

CREATING CAREER PATHS FOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE NATIONAL OLYMPICS OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN THE FIELD OF ADVERTISING „CREATIVE IN ADVERTISING”

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Purpose: The article presents the results of a pilot study on the National Advertising Knowledge and Skills Competition "Creative in Advertising". The primary aim was to examine whether participation in this newly established competition influences the career path choices of young people.

Design/methodology/approach: The study employed a diagnostic survey method using questionnaires. Data were collected from finalists (third-stage participants) and their accompanying teachers during the 2024 and 2025 editions. The research logic was structured around two hypotheses: (H1) that career plans and vocational exam exemptions are primary motivators for participation, and (H2) that perceived professional benefits drive long-term teacher engagement.

Findings: The analysis revealed that approximately 70% of finalists plan a career in the advertising industry. Key motivators include both pragmatic factors (exam exemptions) and developmental ones (prestige, skill verification). Teacher surveys, analyzed through functional categorization, showed that networking and access to industry-standard certifications (e.g., DIMAQ) are the most valued benefits.

Research limitations/implications: As a pilot study, the findings are limited to a highly motivated subgroup of finalists and should not be generalized to the entire vocational student population. Selection bias is an inherent limitation of this stage of research.

Practical implications: The study highlights the Olympiad as a crucial bridge between vocational education and the dynamic requirements of "Economy 4.0", suggesting a need for updating national curricula to better align with industry expectations.

Originality/value: This is the first empirical study of the only national advertising-themed Olympiad in Poland, addressing a significant gap in the domestic vocational education research landscape.

Keywords: staff, advertising, advertising market, career path, Olympics.

Category of the paper: case study.

Introduction

Contemporary macroeconomic conditions, characterised by rapid change, advancing globalisation and pressure to innovate, are forcing a fundamental redefinition of how businesses operate. These processes directly determine new paradigms in the area of career management. Key manifestations of organisational transformation include the de-hierarchisation of structures (flattening), the evolution of professional profiles – including the disappearance of traditional specialisations in favour of new competences – and the spread of non-standard forms of employment. The consequence of these phenomena for human capital is the loss of professional stability. This requires employees to be highly adaptable, mobile and willing to pursue lifelong learning in conditions of job insecurity. The reduction in traditional jobs and the emergence of new specialisations pose significant challenges for both employment and education. Employees are faced with growing pressure to be flexible and multitask, which, in conditions of short-term employment, creates a sense of existential uncertainty. This requires them to constantly update their qualifications in order to maintain their marketability (so-called employability). In turn, the population of pupils and students faces the problem of the inadequacy of traditional educational models to the realities of Economy 4.0. The younger generation must reckon with the need to change their professional profile multiple times throughout their lives. As a result, the education process is no longer a closed stage, but a continuous process that accompanies the individual in parallel with their professional work. In the current economic reality, the future of young people, secondary school graduates, studying, among other things, advertising technology, can be very promising, but also requires flexibility and continuous development. The advertising market is characterised by dynamic changes and, as observations show, increasingly requires flexibility and interdisciplinarity from its employees. Modern technologies, digitalisation and the increasingly widespread use of artificial intelligence necessitate the development of new skills, experience and practical knowledge by young people. The aim of the article was to present the results of a study on the organisation of the National Advertising Knowledge and Skills Competition entitled Creative in Advertising and to check whether participation in a thematic competition in the field of advertising determines the choice of career path of young people, the participants of the competition, in the advertising industry. The study assumed that the factors determining students' participation in the Advertising Knowledge and Skills Competition are their planned career path in this field and the possibility of exemption from the vocational examination.

