

THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC ALLIES IN SHAPING AN INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL OFFER OF A NON-PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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Purpose: The aim of the article is to determine the role played by strategic allies in shaping the innovative educational offer of a non-public university with a practical profile on the example of the University College of Enterprise and Administration in Lublin (WSPA).

Design/methodology/approach: The study employs a mixed-method approach combining three CAWI survey studies conducted among key stakeholder with a desk research analysis of university documentation. Quantitative analysis includes descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha for scale reliability, and Spearman correlations for selected variables. The research focuses on evaluating the intensity, depth, and effectiveness of cooperation between the university and its socio-economic environment.

Findings: Strategic allies enhance the practical and innovative character of the educational offer, but their involvement in co-responsibility and visibility to students remains limited.

Research limitations/implications: The study is limited by its case study nature (single institution) and a small sample of deans, which restricts generalizability. Additionally, some data gaps (e.g., internships and continuation of cooperation) reduce the scope of quantitative analysis. Future research should focus on increasing partner involvement in learning outcomes assessment, improving visibility of cooperation for students, and examining transitions from internships to employment.

Practical implications: The findings suggest that universities should deepen partner co-responsibility in curriculum design, strengthen communication of partnerships to students, and expand mechanisms such as internships and joint projects. Enhancing these aspects can improve graduate employability and strengthen the competitive position of the university in the educational market.

Social implications: The study highlights the importance of stronger university–industry cooperation in aligning education with labor market needs, which may improve graduates' employability and contribute to regional socio-economic development. It also supports the role of universities in fulfilling their “third mission” through engagement with society and business.

Originality/value: The paper offers a multi-stakeholder perspective on the role of strategic allies in educational innovation.

Keywords: strategic allies, non-public university, practical profile, socio-economic environment.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

Introduction

Universities in the Republic of Poland, in accordance with the Act of 20 July 2018 “Law on Higher Education and Science”, are divided into public and non-public universities (the Act, 2018) - commonly called private universities. They may be academic universities – conducting programs with an academic profile – if they conduct scientific activity and have a scientific category A+, A or B+ in at least one scientific or artistic discipline, or vocational universities (programs with a practical profile), if they conduct education taking into account the needs of the socio-economic environment and do not conduct scientific activity (the Act, 2018). The practical profile of a university means, in accordance with paragraph 64, section 2, point 1 of the Act, that “studies are conducted in a practical profile, in which more than half of ECTS points are assigned to classes shaping practical skills”. The fact of implementing the study program through classes that shape practical skills, i.e. exercises, workshops, laboratories, project classes, distinguishes this type of university from a university with a general academic profile, where study programs place greater emphasis on classes related to the scientific activity of the university. In this article, the author focuses on a non-public university with a practical profile.

Having the status of a practically educating university implies the possibility of shaping and implementing study programs in close cooperation with the socio-economic environment (Lis, 2025). Within this article, the author focuses on a specific group of strategic allies belonging to the microenvironment, commonly referred to as the socio-economic environment of the university, whose participation in the functioning of the university takes place on the basis of everyday cooperation. This socio-economic environment is the entirety of stakeholders who may be interested in participating in academic life – both directly and indirectly, through various forms of influence such as student internships, study visits, consultations and construction of study programs, conducting classes in higher education, etc.

The necessity of a broad and lasting connection between the university and the academic environment with the sphere of business (entrepreneurship) brings benefits to all parties involved in cooperation. In business, one can test the usefulness of knowledge and ideas, business experiences may result in ideas for new research. For the university – as an institution – the connection with business may be a source of financing, scientific inspiration and prestige (WSPA, 2008). Taking into account close cooperation with the environment, a non-public university with study programs of a practical profile must reconcile in its functioning two logics: academic logic and business logic. Academic logic means the necessity of having high-quality study programs that must meet rigorous evaluation criteria of the Polish Accreditation Commission – having appropriate teaching staff, facilities and technical infrastructure. Business logic means that the university is an enterprise offering a specific type of service that must be sold on the educational services market, competing with other universities (both public

and non-public). In order to gain a client, it must seek a competitive advantage – added value at the intersection of business and academic logic, which will allow it to stand out on the market. This added value is an innovative educational offer, whose character causes it to belong both to the academic world (a study program adopted according to strictly defined procedures, which must meet rigorous criteria and equip the student with a specific set of knowledge, skills and competences) and the business world (it is co-created with the business environment, responds to its needs and determines the attractiveness of the university and allows achieving the university's economic goals).

