



Eurofound

Educational and training services: Anticipating the challenges

Case study: MAYDAY Poland

[Click for contents](#)

Contents

Introduction	1
General description of the MAYDAY initiative	2
The initiative in the educational landscape	6
Future challenges	7
Sources	8
Interviews	8

Introduction

Education and training remain key policy priorities across Europe because of their importance in fostering future economic growth in the European Union. The education and training sector is addressing some of the big policy challenges in Europe and more globally through innovation, job creation, inclusion and active citizenship, to mention a few themes. This focus is a logical next step following previous policy strategies and initiatives aimed to promote lifelong learning. As Green (2002) observes, lifelong learning has been at the centre of European educational debate for at least a decade. It is reflected in a large number of policy strategies and initiatives, first and foremost the strategic plans for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2010 and ET 2020) and the New Skills for New Jobs Initiative. Schemes to increase mobility and the transparency of national educational systems, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the higher education framework European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as well as frameworks and networks to promote the quality assurance of education and training across Europe, are all measures that affect the education and training sector. Changing framework conditions brought about by economic, ecological, socio-demographic and technological developments will present providers of learning services with new challenges and opportunities. They will also affect the outcomes and performance of the sector as well as employment, working conditions and skills needs.

This case report forms part of a study conducted by the Danish Technological Institute under contract to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). The purpose of the study is to provide empirical evidence about the state of the education and training sector in Europe within the overall context of lifelong learning, to identify and illustrate trends and practices that can function as a source of inspiration. The aim is to produce original scenarios for the sector in the European Union (EU27) in order to provide Eurofound and its stakeholders with a sound and pragmatic knowledge base to improve the understanding and anticipation of change in the sector up to 2020 in the EU.

The study has a particular focus on employment and the supply of labour within the sector. What sort of teaching, training and education jobs will be needed in the future? And what are the skills necessary to do them? How do we make adjustments and develop the current educational workforce in order to be prepared for future trends?

This report is one of six case study reports.

The main objective of the report is to illustrate one example of an innovative approach to anticipating the challenges faced by the education and training sector.

The report is based on preliminary desk research of sources relating to the case and a one-day case visit including face-to-face interviews with the following representatives of the case:

- Stanisława Gatz and Anna Krzyzanowska, Department Head and Deputy Manager of European Programmes, NSZZ Solidarność (Project Manager and Secretary of MAYDAY);
- Odeta Mazyr-Golyszny and Wojciech Jozef Konkel, WUP Gdansk – Voivodeship Labour Office (partner);
- Magdalena Popowska, Associate Dean for International Affairs Faculty of Management and Economics Gdansk University of Technology (partner);
- Joanna Wierszyło, Main specialist public-funded projects, Ship Design and Research Centre (partner).

General description of the MAYDAY initiative

Poland became a member of the European Union in 2004 and several later initiatives in the education sector were established with European funding. Moreover, the policy developments in the sector are based on European recommendations.

Because of the Bologna process and the development of the EQF, the formal education system in Poland is changing to adapt to the educational levels of other European countries. A National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has been introduced and will be implemented gradually over the next few years. However, adapting the Polish system of formal education to the learning outcomes approach, as opposed to focusing on the curriculum and timetabling, is a time-consuming challenge. The non-formal and informal education sector has only recently been given attention and no system of validation of non-formal and informal learning has yet been put into place.

Like some other European countries, Poland has difficulties in attracting people to the teaching profession. The reasons for this may include students' general perception that working conditions in the sector are poor and opportunities for continuous development are limited.

The MAYDAY initiative introduces a model for the active support of employees' and enterprises' development in the face of the structural changes in the European economy and focuses on development of lifelong learning. The case illustrates an innovative collaboration between stakeholders, such as social partners, public authorities, educational and research institutions, and enterprises. The development of training modules and tools by a higher education institution aimed at a target group significantly different from the traditional target group of universities has proven very successful in preparing university teaching staff for the learning outcomes approach.

Background to the initiative

Like other Member States, Poland has seen dramatic demographic changes since 1990. The number of children and young people is falling, while the number of retirees as well as persons of working age is increasing. The situation will be further aggravated in the years after 2010 when the number of people of working age will begin to fall, and the number of retirees will continue to rise, reaching 37% by 2030 (according to Eurostat data).