A Literature Review

Contemporary academic discourse on career planning is very diverse. Many authors analyse factors influencing motivation, creation and development of career paths. They point to the role of career offices, employment offices, employment and career counselling agencies, training companies and, finally, HR departments. However, there is a lack of publications devoted exclusively to the issue of career path creation through participation in competitions or contests at secondary school level. Career path creation issues are discussed in detail in publications on career counselling, gifted education and educational psychology. „Terms such as career, professional career and professional development are usually used interchangeably. Due to its historical connotations, the term career is used very reluctantly; in the recent past, the word ‘careerist’ was used in a derogatory tone to describe a person who achieved professional success for money. In general, these terms refer to a person's development in terms of values, attitudes, talents, interests, personality and knowledge in relation to work. Specifically, these terms reflect the development of an individual's needs and life goals throughout their life and in relation to the career decisions that satisfy them” (Bańka, 2016, p. 21). As A. Smolbik-Jęczmień mentions, "making the right choice of career path is usually a very important matter for every young person, and the decision on the further direction of education is most often made by a 19-year-old student, whose maturity in choosing a university is sometimes not yet fully developed. Often, the decisions made by teenagers can take the form of so-called “youthful indiscretions” with irreversible consequences. However, with wise guidance, they can also be the beginning of an attractive and satisfying professional and personal career” (Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2017, p. 177). It is also worth mentioning the changes taking place in the education system. "The basic structure of the education system consists of formal education institutions: primary schools, vocational schools (first-level vocational schools, second-level vocational schools, technical colleges, post-secondary schools) and higher education institutions. Formal education institutions primarily shape general and general vocational competences, cognitive and IT skills, and create a base of knowledge and skills that graduates will be able to expand and develop with further skills required on the labour market. Formal education is the foundation of knowledge and skills on which the effectiveness of non-formal and informal education depends. It is the basis for a smooth transition from the competences needed here and now to the as yet undefined competences of the future” (Jeruszka, 2023, p. 66). Participation in the Olympiad, willingness to learn, develop interests and prepare beyond the core curriculum can be a factor in developing new skills and helping students find the direction for their future career path. As Stefan M. Kwiatkowski mentions, "the skills of the future can only be effectively shaped and developed in an open and flexible education system focused on lifelong learning. At the heart of this system is a person who understands the need for continuous training and acquisition of new skills, enabling them to adapt to constantly changing living and working

conditions, and above all, is able to do so” (Kwiatkowski, 2018, p. 27). The Olympiads, on the other hand, were and still are a kind of ‘filter’ for talent. As F.W. Wawro points out, "olympiads are intended to support and improve the activation of students' talents and interests, they should initiate creative thinking, teach the application of theoretical knowledge in practice, prepare students for their future professions, and, in the case of particularly talented students, prepare them for specialised studies” (Wawro, 1999, p. 23). The most important qualities useful in career planning include: the ability to know oneself, confidence in one's abilities and effectiveness, resilience, vitality, the ability to develop oneself, self-education, self-organisation, planning ability, flexibility, intuition, orientation in an uncertain environment, the ability to reconcile contradictions, openness to new experiences and creativity, trust, tolerance without excessive emotional involvement (Santorski, Turniak, 2011, p. 27). Participation in the Olympics is undoubtedly an important factor influencing the development of the above characteristics.

National Advertising Knowledge and Skills Competition entitled Creative in Advertising – topics, objectives and organisation

In February 2022, on the initiative of the then authorities of the Faculty of Management at the Czestochowa University of Technology, an Organising Committee was established for the National Olympiad of Knowledge and Skills in Advertising, entitled Creative in Advertising. From the very beginning, the Olympiad has been organised in cooperation with the W.S. Reymont School Complex of Fashion and Advertising in Czestochowa and is aimed at secondary school students studying to become advertising technicians. The most important objectives of the competition are:

1. To develop young people's interest in advertising and its creation.
2. To encourage secondary school students studying advertising to broaden their knowledge and acquire new skills.
3. Promoting economic knowledge among young people, with particular emphasis on marketing, promotion and advertising.
4. Raising the level of vocational education.
5. Supporting students in preparing for further education, for example at university, in fields related to the creation of advertising materials, promotion, image building and marketing.
6. Encouraging young people to compete and building an atmosphere of healthy rivalry.
7. Establishing cooperation between teachers, schools and educational centres.
8. Developing young people's skills in using the latest techniques for creating advertising materials and applying them in social media.

9. Adapting the profile of future graduates and employees in the advertising technician profession to the expectations of employers and the requirements of the labour market (www1).

