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Management of Academic Staff's Health in Poland to Support Personal, Organisational and Social Development¹

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Abstract

Academic staff employed at universities have teaching, academic and organisational obligations, while expectations set for them exceed the norm adopted in the society. They are expected to conduct innovative research, publish ground-breaking discoveries, establish cooperation with leading scientific centres, obtain international grants, speak at conferences, conduct interesting classes for students and become involved in organisational activities at the university. In addition, such staff should have excellent manners and an impeccable ethical approach. The expectations are endless and their working hours are flexible. In this situation it is very difficult to ensure a good life-work balance, which is why it is necessary to implement centralised solutions as well as local actions at individual educational facilities in order to support the management of academic staff's health, as healthy employees have better conditions for personal development, contribute to the development of the university as an organisation and to social development by shaping subsequent generations of students. Therefore, the aim of this article is to present a health management system for academic staff from Polish higher education institutions to facilitate their own development as well as the development of the university and the society. To that end, desk research was performed by examining official national documents to search for systemic solutions aimed at maintaining good health of academic staff, and by browsing the websites of 10 best universities in Poland to find examples of lectures, workshops and initiatives dedicated to health and work-life balance of academic staff. The results of the research with conclusions and most of all recommendations may be useful to the management of higher education institutions, academic staff and all other parties interested in health and work-life balance.

Keywords: Academic teachers, healthcare management, health education, professional development, work-life balance.

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Requirements for academic teaching staff in Poland

The Higher Education Law Act of 27 July 2005 stipulates that in order to become an academic teacher, an individual needs to: hold certain qualifications set out in the act; have a full capacity to act in law; have not been convicted on the basis of a binding court decision for an intentionally committed offence/crime; have not been given any disciplinary sanctions; have full public rights (Chapter 1, art. 109, item 1 of the Higher Education Law Act of 27 July 2005).

According to the act, academic teaching staff are obligated to: educate students and perform research and development activities (Chapter 1, art. 111, item 1 of the Higher Education Law Act of 27 July 2005). Moreover, “academic teachers who hold the academic title of a professor or the academic degree of Ph.D. also have an obligation to educate academic staff” (Chapter 1, art. 111, item 3 of the Higher Education Law Act of 27 July 2005).

It should be added that the requirements for academic teaching staff keep growing and currently also include, among others, active participation in conferences and symposia; publishing papers in foreign, highly-recognised scientific journals; efficient cooperation with leading academic institutions; efficiently securing grants for innovative research; participation in projects; continuously perfecting teaching skills; supporting the university’s organisational activities; as well as building permanent partnerships with public organisations and NGOs, and cooperating with business.

Literature also talks about several additional functions which should be served by academic teaching staff. Harden and Crosby (Harden & Crosby, 2000) listed twelve basic roles (divided into 6 categories, with 2 roles each) that should be played by academic teachers:

- The information provider (lecturer, practitioner-teacher);
- The role-model;
- The facilitator (mentor);
- The student assessor;
- The curriculum/course planner;
- The resource developer.

Whereas Anna Sajdak (Sajdak, 2013, p. 177) lists four roles of an academic teacher (i.e. lecturer, researcher, manager, person) and assigns several basic tasks to each of these roles. The main task of the lecturer is to conduct classes and interact with students. The researcher’s job is creative problem-solving, implementing projects and promoting science. The manager should efficiently manage, organise and plan all of his academic and educational undertakings. Whereas as a person, the academic lecturer needs to look after ethics, should develop continuously and be the master for his students.

Although those tasks and roles are not completely new, more emphasis is placed on them these days, and the outcomes of work of academic teachers, according to the Act, are evaluated on a regular basis (Chapter 2, art. 132, item 1 of the Higher Education Law Act of 27 July 2005).

Moreover, growing social expectations towards academics also need to be taken into consideration. In an era of open access to information through the Internet, the roles and significance of academic teaching staff are being redefined, which may put additional pressure on academic teachers to prove the importance of their role in the society.

At the same time, according to the law “the working hours of an academic teacher are determined by the scope of their didactic, academic and organisational duties” (Chapter 2, art. 130, item 1 of the Higher Education Law Act of 27 July 2005). Therefore, with such high expectations held by both the university and the society, it is very easy to regularly exceed the standard 40 working hours in a week, which sadly may have an impact on health and consequently on further academic and professional activity of academic staff.

However, it seems that the expansion of the scope of requirements for academic teaching staff cannot be stopped - it will continue to grow. So what should be done to ensure that academic teachers are in good health and feel motivated to take on new challenges? Perhaps the role of the university in that area should be considered. Therefore, the best 10 Polish universities were studied to identify health-promoting activities directed at academic teaching staff.

