

# ACADEMIC TUTORING AS A FORM OF MODERN COOPERATION WITH THE STUDENT AND AN ELEMENT OF IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TEACHING SERVICES

TUTORING AKADEMICKI JAKO FORMA NOWOCZESNEJ WSPÓŁPRACY ZE STUDENTEM  
I ELEMENT DOSKONALENIA JAKOŚCI USŁUGI DYDAKTYCZNEJ

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## ABSTRACT

The article, on the example of Poland and Slovakia, concentrates on the changes taking place in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe. The expectations of contemporary students (Z generation representatives) towards academic education and teaching staff have been analysed, and academic tutoring has been presented as an innovative, though not a new, form of education that perfectly meets these expectations.

Based on the collected theoretical material and own experience, the authors have indicated the strengths and weaknesses of academic tutoring and analysed the opportunities of implementing this form of teaching in higher education systems. The subsidiary aim of this paper is to pose a number of questions, which could lead to determining the direction of changes that should be considered in order to incorporate academic tutoring into the teaching activities of the university.

Potential difficulties arising at the stage of implementing tutoring have also been presented. Their identification may contribute to the optimization of the application of this didactic method, thus increasing the chances of its success. Moreover, several examples of good practice and didactic projects related to the introduction of tutoring into academic practice in Poland have been presented. They may be found helpful when making a decision to implement tutoring at the university level in other Central European countries.

**Key words:** students' expectations, academic tutoring, personalized education, teaching services

## ABSTRAKT

W artykule, na przykładzie Polski i Słowacji, wskazano zmiany zachodzące w szkolnictwie wyższym w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej. Uwzględniając oczekiwania współczesnych studentów (reprezentantów pokolenia Z) wobec kształcenia akademickiego i kadry dydaktycznej zaprezentowano tutoring akademicki, jako innowacyjną, choć nie nową formę kształcenia, która doskonale wpisuje się w owe oczekiwania.

Autorki w oparciu o zgromadzony materiał teoretyczny i doświadczenia własne zaprezentowały mocne i słabe strony tutoringu akademickiego, dokonały analizy szans i zagrożeń wdrożenia tej formy kształcenia w szkolnictwie wyższym. Działania te zmierzały do postawienia szeregu pytań wyznaczających kierunek działań w zakresie implementacji tutoringu akademickiego w działalność dydaktyczną uczelni.

Zaprezentowano także potencjalne zagrożenia i trudności pojawiające się na etapie wdrażania tutoringu. Ich identyfikacja może przyczynić się do optymalizacji stosowania tej metody dydaktycznej i zwiększa szansę na jej powodzenie. Przełamywaniu trudności z podjęciem decyzji o implementacji tutoringu na poziomie uczelni wyższej służą też przykłady dobrych praktyk i projektów dydaktycznych związanych z wprowadzaniem tutoringu do praktyki akademickiej w Polsce. Mogą one być pomocne przy podejmowaniu decyzji i wdrożeniu tutoringu akademickiego w innych krajach Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej.

**Słowa kluczowe: oczekiwania studentów, tutoring akademicki, edukacja spersonalizowana, usługa dydaktyczna**

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## Introduction

The situation on the academic education market in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is quite similar (Wasielowski, 2017, pp. 63-65). After the period of mass education, which resulted in its universality and relatively low quality, universities are slowly departing from this model, paying more and more attention to the quality and specificity of academic education and to improving the effectiveness of the teaching process.

Relatively low scores achieved by universities from Poland and Slovakia in international rankings, current demographic evolution observed at schools (starting from the 2006/07 academic year in Poland and from 2009/2010 in Slovakia, a decline in the number of students has been recorded) and influenced by broader demographic changes in Central and

Eastern Europe — a decrease in the population aged 19-24. These factors together with a rather low interest in the didactic offer of foreign students, and a change in young people's attitudes towards learning are just some of the factors that induce university authorities and bodies responsible for higher education to take active steps to reform and search for innovative solutions, e.g. in the field of didactics. An example of such regulations in Poland is the so-called "Constitution for Science", i.e. The Act of 20 July 2018, The Law on Higher Education and Science.