The schedule for the competition is developed each year and adapted to the needs of schools and the duration of the school year. School registrations are open from the beginning of September until 11 October. On 24 October, the first stage of the competition (the so-called school competition) takes place in schools. The schools then send in the results of the school competitions and a list of those who have qualified for the second stage competitions is drawn up. The second stage competitions are organised using the e-learning platform of the Czestochowa University of Technology in the first days of January of the given school year. After the second stage of the competition, the Second Stage Competition Committee sends the Main Committee a report with attached lists containing the results and archived forms of the competition sheets of all participants, as well as relevant documentation. The second stage competition consists of a single-choice and multiple-choice test comprising 50 closed questions. These questions are designed to test basic knowledge and skills in the profession (from the core curriculum and teaching programme). The third stage of the competition and the final take place on-site at the Faculty of Management of the Czestochowa University of Technology in April of the given school year. The third stage of the competition consists of a written part (all participants in the third stage) and an oral part (the five finalists with the highest scores in the written part). The selected finalists take part in the oral part, in which they compete for places one to five. This part consists of randomly selected sets of 3 problem-based questions, which the finalists answer before the Third Level Competition Committee. The winner of a given edition of the Olympiad is the competitor who has obtained the highest number of points in the written and oral parts. (..) In accordance with the Competition Rules, the following terms are used: a Competition finalist is a participant in the third stage of the competition who has obtained at least 60% of the possible points in the written part; a Competition winner is any of the five students among the finalists with the highest scores in the oral and written parts of the third stage of the competition (www1).

In the first edition of the Olympiad in the 2023/2024 school year, students from 52 schools took part in the school competitions, and 727 participants qualified for the second stage. A total of 644 students took part in the second stage of the competition, which was conducted using the e-learning platform of the Czestochowa University of Technology. Seventy-eight people participated in the third stage of the competition, and 14 reached the final. In the first edition of the Olympiad, six people were awarded the status of laureates. In the second edition of the Olympiad, which was held in the 2024/2025 school year, students from 65 schools took part in the school competitions, 998 students took part in the second stage, and 96 students took part in the third stage. In the second edition of the Olympiad, there were 6 finalists and 6 winners. The third edition of the competition, scheduled for the 2025/2026 school year, was in the process of being organised and conducted in first-level vocational schools at the time of writing.

Seventy-five schools from all over Poland took part in the school competitions, which were scheduled for 24 October 2025. Detailed data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Course of the National Creative Advertising Competition in 2023-2026

	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026
Number of schools registered for school competitions	52	65	75
Number of students qualified for second-level competitions	727	998	1105
Number of students qualified for third-level competitions	78	96	The text was written during preparations for the second stage of the competition*
Number of finalists	14	6	j.w.
Number of winners	6	6	j.w.
* At the time of writing, the competition was in the post-school competition phase (school competitions were held on 24 October 2025 and second-stage competitions were scheduled for 15 January 2026).			

Source: own study based on documents from the Olympic Organising Committee entitled Creative in Advertising.

As shown in Table 1, interest in the National Olympiad entitled Creative in Advertising is growing. It should also be mentioned here that since 2023, this event has been included in the schedule of thematic competitions and Olympiads for subsequent school years and has been included in the Announcement of the Minister of Education and Science on the list of thematic competitions and Olympiads related to a selected field of knowledge entitling students to exemption from the written part of the vocational examination.

Materials and Methods

In order to achieve the research objective, which is to determine the role of the National Olympiad in shaping the career paths of its participants, a diagnostic survey method was used. This choice was dictated by the specific nature of the research group and the type of data sought. Diagnostic surveys are the most popular method in quantitative research. „It is a way of gathering knowledge about the structural and functional attributes and dynamics of social phenomena, opinions, views of selected communities, the intensification and directions of development of specific phenomena and any other phenomena that are not institutionally located, which have educational significance based on a specially selected group representing the general population in which the phenomenon under study occurs" (Piekarski, 2016, p. 89).

To structure the empirical logic of the study, the following research questions and testable hypotheses were formulated:

RQ1: To what extent does participation in the advertising-themed Olympiad correlate with the students' declaration of a professional career path in the industry?

RQ2: What are the primary motivators (pragmatic vs. developmental) for students to participate in this nationwide competition?

H1: The planned career path in the advertising field and the possibility of being exempted from the professional vocational examination are the dominant factors determining participation.

