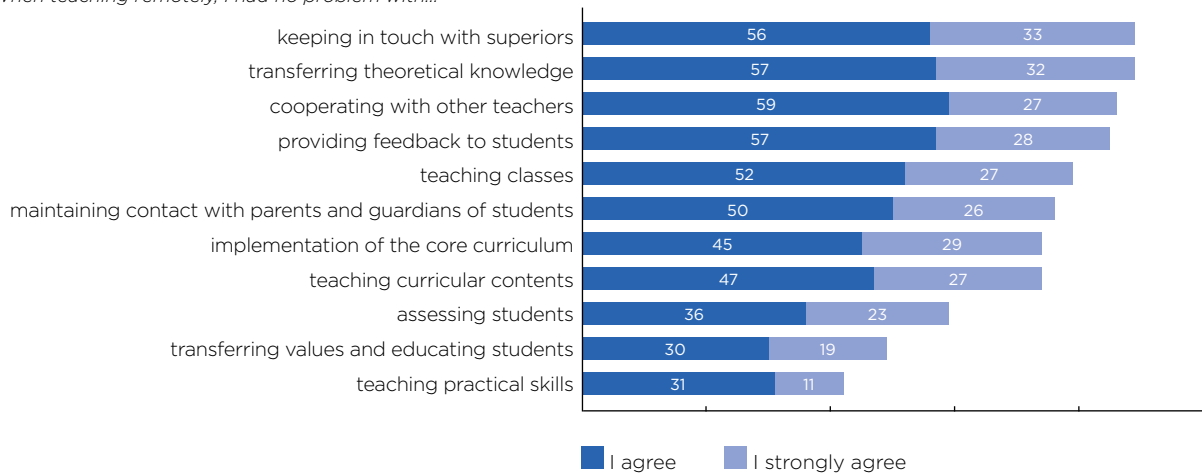


In the opinion of the respondents, the least problematic elements included: transferring theoretical knowledge to students and maintaining contact with superiors (almost 90% of responses). Similar statements were made in relation to establishing collaborative relationships with other teachers (over 86%) and providing students with feedback on their learning progress (over 85%). It is worth noting, however, that less than 50% of the surveyed teachers did not mention problems with teaching practical skills to students.

Difficulties with remote education often concerned the implementation of the core curriculum and the teaching process itself. In both cases, problems were mentioned by one in four survey participants. Its results also show that respondents found it difficult to assess students' work. It is worth noting that teachers were more likely to declare problems with assessing students' progress (59%) than with providing feedback to students.

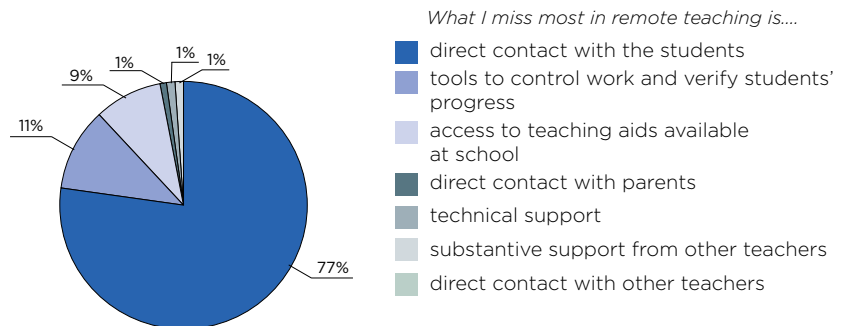
Vocational teachers' attitudes towards remote teaching - factors which do not cause them difficulties (percentage of answers, possible more than one answer, N=102)

When teaching remotely, I had no problem with...



The teachers' answers show that because of the introduction of distance learning, they missed direct contact with students most (more than 77% of answers). They also pointed to the lack of tools to monitor students' work and check their progress (11%) and limited access to teaching aids available at school (9%).