It is therefore important to motivate the ageing workforce to stay in the labour market for as long as possible. In Poland, people retire from the labour market much earlier than in many other EU countries because they have access to early retirement schemes and pre-retirement allowances. Many Polish workers are already considering retirement at the age of 45.

The labour market situation for employees over 50 years is difficult in general. In the period before the MAYDAY initiative was started this was especially true of the maritime sector. The shipyard industry labour market is changing in Poland as the industry has undergone contraction as well as structural changes towards more knowledge-based and automated work and fewer manual operations. This has led to redundancy for older workers who do not have the necessary skills, while at the same time the shipyard sector is finding it difficult to recruit skilled workers and technicians. Without access to sufficient continuing professional training, the employees in the maritime sector quickly lose the skills they need to operate successfully in the modern workplace, and 'rescue' themselves by early retirement. Moreover, companies are not encouraged to keep older workers in employment or to re-employ them.

The MAYDAY initiative, a model of the active support of employees in the face of structural changes in the economy, was launched in 2003 to address the above challenges. The project finished in 2008, but experiences from the project are currently being used by the trade union NSZZ Solidarność (Solidarity) to inform other projects.

Scope of the project

The main aim of MAYDAY was to adjust the qualifications of employees over 50 years, mainly from a sector in decline (the shipyard industry), to the demands of the future labour market with the focus on the development of lifelong learning.

The objective of the initiative was to prepare and implement a programme for the reskilling of this specific part of the workforce with a particular focus on SMEs and new technologies in enterprises. Moreover, the aim was to help entrepreneurs and employees through the system of training and consulting.

The project had two different target groups:

- employees (mainly aged 50+ in the shipyard sector);
- employers/enterprises in the shipyard sector as well as companies cooperating with the sector and their employees.

Many of the employees in to the target groups had a need for psychological support when entering the programme to help them resolve personal problems such as stress management.

With regard to the training modules, the most important goal was to develop training activities adapted to the needs of the participants while also emphasising self-guided learning activities so that as many as possible unemployed people could profit from the initiative.

Activities and stakeholders

MAYDAY was developed and implemented as a partnership between the trade union Solidarność, the Pomeranian Chambers of Industry and Commerce, the University of Technology in Gdansk, the Ship Design and Research Centre (a research and development institution) and the public authorities represented by the Regional Labour Office in Gdansk.

Solidarność initiated the project and was the administrative project manager as well as part of both development and implementation.

The Pomeranian Chambers of Industry and Commerce participated in the project by contributing the views of local enterprises. They were also in charge of an Entrepreneurship Club within the framework of MAYDAY. Finally, they participated in the MAYDAY conference, which took place in Lisbon in October 2006.

The Ship Design and Research Centre carried out a pilot study among the target groups in the preliminary phase of the project. These studies identified problems and obstacles in connection with the employees and the industry in general. For example:

- the skills and knowledge of older workers were not adapted to the employers' requirements mainly in the area of innovative technologies;
- the employers lacked knowledge about the skills and competences of older workers;
- there was a lack of lifelong learning systems (education and training) corresponding to the real needs of workers;
- there was a lack of mechanisms for social integration in the workplace.

A mentoring system was developed and tested. First, a group of potential mentors was identified within the employee target group. The potential mentors were older, experienced workers who were assessed as having the potential to serve as mentors for fellow employees and unemployed people. The mentors were introduced to soft skills, such as communication, as they had to be able to convey their newly acquired knowledge to younger employees at a later stage. This system allowed for better use of knowledge and expertise of employees aged 50 and over, allowing them to enhance their position in the company.

In addition, the Ship Design and Research Centre developed a marketing and promotion scheme. This involved the elaboration of concepts, pilot testing, final adjustment of the proposed systems and an additional training scheme for the mentors.

The University of Technology, Gdansk, conducted a second pilot study on skills needs to gather information on what to include in the new training modules they were to design, as well as training materials and hand-outs. The university developed new training tools and modules carried out conventionally or in the form of e-learning as a way to improve lifelong learning in the industry. The training modules had to support the introduction and implementation of innovative information and communication technologies (ICT) as well as improve the 'soft skills' in the enterprises. Training centres and a virtual educational platform were established as a way of supporting and advising the employees.

Within the framework of the project, members of the university staff also published academic research papers. Finally, staff at the university taught some of the training modules.