H2: Teachers' satisfaction with student outcomes and the perceived developmental benefits for the school motivate their long-term involvement in the Olympiad's subsequent editions.

The choice of a diagnostic survey to examine participants' attitudes and subject teachers' opinions was based on the following factors:

1. The participants in the competition constitute a group representing the population that may be interested in pursuing a career path in line with their education (the competition is open to students of schools offering training in advertising technology).
2. The Olympiad participants come from scattered locations, representing various cities and towns in Poland.
3. The quantitative nature of the study allows trends in career path creation to be identified.
4. The survey makes it possible to standardise variables and harmonise the responses obtained (reasons for participating in the competition, plans for the future, skills developed through participation in the competition).
5. Sense of anonymity – although the survey was conducted during the third stage of the Olympiad, participants were able to answer the questions in the questionnaire anonymously.

The survey method also allowed for effective and efficient outreach to event participants. Secondly, this method enabled the collection of standardised quantitative data. The use of this methodology allowed not only for the diagnosis of the actual state of affairs (which was dictated by participation in the Olympics), but also for learning the subjective opinions of participants regarding the usefulness of the competences acquired during the competition in their career plans. An audience survey was used as a research technique, which ensured that respondents felt anonymous and comfortable when answering questions. In addition, the organisers aimed to obtain a comprehensive, two-perspective assessment of the initiative and its impact on the socio-economic environment. The diagnostic survey study used two research tools: a questionnaire addressed to students participating in the competition and a questionnaire addressed to teachers.

In both editions of the competition held so far, a diagnostic survey was conducted among students and guardians/teachers who accompanied the participants during the third stage of the competition. The survey conducted among students concerned the organisation of the competition and the participants' career plans, while the survey conducted among teachers concerned, in addition to the organisation of the event, the assessment of the benefits that participation in the competition brought to students, the identification of the competences they were able to develop, and the thematic scope of the competition. In addition, teachers also evaluated a meeting with a representative of the Sector Council for Competences (Marketing Communication), which was organised for them during the competition at the Czestochowa University of Technology. Questionnaires were distributed to all students participating in the third-level competition and to teachers. Both questionnaires contained 10 questions and personal details (the questionnaires were authored by Agnieszka Widawska-Stanisiz and Joanna Piłula-Malachowska). The study assumed that the factors determining students' participation in the Advertising Knowledge and Skills Competition were their planned career in this field and the possibility of exemption from the vocational examination. Furthermore, it was assumed that teachers' satisfaction with the results and commitment of students in the current editions of the Olympiad would motivate them to actively include the school's participation in this event in their plans for the coming years. The survey was conducted during the two editions of the Olympiad organised so far – on 17 April 2024 and 16 April 2025.

In the first edition of the competition, 66 students returned correctly completed questionnaires, and in the second edition, 64 students did so. Not all of the questionnaires distributed were accepted for further analysis because they were not completed in full. Twenty-one teachers took part in the survey in the first edition, and 17 in the second edition.

Research Findings

The two editions of the Olympiad organized and conducted to date involved secondary school students. Women comprised the majority (76% in 2024 and 69% in 2025), while men accounted for 24% and 31%, respectively. In both editions, the majority of participants were aged 17-18, which may indicate that this age group is more likely to be interested in participating in Olympiads and competitions because they are better prepared (having already covered most of the curriculum in their final years of schooling) and are beginning to consider various scenarios for their career path or choice of field of study. Participants came from various cities across Poland. The largest number of finalists originated in the Silesian, Lesser Poland, Greater Poland, and Pomeranian Voivodeships.

In the first question, students talked about their career plans. As shown in figure 1, in 2025 there was an increase in the number of people who see their future in the advertising industry.