In this article, the author will determine the role played by strategic allies in shaping an innovative educational offer of a non-public university with a practical profile on the example of the University College of Enterprise and Administration in Lublin – the oldest non-public university in Lublin, founded in 1998, offering 11 fields of study at bachelor's, engineering and master's levels, of which 100% are programs with a practical profile (WSPA, 2026).

Innovative educational offer

Innovative education, according to UNESCO, refers to teaching and learning approaches that incorporate new ideas, technologies and methods to enhance the educational experience (UNESCO, 2026). An innovative educational offer at a higher education institution with a practical profile includes study programs available in the university's offer (at bachelor's, engineering, master's levels, conducted in Polish), which are oriented towards practical development of students' knowledge, skills and competences and which are co-created with the participation of partners from the socio-economic environment of the university in response to needs reported by the labor market (employers, entrepreneurs), who thanks to this approach influence academic programs (Vuoriainen et al., 2024). Co-creation includes creating from scratch the entire study program, module or individual subjects as well as modifying existing programs/modules/subjects by modifying their individual elements and content.

An innovative educational offer uses innovative solutions used in business or administration. In the literature, specific features of an innovative educational offer can be found. They are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Features of an innovative educational offer

Feature	Short characteristic
Responds to changing needs of the environment	Reviews programs in terms of future competences; study fields/development paths are related to digitalization, use of artificial intelligence (AI), automation and co-creation of learning outcomes with industries
Is the result of close cooperation with the socio-economic environment	Formalized cooperation with enterprises and institutions, transfer of knowledge and good practices, practical solutions
Takes into account student evaluations regarding processes at the university	Students are treated not only as recipients of educational services but also as a source of evaluation and co-creators of the entrepreneurship/teaching ecosystem at the university
Combines educational and scientific missions	Operates “in the spirit of entrepreneurship” – integrating education and research for innovation
Implements the “third mission”	Through cooperation with the socio-economic environment – society and business and actions such as knowledge transfer/ academic engagement projects for regions and branches are implemented
Is oriented towards student outcomes	Programs are student-centered and oriented towards learning outcomes to fit the offer better to learner’s needs (active methods, project work, effects validation)
Programmatically autonomous	Building unique programs in response to needs of socio-economic environment. Learning effects audits, consistency, quality maintenance systems, eliminating „copying” of general characteristics
Includes students as co-creators of processes	Builds a culture of cooperation and knowledge sharing – process goes both directions (university support <-> student engagement). Implemented through ambitious activities (tutoring/ mentoring), practices, learning with the use of project method, using ICT tools
Uses modern technologies	Responsibly implements AI tools as part of an “innovative university”

Source: Own elaboration basing on: Chernaya et al., 2023; Łochnicka, 2023; Pisarski, 2024; Piotrowska, 2024; Łuźniak-Piecha et al., 2023; Tereshchenko et al., 2024; Mytnik et al., 2024; Bastý et al., 2025; Amiri et al., 2025.

Innovative educational offer includes also the integration of industry projects and mentorship into academic curricula, which is an effective strategy for enhancing student learning and professional readiness (Navneet et al., 2024). Investment in lecturers from industry, who can bring the latest knowledge to the classroom and ensure that curriculum remain up to date is also of a great importance (OECD, 2022). In this context, the close cooperation and exchange between university and socio-economic environment is crucial: lecturers from industry bring specialist, up-to-date knowledge from specific sector which is an competitive advantage for the university as well as students can learn directly from their possible future employers (Grebski et al., 2023).

Research methodology

In this study, a number of logically connected stages were carried out enabling the achievement of the assumed research objective. First, the research problem was formulated: What role do strategic allies play in shaping the innovative educational offer of WSPA in Lublin? Based on it, the research question was formulated: how do the main stakeholders of the

university – deans, students and strategic allies evaluate the innovativeness of the educational offer of a non-public university on the example of WSPA.

The following research hypotheses were formulated:

- H1.** In the opinion of WSPA deans, cooperation with partners supports strengthening the practical and up-to-date character of the educational offer and deeper co-responsibility for the program and learning outcomes.
- H2.** WSPA partners highly evaluate the organizational quality of cooperation, responsiveness, usefulness of study programs and their real participation in co-creating programs and learning outcomes.
- H3.** WSPA students highly evaluate the practical dimension of education and the participation of practitioners, actively participate in activities with partners and know partner institutions well.