The Labour Office created a model for a platform for skills-oriented social dialogue within the shipyard sector. The model included a cycle of five panel meetings where the focus was on staff and human resources. The purpose of these meetings was to bring different stakeholders together and to provide a space for reflection on analysis and research of the labour market. Each meeting was attended by between 70 and 100 participants and they covered different topics, such as:

- development of a mentoring system for the sector;
- expectations of the regional labour market and qualifications in the future;
- how to produce educational offers that are linked to labour market.

Finally, MAYDAY formed transnational links with partners in Italy, Portugal and Germany facing similar structural problems. This partnership was called Working for Innovation Management, Production and Sharing (WIMPS). The partners worked with automotive, agricultural machines and home automation equipment. The transnational activities enabled the partners to share their experiences in tackling skills challenges created by technological change.

Finance/costs

The project was financed with funds within the framework of the Polish European Social Fund (ESF) Programme.

Evidence-based results

MAYDAY was a five-year project that finished in 2008. The following objectives were accomplished and the lessons from the project are continually taken forward into new projects of Solidarność:

- human capital perspective – participating enterprises have increased their focus on how to develop a training system for human capital;

- vocational training – job agency and advisory, coaching and stress management;
- computer courses.

During the five-year project period, MAYDAY was in touch with 10,000 individuals, 30 companies – mainly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – and all shipyards in the region. Six hundred people received training (of whom 100 were managers). MAYDAY reported its results to the national authorities, who recognised and accepted the outcomes of the project.

The mentoring subproject involved 25 employees over a five-month pilot test period. Since the project finished, at least two companies have implemented the system developed in MAYDAY to identify gaps in the skills/competences of their employees as well as a module with a focus on lifelong learning.

Two companies that have been involved in the MAYDAY project are POROLOT and ELDIS.

Mentoring at POROLOT and ELDIS

At POROLOT, a manufacturer of products for the maritime sector, mentoring has been a component of human resources development since the company was founded 20 years ago. However, mentoring has not been used in a structured way, and mentors have never been trained for their role. The new training system has been very successful in teaching the mentors how to handle new and young employees, as well as giving the mentors more confidence in themselves and their professional life.

Developing the skills and competences of workers over 40 is important in this company as it is finding that young people are often just waiting for better opportunities and do not stay in the job for long. Consequently, the investment in the older and more stable workforce is seen to pay off.

At ELDIS, which produces electrical equipment for the maritime industry, two of the company's 23 employees were trained as mentors. The company finds that this is a great support for the workers' professional development. The manager points out that the number of Polish vocational education and training (VET) schools has been reduced as a result of the Bologna process, leaving few courses for vocational training. This means that companies have to manage the training and professional development of their employees themselves.

Being part of the MAYDAY initiative gave the University of Technology in Gdansk an opportunity to design training materials using ICT. This is still unusual in Poland, where ICT-based tools and e-learning are not part of the formal system of education. The staff and researchers learned that the university was able to design relevant training content for people who, unlike their traditional target group (university students), are not looking for a certificate or a degree. The MAYDAY target group was different and more critical as their objective was to achieve specific skills and competences that could be taken directly into the workplace. Without the MAYDAY project, the university would not have been able to recruit this target group.

Moreover, the university started to offer workshops on age management and stress management for a different audience than it would usually target.

The partnership with MAYDAY had a positive impact on the work of the Gdansk Labour Office. The project increased the labour office's knowledge about the shipyard industry and its workers, and MAYDAY had a positive effect on the unemployment rate among older workers. In addition, MAYDAY resulted in increased attention being paid to this target group of older workers who had been forced into unemployment.

The Labour Office's involvement in MAYDAY also contributed to the preparation of a strategy to prevent and combat unemployment. The main aim of the strategy is to develop measures targeted at specific groups of employees, such as older workers, young people or people employed in sectors in decline. The strategy is connected to the regional labour market policies.

The initiative in the educational landscape

Links to formal education sector and other education and training initiatives

MAYDAY was located within the non-formal education sector. However, programmes from the formal sector (such as university courses) were used as inspiration. In addition, the project had an impact on the methods used by the teaching staff in the formal sector through the university's involvement as a partner.

Theoretically, the MAYDAY training modules could be recognised by institutions in the formal sector through certification, as there are no legal obstacles to this move. In practice, however, it would be very difficult. The question about linking these training modules to a level of educational qualifications would be challenging, primarily because they are too specific for the first cycle of higher education qualification under the Bologna process. The training centres could continue their work but not in the formal sector.