In Poland, the indicators concerning the method of distributing subsidies from the state budget for public and private universities are changing, according to which in a public university there may not be more than 13 students per academic teacher (SSR — student staff ratio) (Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education from December 7, 2016).

As of October 31, 2019, there were 1,230.3 thousand students in higher education institutions in the 2018/19 academic year in Poland, i.e. 4.8% fewer than a year earlier. As many as 73.3% of all students were enrolled in public schools. A total of 93.2 thousand academic teachers were employed in higher education institutions, including 2.1 thousand foreigners.

The revenues of higher education institutions totalled PLN 24,591.9 million (of which PLN 22,057.7 million were generated by public higher education institutions) that is 5.3% more than in the previous year. Total costs reached PLN 23,885.8 million, 5.4% more than in the previous year. The average educational costs per student in Poland amounted to PLN 20,446.0, which is 7.8% more than in the previous year (Szkolnictwo wyższe, 2020)

In Slovakia, in the same time there were 136,874 students in higher education institutions i.e. 2.27% fewer than in the previous academic year. The vast majority of them (85.04%) studied in public higher education institutions. 95,830 of all students were full-time students in higher education institutions in Slovakia, i.e. 3.38% fewer than in the previous academic year. The vast majority of them (92.64%) studied in public higher education institutions.

The number of students has been decreasing since the academic year 2009/2010 in Slovakia. This trend cannot be connected only to demographic changes. Although the number of 19-year-olds has decreased over the last

10 years (by almost 30%), this decrease does not directly translate into the decrease in applicants to university. It is also not possible to claim that the number of graduates of Slovak universities has decreased in proportion to the decrease in the number of young people aged 21–25. The decline in student enrolment numbers at Slovak universities is likely influenced by the increasing number of young people that prefer to study abroad (Vaněiková, 2019). At the same time, it should be noted that the number of foreign students has been increasing every year since the academic year 2003/2004.

A total of 10,036 full-time university teachers were employed in higher education institutions in 2018/2019 academic year (excluding 1,703 of part-time teachers), i.e. ratio of students to teaching staff was 13.64 (11.65 if part-time teachers are included) (CVTI, 2020).

In 2018, public higher education institutions in Slovakia reached revenues of 770,339.292 million , i.e. 2.22% more than in the previous year. Public higher education institution costs accounted for 758,007.472 , which was 2.58% more than in the previous year (MŠVVaŠ SR, 2018a; MŠVVaŠ SR, 2019).

This article is a part of the considerations on the necessity and ways of improving the quality of education at universities in Central and Eastern Europe. It points academic tutoring as an effective tool to meet the expectations of modern youth, and at the same time a way to raise the professional competences of teaching staff and build the relational capital of a university. The aim of the paper is to pose a number of questions to determine the direction of changes that should be considered in order to incorporate academic tutoring into the teaching activities of the modern university.

## **Aim, scope and methodology of research**

The aim of the article is to present the changes taking place in the expectations of contemporary students and to analyse the essence and assumptions of academic tutoring as one of the forms of personalized education, the goal of which is to empower the students and place their development at the centre of the university's interest.

The research problem is to show tutoring as a method of building a relationship with a student, and also a method of improving the quality of teaching services offered at the higher education level. An analysis of academic tutoring (both developmental and scientific, as both types often interpenetrate in practice) was performed, taking into account the positions of both sides of the process, i.e. the tutor — university researcher and the tutee, i.e. a student, a participant of tutorials. It constitutes the basis for the formulation of a number of questions concerning the role and direction of changes in contemporary academic education. Questions remain open and it is at the level of a given university that an effort should be made to answer them. Yet, they may prove helpful in taking effective actions introducing changes in academic teaching.

The study, based on a critical review and analysis of the literature and the identification of examples of good practice in the field of academic tutoring in Poland and Slovakia, is of an exploratory and analytical nature.