To verify the above hypotheses, quantitative methods based on the analysis of survey data with the use of descriptive statistics were applied. A survey study was conducted (CAWI, anonymous in nature) using original questionnaires addressed to three groups of university stakeholders:

- a) deans managing fields of study (11 persons – all WSPA deans) – 32 questions divided into 6 sections. The variables analysed were: fields of study, number of allies and their sectoral structure, items assessed on a Likert scale (1-5) – 5 thematic blocks, categorical/ordinal questions. In the analysis, descriptive statistics were applied (M, SD, median, quartiles, min-max) as well as scale reliability analysis (Cronbach's α). For relationships between variables, Spearman correlations (ρ) were used. Due to the small sample size ($N = 11$), interpretations of significance tests were treated as exploratory; the significance level was assumed at $\alpha = 0.05$.
- b) strategic allies – business institutions, non-governmental organisations, public institutions with which the university has active cooperation agreements – an invitation was sent to 167 entities (all those with whom the university conducts cooperation). 43 responses were obtained, the questionnaire consisted of 27 questions divided into 5 sections. The analysed variables were: types of organisations and areas of activity, duration of cooperation with the university, field/fields of cooperation and forms of cooperation (multiple-choice questions). The key part consisted of items assessed on a 1-5 scale (Likert scale), grouped into four areas. Descriptive analysis was applied (means, standard deviations, medians and distributions of responses) as well as scale reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha coefficient).

- c) WSPA students – full-time and part-time, studying in all fields (except for the WSPA branch in Wodzisław Śląski) – an invitation was sent to 2174 students, 229 responses were obtained, the questionnaire consisted of 26 questions divided into 5 sections. The analysed variables were: binary and multiple-choice questions concerning participation in activities with partners, 15 items assessed on a five-point Likert scale and an open question about the most valuable activity with a partner. In the quantitative part, descriptive statistics and internal reliability analysis (Cronbach's α) were applied.

The study used survey-based quantitative methods to assess how deans, partners, and students perceive the innovativeness of WSPA's educational offer, with a focus on cooperation with strategic allies. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics and reliability measures, providing an exploratory verification of the hypotheses regarding the role and evaluation of such cooperation.

Research results

The survey addressed to WSPA Deans was completed by 11 respondents. The overall assessment of cooperation with strategic allies was very high – the arithmetic mean (M) amounted to 4.33, standard deviation SD = 0.68 (scale 1-5) with a clear concentration of responses in the upper range of the scale (61.2% of responses = 5). The structure of strategic allies – cooperation with entities from the business sector and public institutions was most often declared (in both cases 72.7% of fields had at least one ally in a given sector). Cooperation with administration/local government units was declared by 54.5% of deans, while with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) by 45.5%. This is presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Percentage of fields having at least one ally in a given sector

Sector of allies	n (≥ 1)	%
Business	8	72,7
Administration/ local government units	6	54,5
NGO	5	45,5
Public institutions	8	72,7

Source: own elaboration.

The assessment of cooperation on the Likert scale concerned issues (question blocks 6, 7, 8, 11, 14) of the intensity of cooperation, the depth of co-creation of the programme and teaching, innovation in the educational offer, innovation in teaching, and implementation and socio-economic effects. In total, 242 Likert responses were collected (22 items x 11 fields). The distribution of responses indicates a ceiling effect: 61.2% of responses were a rating of 5, and 20.7% a rating of 4.

For each block, an index was calculated as the average of the items from the block. The reliability of the indices was assessed using Cronbach's α (Table 3 below).

Table 3.

Descriptive statistics of block indices and reliability (Cronbach's α)

Evaluated dimension	k	M (SD)	Me (Q1-Q3)	Min-Max	Cronbach's α
Regularity and embedding of cooperation (6)	5	4,62 (0,40)	4,60 (4,40-5,00)	3,80-5,00	0,61
Co-creation of the programme and co-responsibility (7)	5	3,98 (0,68)	4,00 (3,60-4,30)	2,60-5,00	0,81
Updating the offer and agility of changes (8)	5	4,18 (1,24)	4,80 (3,80-5,00)	1,00-5,00	0,95
Practical dimension of teaching (11)	3	4,58 (0,76)	5,00 (4,50-5,00)	2,67-5,00	0,95
Internships/placements and the feedback loop (14)	4	4,43 (0,90)	4,50 (4,50-5,00)	2,00-5,00	0,94
Overall result (average of 22 items)	22	4,33 (0,68)	4,55 (4,32-4,64)	2,41-4,91	0,95

Source: own elaboration.

The highest averages were obtained in the areas of: regularity and embedding of cooperation (block 6) and the practical dimension of teaching (block 11). The lowest average was obtained by block 7 (co-creation of the programme and co-responsibility). Reliability was high for most blocks ($\alpha \approx 0.81-0.95$), with moderate reliability of block 6 ($\alpha = 0.61$).