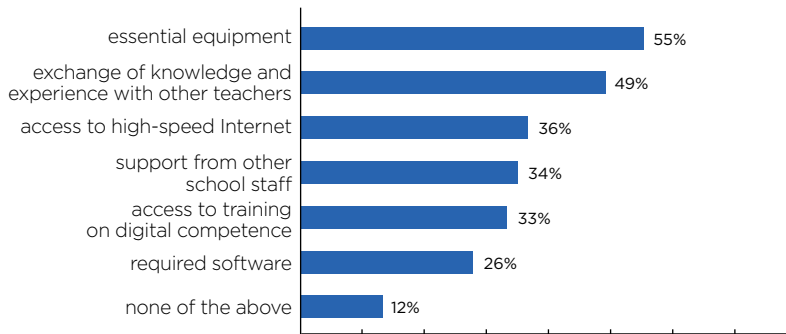
Factors causing most problems to vocational teachers in remote teaching (N=102)



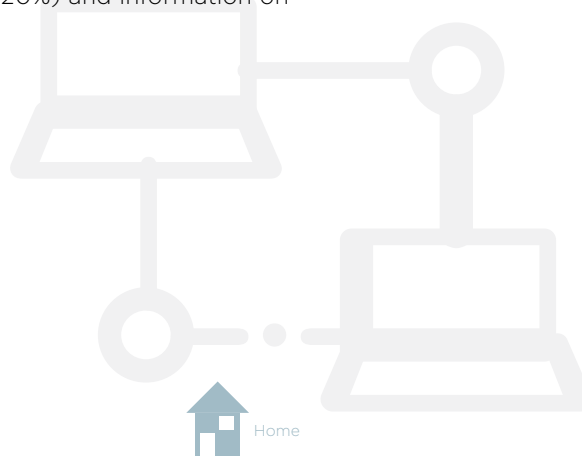
Vocational teachers emphasised that their effective use of new technologies required support from their home teaching institution. However, the survey results show that many respondents do not receive any help from their schools. Less than 55% confirmed that their schools provided them with the necessary equipment when needed, and only more than 26% could count on appropriate software. Just over a third of those surveyed received high-speed Internet access from their organisation; could attend training in technology and digital development; and received systemic support from other specialists in their organisation.

Teacher support in the field of IT (percentage of affirmative answers among the respondents)

If needed, my school provides (enables)...

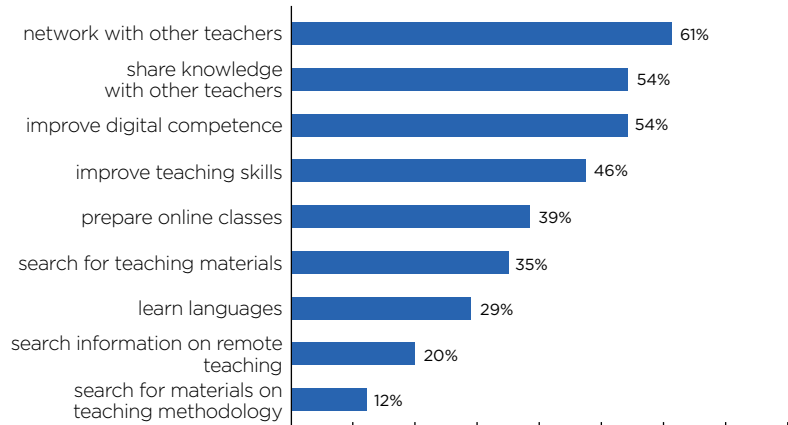


According to the respondents, eTwinning not only is helpful in improving digital competences, but also facilitates knowledge sharing with other teachers (over 53% responses in both cases). Almost 50% of the respondents confirmed that eTwinning facilitated the improvement of teachers' professional competences (over 46% of answers). The vast majority – more than 60% of those surveyed – also confirmed that the platform could be used primarily for networking with other teachers. Less frequent were reports on the use of specific methodological materials by vocational teachers (less than 20%) and information on distance learning (more than 11%).



Usefulness of eTwinning offer in the opinion of vocational teachers (percentage of affirmative answers, N=102)

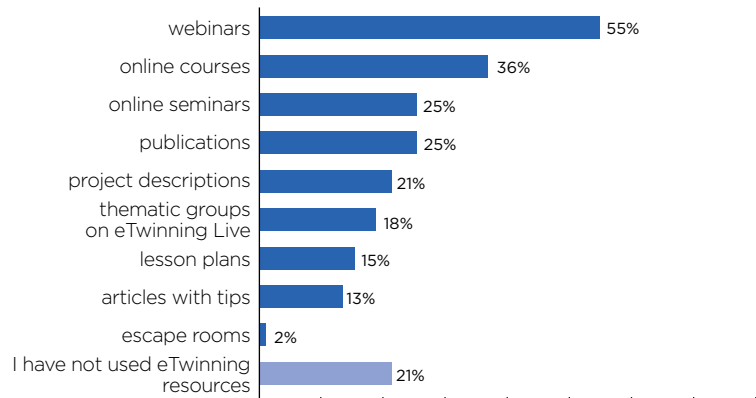
eTwinning helps me to...