## **Students' expectations towards academic education and teaching staff**

Socio-economic changes, globalization, internationalization, progressive demographic decline, evolution of the labour market and thus of employers' expectations are just some of the factors that contribute to changes in the attitudes of young people, including their requirements regarding universities and academic education (Sarnat-Ciastko, 2017, pp. 79–80). At the same time, they influence the demand for educational services, understood as a deliberate and orderly sequence of relations between academic teachers who offer their knowledge and skills, and students who acquire them (Pluta-Olearnik, 2009, pp. 12-13). In the current reality (the COVID-19 pandemic), there is also the necessity of at least temporary isolation, and thus the importance of virtualisation of teaching and remote education (e-learning, hybrid education model, etc.) is growing. Information technologies and remote forms of interpersonal communication are rapidly developing — synchronous/asynchronous remote learning in given periods becomes a necessity.

The current forms of learning — through lectures, labs and practical classes often conducted in large groups, do not fully meet the expectations of contemporary students. Young people expect subjectivity, individual approach, and building partnerships with lecturers. It is desirable to use modern, activating tools and didactic techniques that enable real contact and effective discovery of the students' talents, abilities and predispositions, and thus their development. Students expect taking into account the individual situation of a given person, which, with a limited number of hours of in-group classes under standard conditions, was rarely possible, let alone in the case of remote, on-line teaching.

When choosing a university where they intend to study, students expect high-quality education. In the perception of young people, it consists of, among others: plans, programs and methods of education used at the university, available research, teaching and administrative staff, education conditions and available infrastructure. What matters is the cooperation of universities with external entities, including business practice, particular care taken for the relations in the external and internal socio-economic environments, and corporate social responsibility (Adamska, 2018, p. 41). The academic tradition and the place of the university in the rankings are also important.

In practice, human capital turns out to be the most important aspect, determining the intellectual capital of the university. It is people, their competences, commitment, creativity, personal motivation, intellect, willingness to develop, and the ability to cooperate with another human beings that primarily affect, with appropriate support from the university infrastructure, the level of teaching services provided (Adamska, 2018, p. 44; Kwaśny and Żur, 2018, p. 88). The effectiveness of any improvement and development activities is determined by the degree of identification and understanding of the expectations and needs of potential and current students. As Adamska (2018, pp. 48–50) claims, teaching staff and interpersonal relations are, in the opinion of students, the most important factors shaping the image of a university. The university's infrastructure and the place of universities in the rankings are on the next positions. It turns out that students expect lecturers not only to provide knowledge and help in scientific issues, but also, to an increasing extent, to participate in various forms of cooperation, including support in professional/life issues.

The teaching staff should, therefore, improve the skills of professional support and counselling in order to meet, also in this respect, the expectations of students.

For most students, the university is the last stage on the educational path, which encourages reflection regarding their further life and professional career. It also presents the young individual with the need to make specific choices that should lead to success. In this situation, a contact with a person who could assist them and provide support cannot be overestimated (Adamska, 2018, p. 50). These expectations can be met by a committed tutor who, acting as a facilitator, not only helps the students to cope with the "difficulty of studying", but by activating them, asking the right questions at the right time, encourages reflection, and by formulating constructive feedback helps to make informed decisions. Students are definitely looking for not only mentors — specialists in a specific field, but tutors — people supporting the education process and assisting them in choosing a career path based on their predispositions and social competences. Such a teacher could also be helpful in acquainting a given student with a specific company, which, for example, is looking for an employee through the university. This could help create the image of the university as a socially responsible institution (Master, 2019, Adamska, 2018, p. 50). According to the available research results, among various forms of non-didactic activity of lecturers, students most appreciate cooperation, and conducting research projects in which students would like to participate. The social activity of lecturers is also important (Adamska, 2018, p. 52). Today's students expect education based on dialogue and cooperation, in which mutual respect, partnership and trust are important. These are perfect conditions for exploring inspiring scientific problems, acquiring new skills and developing competences; yet, they require strengthening the role and function of an academic teacher (Todorescu, Popescu-Mitroia, Greculescu, 2015, p. 191). The teaching staff of universities should be encouraged to develop innovative teaching methods that activate students, taking the role of not only a mentor but also a tutor.