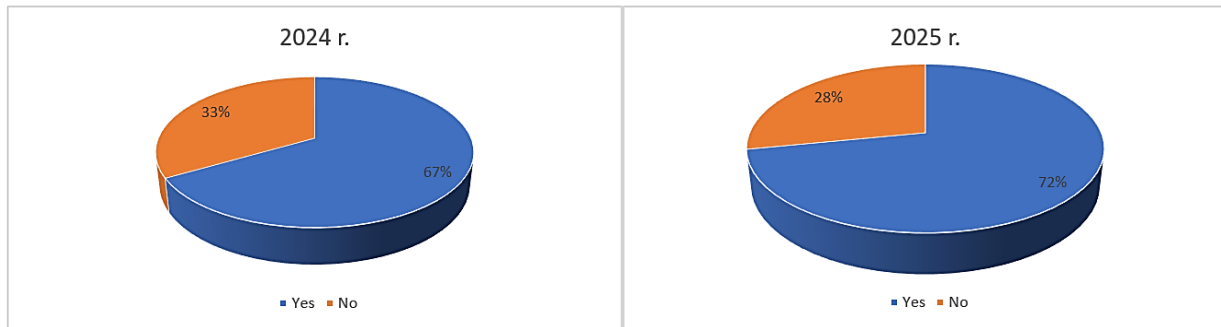


Figure 1. Intention to pursue a career in the advertising industry.

Source: own research based on conducted surveys.

In the next question, respondents were asked what had motivated them to take part in the Olympiad. In both editions, two answers stood out by far: the desire to compete and the opportunity to be exempted from the written part of the vocational exam. It is interesting to note that, compared to 2024, in this year’s edition students were more likely to cite the development of their interests in advertising.

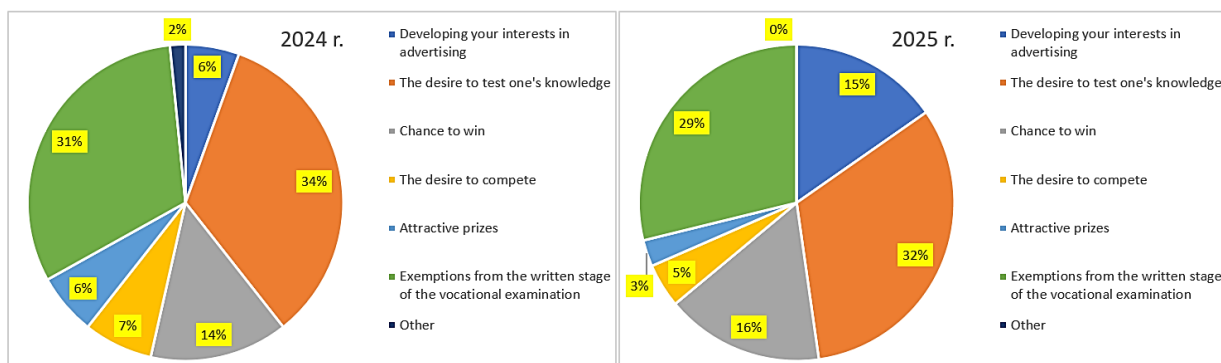


Figure 2. Reasons for participating in the Olympiad.

Source: own research based on conducted surveys.

In subsequent questions, students indicated their plans in the event of deciding to pursue higher education. In both editions, students indicated studying economics/management/marketing at university, studying graphic design and multimedia, and some indicated other fields of study than those mentioned above. There were also those who were undecided. This question shows that most of the participants in the competition are thinking about further development and education, with individual responses concerning taking up employment immediately after school or deciding to take industry-specific courses. In the next question, the participants answered what benefits they gained from participating in the Olympiad. Most people believed that participating in the Olympiad allowed them to broaden their theoretical knowledge, helped them pass their professional examinations, and gave them the opportunity to test themselves in a competitive situation.