2. Methodology

In order to verify the state of academic staff health management, desk research was carried out to analyse the following data:

- official national-level documents to search for systemic solutions aimed at maintaining good health of academic teaching staff;
- official websites and sub-pages (e.g. pages dedicated to HR departments, personnel departments, social benefits departments) of 10 best Polish universities (according to the latest university ranking published by the prestigious "Perspektywy" magazine) to search for lectures, workshops and other initiatives in the scope of health and work-life balance directed at academic teaching staff.

3. Study results

This chapter presents the results of the study based on desk research involving analysis of the main national-level documents to identify initiatives oriented at looking after the health and work-life balance of academic teaching staff in Poland. Next, 10 best Polish universities are analysed to search for specific bottom-up initiatives aimed at health promotion among academic teachers.

3.1. Official national-level documents containing provisions relating to looking after the health and work-life balance of Polish academic teaching staff

3.1.1. Higher Education Law Act of 27 July 2005

Chapter 2, item "Employment relationship of university staff" features provisions concerning:

- Annual leave: „Art. 133. 1. Academic teachers have the right to annual leave in the amount of thirty-six working days annually. Annual leave should be taken in non-teaching periods”;
- Health leave: „Art. 134. (...) 5. Academic teachers employed on a full-time basis, having worked for at least 15 years at the university, have the right to paid health leave in order to undergo recommended treatment if time off work is required for health reasons. 5a. The total amount of health leave throughout the employment period of an academic teacher may not exceed one year”.

3.1.2. Labour Code

- Chapter 4 entitled "Obligations of the employer and the employee", section I entitled "Obligations of the employer" features provisions relating to health deterioration as a result of mobbing: „Art. 943. § 3. An employee whose health has deteriorated due to mobbing has the right to seek monetary compensation in an appropriate amount for the harm suffered”;
- Chapter ten entitled "Occupational health and safety", section I entitled "Basic obligations of the employer" features the following provisions relating to the protection of employees' health and safety: „Art. 207. § 2. The employer has an obligation to protect life and health of employees by providing safe and hygienic working conditions through an appropriate use of scientific and technological developments”.

3.1.3. *Regulation of the Minister of Health and Social Welfare of 30 May 1996 on conducting occupational health tests, scope of preventative healthcare for employees and medical certificates issued for the purposes provided for in the Labour Code* stipulates that, among others, all employees should undergo preventative medical examinations, including initial examinations, check-ups and periodic examinations.

- 3.1.4. *Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy of 1 December 1998 regarding health and safety at workstations equipped with screen equipment* stipulates that the employer has an obligation to provide employees with corrective glasses, according to medical recommendations, if the results of ophthalmic tests conducted as part of preventative healthcare services indicate the need to use such glasses while working with screen equipment.
- 3.1.5. *The Act on protecting health against the negative effects of tobacco and tobacco products of 9 November 1995* stipulates that a smoking ban should be in place, among others, at universities, except for appropriately designated, separate areas.

3.2. 10 best Polish universities and their solutions in the scope of health promotion and maintaining work-life balance among academic teaching staff

Unfortunately, in case of one of the universities it was not possible to obtain data as they are only accessible to logged-in university staff. Therefore, the final analysis included information obtained from 9 Polish universities.

3.2.1. Breakdown based on the number of university activities in the scope of looking after the health and work-life balance of academic teaching staff

The results indicate that among the 9 best Polish universities:

- 2 universities (2/9) have implemented as many as 7 various forms of activities in the scope of looking after the health and work-life balance of academic teaching staff;
- only 1 university (1/9) has implemented 6 various forms of activities in the scope of looking after the health and work-life balance of academic teaching staff;
- 2 universities (2/9) have implemented 5 various forms of activities in the scope of looking after the health and work-life balance of academic teaching staff;
- 1 university (1/9) has implemented 4 various forms of activities in the scope of looking after the health and work-life balance of academic teaching staff;
- 3 universities (3/9) have implemented 3 various forms of activities in the scope of looking after the health and work-life balance of academic teaching staff;

3.2.2. Breakdown based on the form of university activities in the scope of looking after the health and work-life balance of academic teaching staff

The results indicate that among the 9 best Polish universities:

- Ability to take out additional, paid group life insurance available at 4 universities (4/9);
- Ability to benefit from additional, paid, private healthcare services available at 4 universities (4/9);
- Ability to use/attend the university's sports facilities and classes/ to charter a yacht (for free or with a discount) available at 5 universities (5/9);
- Ability to obtain co-financing for a pass for sports classes available at 5 universities (5/9);
- Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday at the university's holiday locations available at 5 universities (5/9);
- Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday is available at all of the universities examined (9/9);
- Ability to obtain co-financing for treatment at a sanatorium/ rehabilitation treatment available at 2 universities (2/9);
- Ability to attend tourist trips organised by the university at a discounted price available at 2 universities (2/9);

- Ability to purchase theatre tickets at a discounted price/ to obtain co-financing for cultural activities available at 4 universities (4/9);
- Ability to obtain psychological support/ access online guidance on how to cope with stress in dangerous situations available at 3 universities (3/9).