Based on the research results (Centrum edukačného manažmentu, 2018), Slovak students expect that their studies bring them excellent references for the labour market and a wide range of employment opportunities. Although students generally have lower expectations

regarding international cooperation before starting their studies, the offer of exchange opportunities abroad obtained the best scores in the rating of students' practical experience gained at university. Respondents indicated that the university provides them with the best basis in terms of their own personal development, further learning ability and future working career. While the future working career was described relatively positively, the respondents rated the development of business activities worse. According to students, more effort and emphasis should be placed on practical elements of their studies, on hard skills, and there should be more options for combining courses.

In general, students, regardless of the country, in the light of similar experiences and realities in Poland and Slovakia, as representatives of the same, Z generation have very similar expectations towards universities and academic teachers.

## **Academic tutoring — opportunities and challenges**

Tutoring is a didactic method based on the "master-apprentice" relationship, known and successfully used since the times of ancient Greece (Czekierda, 2015, p. 20, Fingas, 2015, p. 38). Aristotle is considered the "father" of this method, who, while walking with his students, had the habit of having long discussions with them and teaching them in this way. Over time, with some modifications, tutoring began to be successfully used in secondary schools and universities in Great Britain and the USA, and introduced, with some caution, through experiments, into the education system in other countries, including Poland. To this day, however, it has not been properly appreciated or even permanently included in the curricula of universities in Central and Eastern Europe as a form of classes.

Tutoring is based on a kind of inversion of the education process — the purpose of tutoring is not to transfer knowledge in a traditional way, but to identify talents and strengthen the strengths of the student (tutee), and thus stimulate him to personal and scientific development (Cichorzewska, 2014, p. 223; Włodarczyk, 2018, pp. 75–76). Individual work of the tutor with the student in a 1:1 relationship is meant to encourage a young person to identify what is his or her true passion and explore it on his/her own

(Master, 2019, pp. 36–37). In tutoring, external motivation moves towards the work based on internal motivation, which the student awakens and nurtures during the tutorials. Students usually have a tutorial per one or two weeks, taking place in their college. Tutorials normally last about an hour, during which the tutor gives the student a one to one feedback based on the prepared work on a particular topic. At the end of the tutorial, the tutor will set a new piece of work for a student to be ready for the next meeting. During the following week the student is expected to work independently to complete the task.

A tutorial relies on the exchange of ideas, so the student needs to be ready to present and defend his/her opinions, accept constructive criticism and practice active listening. Such a regular and rigorous academic discussion develops and facilitates learning in a way that is not possible through lectures alone. Tutorials are a great way to explore ideas and get new perspectives. They develop the ability to think for oneself — an essential skill for academic success and something that the best employers look for in graduates. Regular tutorials also allow for close progress monitoring, so tutors can quickly provide additional support if necessary (Ragonis and Hazzan, 2009, pp. 69–71).

University graduates who have had a chance to study with the use of tutoring gain skills that increase their chances of finding a job and launching a successful professional career (Poon, Hoxley and Fuchs, 2011).

The uniqueness of each student and their specific scientific interests make tutoring a process that is characterized by high dynamics and variability. No two tutorials are the same. It all depends on the student's needs and capabilities, the tutor's personality and work style, and the commitment of both parties, including the uniqueness of the relationship that is formed between the student and the tutor. All this means that when working with the tutoring method there is no room for boredom and routine, but there is a need to systematically update one's knowledge, search for new information, follow the latest scientific reports that may prove inspiring for the student/ward. By discussing with the student/ward, the tutor also develops (Master, 2019, pp. 46–47).

Among the benefits of implementing tutoring into academic practice, there are benefits at the university, student and academic lecturer level (Włodarczyk, 2018, pp. 78–81).