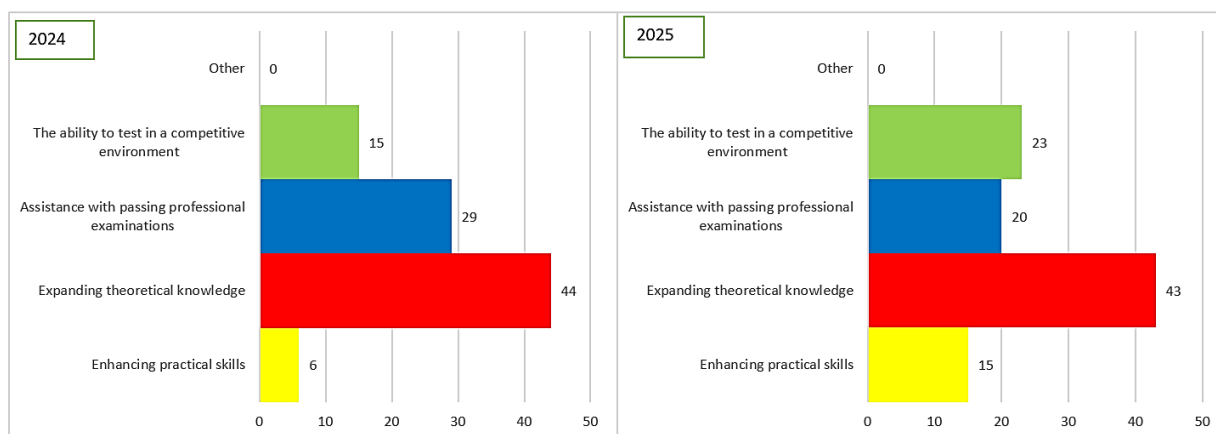


Figure 3. Benefits gained by participants from taking part in the competition.

Source: own research based on conducted surveys.

The students also indicated where they had heard about the Creative in Advertising Olympiad. The most common answer was that it was their vocational teacher (61 people in 2024 and 60 people in 2025). The organisers of the competition should therefore direct their promotional and publicity activities towards schools and subject teachers. In both editions, participants expressed a willingness to recommend the event to other students at their school – 83% (2024) and 91% (2025).

As the results of the study show, the participants who reached the third stage of the competition are people who:

1. see their future in the advertising industry,
2. participation in the competition allowed them to broaden their theoretical knowledge,
3. the students participating in the competition primarily wanted to compete with others and develop their interests related to advertising,
4. most of them would definitely recommend other students to participate in the competition,
5. the most important reason for participating was the opportunity to be exempt from the written part of the vocational examination.

Only students who reached the third stage of the competition took part in the study. The study group (third-stage competition participants) is highly selective and probably has unique characteristics that distinguish it from the average student (e.g. higher motivation, better skills, greater commitment, above-average knowledge in a given field). The above results should be treated as a pilot study (they show the results of research conducted only during the first two editions of the competition). It is also worth considering whether to send the questionnaire to all participants of the Olympiad (at all stages of the competition) in the future. However, there is a doubt as to whether those who only took part in the school competition will be able to answer all the questions as reliably as the participants of the final stage.

The second part of the survey conducted among teachers/guardians of the competition participants concerned, apart from the organisation of the event, the assessment of the benefits that the students gained from participating in the competition, the identification of the competences they were able to develop, and the thematic scope of the competition. In addition, teachers also evaluated a meeting with a representative of the Sector Council for Competences (Marketing Communication), which was organised for them during the competition at the Czestochowa University of Technology. The benefits for teachers resulting from the meeting with the Sectoral Competence Council were analysed using a categorisation approach in order to prioritise their needs. The identified benefits were grouped into three functional pillars, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

The benefits for teachers resulting from the meeting with the Sectoral Competence Council

Category	Specific Benefits Identified
Market Intelligence	Information on industry certifications (Dimaq), understanding evolving employer expectations, and information about the Industry Education Centre.
Networking & Integration	Building networks within the educational community, exchange of professional experiences, and integration of the academic and vocational environment.
Professional Growth	Opportunities to join the Sector Council and obtaining new teaching resources.

Source: own research based on conducted surveys.

Among the teachers surveyed, the majority were women (18 in 2024 and 14 in 2025) aged 31-40 and 41-50.

Conclusions

The results of this pilot study provide an initial insight into the role of the "Creative in Advertising" Olympiad in shaping career paths. However, the following limitations must be considered:

- **Selective Sample:** The study focused exclusively on finalists (third-stage participants). This group is highly selective and characterized by above-average motivation and commitment. Therefore, the findings represent a "talent subgroup" rather than the general population of vocational students.
- **Pilot Nature:** As a pilot study covering the first two editions (2024 and 2025), the results are a prelude to further analysis.
- **Conclusion:** While 70% of finalists declare a career in advertising, and the Olympiad serves as a facilitator of vocational education, these impact claims should be treated with caution. Future research will be expanded to include participants from the preliminary stages to mitigate selection bias and provide a broader perspective on the competition's impact.

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