Gdansk University of Technology and the staff involved believe that the MAYDAY training modules could easily be transferred to other sectors, and due to the extensive pilot study done for MAYDAY (100 companies) it would be feasible to predict obstacles and ways to tackle them for other target groups or sectors. Nevertheless, the interviewees consider that a new pilot study would be required to adapt the training to the specific needs of the sector/target group.

Innovative aspects of the initiative

The MAYDAY partnership was innovative as it created a new relationship between social partners and higher educational institutions.

MAYDAY developed a system for tackling the ageing vocationally trained workforce with an emphasis on lifelong learning, which is relatively new in the Polish context.

In addition, new methods of assessment had to be developed and applied as a result of the project's focus on self-learning via e-learning. The development of the training modules had to focus on learning outcomes.

Links to other policy fields or initiatives

According to Solidarność and the MAYDAY management, the changes to the education system in Poland to bring it in line with the Bologna process have resulted in a reduction and downgrading of vocational training. The VET schools lack sufficient funding and practical training opportunities. This policy development moves the responsibility for VET to the social partners, and MAYDAY represents a good example of cooperation between them. The strength of this model is that the social partners are well acquainted with the target groups for VET training.

Role of teachers and trainers

The training modules were developed by university staff and researchers. They also taught the main part of the courses such as the sociological and psychological modules. Other trainers were in-house staff from Solidarność, who taught computer skills and language courses.

Strengths and weaknesses of the teaching workforce

Among the university staff and researchers, there was no need for new skills or training in relation to the content of the courses offered by MAYDAY. However, the target group was very different from the traditional university audience. This meant that in addition to understanding the target group, adaptability and flexibility were important skills for the teaching staff. The development of these new staff competences was supported by process evaluation that allowed for collective reflection on new experiences and enabled the teaching staff to adapt.

The staff also had to adapt to a 'learning outcomes' approach to education. Such an approach is not widely adopted in the current education system in Poland, where the system is based on set input standards for qualifications. The focus is on the student getting a qualification and not on what the student knows and is able to do after a learning activity. The development and delivery of training modules and e-learning modules for MAYDAY gave the university teaching staff the opportunity to focus on learning outcomes, which will be necessary with the implementation of the NQF.

The Solidarność trainers needed knowledge about the subject that they were teaching and a certificate of training in teaching. The strength of the trained trade unionist is their knowledge of the target group.

Initial and continuing education and training of the teaching workforce

With regard to the implementation of the NQF, there is a need for continuing training in Poland, as the initial training of the teaching workforce is based on the current standards of qualifications approach. The Polish education system is currently in a difficult transition period, where it is going from a rigid and strict system of standards to a learning outcome-based approach. A paradigm shift takes time, as the real change needs to happen within the mind-set of teachers.

Continuing training courses for the teaching staff in the new approaches to learning and assessment are provided in the context of the Bologna process. The intensity of training and mutual learning activities will gradually progress with the implementation of the NQF. However, the NQF has still not been developed for each discipline and this makes it difficult for the teaching staff to prepare.

Future challenges

Organisational structure of MAYDAY

The partnership brought together very different stakeholders that perceived themselves as equally important and competent in all tasks of the project. It was time consuming to find the right balance in terms of involvement and collaboration.

The high number of partners also meant that bureaucracy was an obstacle. It was a challenge to cooperate with the National Agency for the EQUAL programme, as there were continuous changes in the agency staff, and the financial requirements were changed several times. To the MAYDAY management it seemed that every day brought a request for more documentation. This made it difficult to manage the project and explain the new requirements to the participating enterprises.

Structural changes in the labour market

According to the interviewees, MAYDAY operated in a turbulent period in Poland with many changes taking place in the labour market and the education sector. The employment situation changed due to structural changes in the labour market during the four-year project period. The development and implementation of the NQF and the Bologna process had implications for the education sector.

Target group

According to the Ship Design and Research Centre, it was difficult to find enterprises willing to participate in the pilot test of the mentoring system, as many companies did not accept the idea of mentoring.

The age of the target group was an obstacle to the project, as the older workers often turned out to be resistant to learning and some perceived themselves as too old to be trained. A special programme was initiated to remove this obstacle, in which the 'learning resistant' workers were placed in a group with people having similar knowledge, skills, age and social background.

According to the Gdansk University of Technology, the teaching staff needed to adapt to the target group, which was different from their usual set of students. They needed to understand the fact that this target group was seeking to gain competences and skills, rather than qualifications.

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EF/11/64/EN 4