- **Benefits for the university:**
  - improving the image of the university and increasing its competitiveness
  - strengthening the recognition of the university as a forge of soft skills of students
  - strengthening the subjectivity of students in the didactic process
  - continuous improvement of the quality of education
  - effective shaping of young people, who consciously take matters into their own hands, and by adopting entrepreneurial and proactive attitudes, have a chance to become future elites in a given environment
  - an opportunity, thanks to the use of modern forms of education, for a greater degree of internationalization of the university
  - development of culture and relationships
  - creating a group of graduates closely related to the university and identifying with its values, thus maintaining the relationship with the university even after graduation.
- **Benefits for the student:**
  - a chance for integrated development and the possibility of achieving above-average educational effects — studying, i.e. independent acquisition of knowledge under the supervision of a tutor, becomes an intellectual adventure that stimulates and develops, among others thanks to individual selection of educational content
  - development of self-management skills in time, improvement of work self-organization,
  - developing self-motivation for further development and lifelong learning
  - developing the ability to think analytically, clearly define thoughts and express one's own opinions on a given topic, as well as substantive discussion and defence of one's position on a given issue
  - learning becomes something natural, not a forced necessity
  - polishing the writing workshop (tutoring sessions, scientific articles)
  - developing the art of argumentation, presentation and defence of one's position on a given issue.
- **Benefits for the tutor:**
  - tutoring creates the space and opportunity to exchange views on an intellectual and scientific plane with the student/ward, and to inspire each other

- tutoring creates new opportunities for the didactic development of the tutor, provides modern, inspiring tools for working with the student
- successful cooperation with the student/ward who discovers a scientific passion, achieves success in academic life, and then in professional life, may become a reason for obtaining professional satisfaction for the lecturer
- an academic teacher has a chance to move from a role of a lecturer-mentor, simply implementing the curriculum to a tutor-guide, a specialist with high authority and a credit of trust, a partner in the process of acquiring knowledge and broadening the student's horizons.

With its many benefits, academic tutoring has several limitations as well. First of all, in the academic environment, the knowledge about the nature and role of tutoring is generally limited. The implementation of this form of development into didactic practice requires certain administrative and organizational changes at the university level, including the modification of educational curricula (the possibility of tutoring is partially available during diploma seminars, but it would definitely require an increase in the number of hours if this form of cooperation with the student was to be applied). It is necessary to ensure adequate financial resources for financing classes carried out in the form of tutorials (within the pool of expenses for teaching). The condition for success is to provide a sufficiently large group of properly prepared (the cost of refresher training), motivated and committed tutors who will confidently approach the implementation of this form of classes with the student (Godlewski, 2015, p. 92; Włodarczyk, 2018, p. 81).

Due to their nature, as a personalized form of education, tutorials can be addressed in the current reality to only a small, selected group of students, which can be perceived as excluding or even discriminating against the rest of the students. There is an impression of creating an exclusive group of "chosen ones", who have special access to the lecturer thanks to regular individual meetings (tutorials) (Cichorzewska, 2014, p. 225).

Conducting classes in the form of tutorials requires, from the point of view of the lecturer, to devote a lot of time to teaching (contact hours are one thing, but the need to plan and prepare for individual meetings with

each student cannot be ignored). This may contribute to limiting the scientific development, including research and preparation of new scientific publications. For students, such a situation would also be highly undesirable, because inhibiting the scientific development of a lecturer would limit their access to the latest scientific research and the latest achievements in a given field. Working with the tutoring method requires of the lecturers to manage themselves properly in terms of time, and a lot of discipline to maintain a balance in their lives and teaching duties. The so-called didactic academic career path creates an opportunity in this respect in Poland, but definitely tutorials as an inspiring and satisfying form of didactic classes should not be reserved only for the teaching staff.

When deciding to implement academic tutoring, a university should seek answers to a number of questions that will allow this process to be undertaken in a thoughtful manner. Some of them are:

- is there a chance to obtain additional funds for conducting classes using the scientific tutoring method, at least in the first phase, thanks to which this teaching method will be popularized?
- in a specific situation, will the strengths of academic tutoring lead to taking the full advantage of the opportunities offered by the implementation of this form of education?
- can the university allow the weaknesses of tutoring to prevent the use of potential opportunities?
- are the strengths of tutoring significant and easy enough to identify in order to overcome the threats and bring the university tangible profits?
- can the weaknesses of tutoring aggravate the threats resulting from its use and, as a result, bring more negative than positive effects?