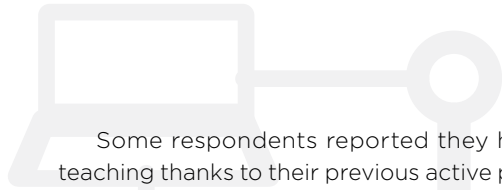


Teachers were also asked about the usefulness of information posted on the eTwinning platform in the context of remote teaching. During the pandemic, the most popular were webinars (over 54% of indications), online courses (over 36%), seminars (over 25%), and digital publications (over 24%). As far as methodological support is concerned, the platform users mainly used articles with tips for teachers (more than 12%), lesson plans (more than 14%), and they joined various thematic groups available on eTwinning Live (more than 17% of responses).

eTwinning resources used by teachers in remote teaching (N=102)

To teach remotely during the COVID-19, I used the following training offer or teaching materials available on eTwinning:





Some respondents reported they had no problems with remote teaching thanks to their previous active participation in eTwinning. They stressed that they could not only use the knowledge, but also teaching materials developed during the training courses available posted on the platform. Some respondents admitted that it was the experience gained through eTwinning projects and training that allowed them to smoothly teach remotely during the pandemic. In their opinion, the lack of similar experiences would prevent the implementation of online lessons.

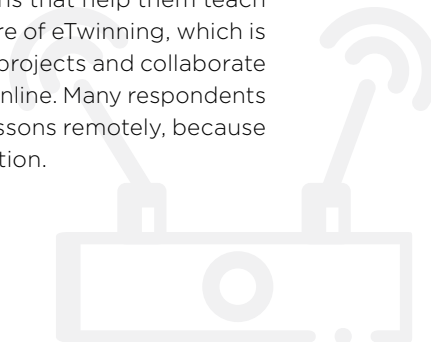
The surveyed teachers also declared that the period of remote teaching was an opportunity for them to improve their own competences and, above all, to use the skills acquired during previous training in practice. The lockdown allowed them to identify competence gaps and participate in additional courses and trainings (including those offered on the eTwinning platform).

Summary

The study aimed to determine the extent to which the eTwinning offer proved useful for remote teaching when Polish educational institutions were closed at the time of the pandemic. The results of the survey show that eTwinning is seen not only as a tool that helps teachers prepare for teaching online, but also as a platform for networking and collaboration between schools. It was emphasised that experience from previous eTwinning projects could facilitate remote teaching.

The vast majority of surveyed vocational teachers were positive about the support provided by eTwinning to improve their digital competence. According to the respondents, the platform offers tools for better use of new technologies in teaching and its resources can also be used for remote teaching. Some of the respondents provided suggestions to broaden the range of materials to facilitate remote teaching of vocational subjects.

The survey results also show that teachers who actively use the eTwinning platform have a well-developed digital competence and are familiar with modern technological solutions that help them teach lessons online. This is certainly due to the nature of eTwinning, which is primarily addressed to teachers who carry out projects and collaborate with other teachers and students from abroad online. Many respondents admitted that it was easier for them to teach lessons remotely, because it was not their first contact with online education.





Home

In addition to supporting primary and secondary schools, **eTwinning** is effective in the field of Initial **Vocational Education and Training (IVET)**. This area is a key element of the European Union's wider policy – it enables the acquisition of skills and competencies required on the open labour market. When registering on the platform, teachers can indicate whether their school provides vocational training, which makes it easier to connect with similar institutions all over Europe and thus create innovative projects. This publication can be seen as a source of knowledge about the possibilities of eTwinning and, above all, as an inspiration to start cooperation with vocational schools.

The Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE) has been operating since 1993. Currently, it is the Polish National Agency of the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps for 2021-2027. At the same time, it carries out European information and education initiatives: eTwinning, Eurodesk Poland, Eurydice, Europass, EVET and EPAL. The foundation also supports cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe through the Polish-Lithuanian Youth Exchange Fund, the Polish-Ukrainian Council of Youth Exchange, SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Centre. Since 2014, FRSE has been involved in the implementation of the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development.