3.2.3. *Breakdown of university activities in the scope of looking after the health and work-life balance of academic teaching staff within the individual universities*

Table no. 1 presents detailed study results with regard to initiatives relating to broadly-defined health promotion and work-life balance directed at academic teaching staff based on 10 best Polish universities.

Table 1. List of initiatives relating to broadly-defined health promotion and work-life balance directed at academic teaching staff at 10 best Polish universities (as per the “Perspektywy” magazine’s 2018 university ranking).

Position in the ranking	Name of university	Initiatives in the scope of broadly-defined health promotion and work-life balance directed at academic teaching staff
1 (Ex aequo)	University of Warsaw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to take out additional, paid group life insurance; • Ability to benefit from additional, paid, private healthcare services; • Ability to use/attend the university’s sports facilities and classes (for free or with a discount); • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday at the university’s holiday locations; • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday; • Ability to obtain psychological support.
1 (Ex aequo)	Jagiellonian University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to use/attend the university’s sports facilities and classes (for free or with a discount); • Ability to obtain co-financing for a pass for sports classes; • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday at the university’s holiday locations; • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday; • Ability to attend tourist trips organised by the university at a discounted price; • Ability to purchase theatre tickets at a discounted price; • Ability to obtain psychological support.
3	Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to use/attend the university’s sports facilities and classes (for free or with a discount); • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday at the university’s holiday locations; • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday.
4	Wrocław University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to take out additional, paid group life insurance; • Ability to benefit from additional, paid, private healthcare services; • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday; • Ability to obtain co-financing for cultural activities; • Access to online guidance on how to cope with stress in dangerous situations.
5	Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń	No information - data only available to logged-in staff members.
6	Łódź University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to use/attend the university’s sports facilities and classes (for free or with a discount); • Ability to obtain co-financing for a pass for sports classes; • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday; • Ability to attend tourist trips organised by the university at a discounted price; • Ability to obtain co-financing for theatre tickets.

7	University of Silesia in Katowice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to obtain co-financing for a pass for sports classes; • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday; • Ability to obtain co-financing for treatment at a sanatorium/rehabilitation treatment.
8	Gdańsk University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to take out additional, paid group life insurance; • Ability to benefit from additional, paid, private healthcare services; • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday.
9	University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to obtain co-financing for a pass for sports classes; • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday at the university's holiday locations; • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday; • Ability to obtain co-financing for treatment at a sanatorium/rehabilitation treatment.
10	Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to take out additional, paid group life insurance; • Ability to benefit from additional, paid, private healthcare services; • Ability to charter a club yacht at a discounted price; • Ability to obtain co-financing for a pass for sports classes; • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday at the university's holiday locations; • Ability to obtain co-financing for a holiday; • Ability to obtain co-financing for cultural activities.

Source: own elaboration.

At the same time it should be stressed that perhaps not all information concerning work-life balance and health-related initiatives directed at academic teaching staff has been published on the websites of the universities examined in this study. However, it would be beneficial for universities to publish such information, as such activities may reinforce the image of a given university as an attractive employer, thus increase its chances for attracting the best specialists.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The results of the study show that 10 best Polish universities have implemented 3 to 7 various forms of activities in the scope of looking after the health and work-life balance of academic teaching staff. All of the universities examined offer co-financing for holidays organised individually by the staff, and half of them also provide co-financing for holidays at the university's holiday locations, ability to use/attend the university's sports facilities and classes or to charter a yacht (for free or with a discount), as well as the ability to obtain co-financing for a pass for sports classes. Therefore, it may be assumed that the best Polish universities take actions in the scope of maintaining good health of academic teaching staff mainly by way of providing co-financing for holidays and sports activities.

However, universities should expand their offering, for example, by investing in free private healthcare, voice emission classes, psychological support, healthy food in canteens, family picnics, free tickets to the cinema/theatre/opera and other benefits introduced on the basis of an analysis of the needs of the academic teaching staff at a given university.

It is very important to look after the health of academic teachers, as it directly affects the results of their work, including classes with students, thus indirectly affecting the society. Therefore, it would be beneficial to promote good practices in the scope of health-promoting activities oriented at academic teaching staff and to conduct further research in that area.

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