In this way, the full picture of the factors that influence the effective implementation of tutoring into academic practice may be obtained. Their analysis and ordering allows to define possible scenarios for the implementation of academic tutoring (Dziemianowicz, Szmigiel-Rawska, Nowicka and Dąbrowska, 2012, pp. 104–120):

- a pessimistic scenario — weaknesses deepen the threats of the implementation of academic tutoring, the university does not generate benefits from the application of this innovative form of education,

- a realistic scenario — strengths override the threats, but some weaknesses prevent the use of all potential opportunities,
- an optimistic scenario — strengths fully allow to take advantage of the opportunities created by this method and the university benefits from the potential of academic tutoring, constituting a kind of benchmark for other entities.

The examples of good practice in the field of tutoring-based didactic projects presented below show that an optimistic scenario is possible.

### **Academic tutoring — examples of good practice and implementation of the method at Polish universities**

There are more and more examples and possibilities of long-term implementation of academic tutoring in academic practice in Poland. The criterion for selecting the presented examples of tutoring in Poland was the time perspective of implementing tutoring into higher education in a conscious, structured way — from the first formalized projects in this area implemented since 2009, to projects currently in progress, e.g. Masters of Didactics.

- The "Modern Lecturer — tutor, coach" project implemented since 2009 at the Pedagogical University of Towarzystwo Wiedzy Powszechnej in Warsaw (Marzec, 2014, p. 92),
- The "TUTOR — WOiG" project — tutoring at the Faculty of Oceanography and Geography of the University of Gdańsk, under which in the academic year 2012/13 and 2013/14 34 lecturers completed the 64-hour School of Academic Tutors course dedicated to the Faculty of Oceanography and Geography. Trained tutors work with students who are not necessarily the best, but seek knowledge, are active, and their interests extend beyond the curriculum of the specialty they are studying. This is done to promote self-education and foster independence in developing students' scientific interests, as well as consciously use their potential. In a series of 8 meetings per semester, the tutor implements an individual academic course tailored to the student's needs. Therefore, students can use modern scientific

methods that are available to students of the best universities in the world.

- WISE — Faculty Individual Educational Path — a program implemented since 2013 at the University of Economics in Krakow, that can be undertaken during the last three semesters of the first-cycle studies and the last two semesters of the second-cycle studies. Each of the students qualified for the program resigns from a specific specialization and follows an individual study plan previously agreed with the tutor in accordance with the scientific interests of a given student. While working with the tutor on a 1:1 basis, students explore scientific topics selected together with the tutor, write essays, and engage in discussions (Kwaśny i Żur, 2018, pp. 89–90).
- IQ — Ideal Quality in Good Quantity project, implemented in 2014–2016 at the University of Gdańsk. The project was aimed at improving the quality of education and extracting the intellectual potential of students who expect even more ambitious challenges than those offered by the study program of the chosen field. During the project, 1,576 hours of individual tutorials were carried out by 29 trained academic tutors of various specialties, who took care of 222 students (Karpińska-Musiał, 2016, p. 95).
- An ongoing implementation, starting from 2016, of academic and development tutoring within the scope of elective courses at the Jan Długosz in Częstochowa.
- The "Masters of Didactics" project — implemented in the years 2019–2022 by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and co-financed from the Knowledge Education Development Operational Program, the aim of which is to "raise the competences of academic staff in the use of modern, innovative teaching methods, especially tutoring, in education". As part of the project, it is planned to develop a concept and implement new solutions in the field of tutoring aimed at supporting outstandingly talented students. Academic teachers from universities participating in the project take part in study visits to selected, renowned European universities, and then each of the trained teachers conducts, using the potential and experience of a partner from abroad, tutoring classes with selected students of their home university.

The project involves the participation of approx. 600 academic teachers, conducting classes for approx. 1,800 exceptionally talented students from approx. 35 universities. Each tutor can take care of up to 10 students. Classes are to be conducted during the full cycle of education as part of the first-cycle studies or the first 7 semesters of the uniform graduate level studies (first 3–3.5 years); Funds under the project may be used to subsidize salaries for academic teachers, conducting classes within the normal course of studies with students using the tutoring method and for the preparation of teaching materials for these classes. In 2019, the ministry launched the "tutoring model". The value of the funds allocated for co-financing classes in the form of tutoring for a period of up to 35 months is: PLN 42,910,000.00 and constitutes a significant support in the popularization of tutoring and the lifting of financial restrictions related to its use at Polish universities (Zaproszenie... 2020).

In the case of Masters of Didactics, the next recruitment for the project was announced on October 2, 2020 and assumes an allocation of PLN 11,000,000 for this purpose by December 31, 2022. Recruitment of more universities interested in supporting the implementation of tutoring is on going.

The above-mentioned projects are examples of good practice in implementing academic tutoring in the realities of universities in Poland. If properly adapted, they can constitute a specific benchmark for universities from other Central and Eastern European countries.

At Slovak higher education institutions (University of Economics in Bratislava, Technical University in Košice), there are some unique educational projects that are focused on the implementation of innovative teaching methods (project-based learning, problem-based learning, design thinking) that enable personalized teaching and connect students with business practice. Academic tutoring is implemented during conducting of final thesis at all studies levels. Final thesis seminars are included in the study plans as compulsory courses that are led by the advisor — tutor. On the other hand, we think that currently higher education institutions are not familiar with the concept of personalized teaching and/or academic

tutoring and that they are not even included in the program and conceptual development documents in the field of education at the national level. In 2017, the document — Learning Slovakia (Učiace sa Slovensko) — was published, in which the emphasis was placed on personalized education at the level of primary and secondary schools (MŠVVaŠ SR, 2017). Subsequently, based on the previous comprehensive strategy document the National Program of Education 2018–2027 was adopted in 2018, but the sections on personalized education were excluded (MŠVVaŠ SR, 2018b).

Let us hope that the examples of good practice in implementing academic tutoring in higher education in Poland will encourage the Slovak authorities to consider possible changes in this area and to assert that the advantages of tutoring definitely exceed its limitations.

## Summary

New technologies, generational differences, capturing the current and anticipating future needs of the labour market pose many challenges for academic teachers in terms of methods and forms of education, rules for improving knowledge and their own didactic workshop. At the same time, students' expectations are changing, evolving towards personalizing education, tightening the relationship with the lecturer, who should not only be a mentor and authority on scientific issues, but also a guide to help students choose their career path and find themselves in adult life after graduation. In this situation, academic tutoring seems to be a good solution, as it limits the negative effects of mass education, and supports not only the talented individuals that are particularly motivated and development-oriented.

Tutoring has both strengths and weaknesses. Appropriate recognition of students' individual, improvement of skills and social competences that will allow them to meet the expectations of the labour market, increasing the attractiveness of studying, personal development, both of the student and the tutor, development of individual entrepreneurship of a tutee are just a few of the advantages of this form of academic education. Of course, introducing tutoring into academic practice entails the need for organizational changes at the university level. It also involves the necessity

to spend certain funds; however, they should be treated as an investment, not only costs. It is worth emphasizing that academic education with the use of tutoring requires, with full flexibility and discretion in the topics undertaken, a certain care for the quality of this form of work with the student. Specific standards and control mechanisms should be developed in this field.

A lot needs to be done to make the optimistic scenario of the implementation of academic tutoring into the teaching practice of universities possible on a larger scale. The strengths of tutoring should be communicated clearly enough to make it possible to use the opportunities offered by the potential of this teaching method. Tutoring should become a complementary, and in some cases, alternative didactic method. The changes should be of an evolutionary nature. Examples of educational projects in this area show that it is possible.

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