WSPA Deans rated highest (Top 3) the linking of cooperation with the development strategy of the field and the university ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 0.3$, 100% for ratings 4-5), continuity and predictability of actions (stability of cooperation) and improving the quality and currency of teaching thanks to cooperation with allies (in both cases $M = 4.73$, $SD = 0.65$, 90.9% for ratings 4-5). The lowest ratings (Bottom 3) concerned co-investing by allies in education (e.g. equipment – $M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.21$, 63.6% for ratings 1-3), participation of allies in the evaluation of learning outcomes ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.9$, 36.4% for ratings 1-3) and the real character of changes (significant changes in the content of education/competences acquired by students – $M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.4$, 36.4% for ratings 1-3). This means that cooperation is intensive at the level of contacts, classes and internships, whereas it less often includes co-responsibility for assessment or resource contribution.

Questions 9, 10, 12, 13 were categorical/ordinal in nature and concerned updating the offer, joint projects carried out and the participation of practitioners in the educational process. The results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4.

Updating of the offer, joint projects, participation of practitioners

9.1. How many new/modified elements of the offer were implemented in the last academic year (2024/2025) in the field?		
Category	n	%
1-2	5	45,5
3-4	1	9,1
5-6	3	27,3
7 and more	2	18,2

Cont. table 4.

9.2. How many of them were initiated directly by allies?		
Category	n	%
1-2	6	54,5
3-4	4	36,4
7 and more	1	9,1
10.1. How much time on average elapsed from reporting to the need to implementing the change?		
Category	n	%
< 3 months	3	27,3
3-6 months	6	54,5
9-12 months	2	18,2
12.1. How many projects in the academic year are carried out at the request of an ally?		
Category	n	%
0	4	36,4
1-2	4	36,4
3-4	3	27,3
13.1. What percentage of classes in the academic year are taught by practitioners?		
Category	n	%
1-10%	1	9,1
21-30%	2	18,2
31-40%	1	9,1
41% and more	7	63,6

Source: own elaboration.

More than half of deans (54.5%) declared that in the last academic year the number of changes initiated by allies was 1-2. The time of implementation of the change most often fell within the range of 3-6 months (54.5%). In relation to projects carried out at the request of an ally, 36.4% of fields indicated the value 0, and 27.3% – 3-4 projects in the academic year. The participation of practitioners in teaching was high: 63.6% of fields indicated the category 41% and more.

The survey study was supplemented with a desk research analysis of the documentation of the WSPA Centre for Quality of Education in Lublin and the WSPA Career Planning Centre. The intensity of cooperation was described using the following indicators, presented in Table 5 (concerning the academic year 2024/2025)

Table 5.

Indicators used to assess the intensity of WSPA's cooperation in Lublin with the socio-economic environment in the academic year

Area	Name of the indicator	Value of the indicator
Scale and frequency of cooperation	number of active partners	191
	number of joint activities carried out within individual fields (total)	57
Durability and continuity of cooperation	number of years of cooperation carried out	4
Involvement of resources	number of students who participate in cooperation	2174
	number of teaching hours carried out by practitioners from the environment	2137
	number of purchased equipment, software	0

Cont. table 5.

Scope of participation in teaching processes	number of programmes reviewed by partners	11
	number of jointly implemented internship programmes	70
	number of joint fields conducted in cooperation with partners	11
Results of cooperation	number of students carrying out internships with partners during studies	70

Note: Figures base on the stat from 31.12.2025. For the purpose of adopting a uniform calculation method for all fields of study, only members of the Advisory Councils operating within the study programs were taken into account. It was assumed that 1 student completing an internship with a partner = 1 internship program. By joint programs, the author understands fields of study in which the university consults curricula within advisory councils with the participation of socio-economic environment.

Source: Own elaboration.

The depth of cooperation was also subjected to a desk research analysis of WSPA using the following indicators, presented in Table 6 (concerning the academic year 2024/2025).

Table 6.

Indicators used to assess the depth of WSPA's cooperation in Lublin with the socio-economic environment

Area	Name of the indicator	Value of the indicator
Co-creation of study programmes	number of updated study programmes	5
	number of modified/new specialisations launched jointly with partners	11
Co-investing in education	number of equipment purchased for the university by allies	0
	number of studios/laboratories created and (co-)financed by partners	4
Created organisational frameworks of cooperation	number of permanent cooperation structures (e.g. advisory councils, joint internship programmes, dual studies)	11

Source: Own elaboration.

On the basis of the above table, it can be concluded that the cooperation model concentrates more on expert knowledge and co-designing education than on financial support.

The desk research analysis also concerned classes conducted by practitioners from the socio-economic environment in individual fields of study. The results of the analysis are presented in figure 1.

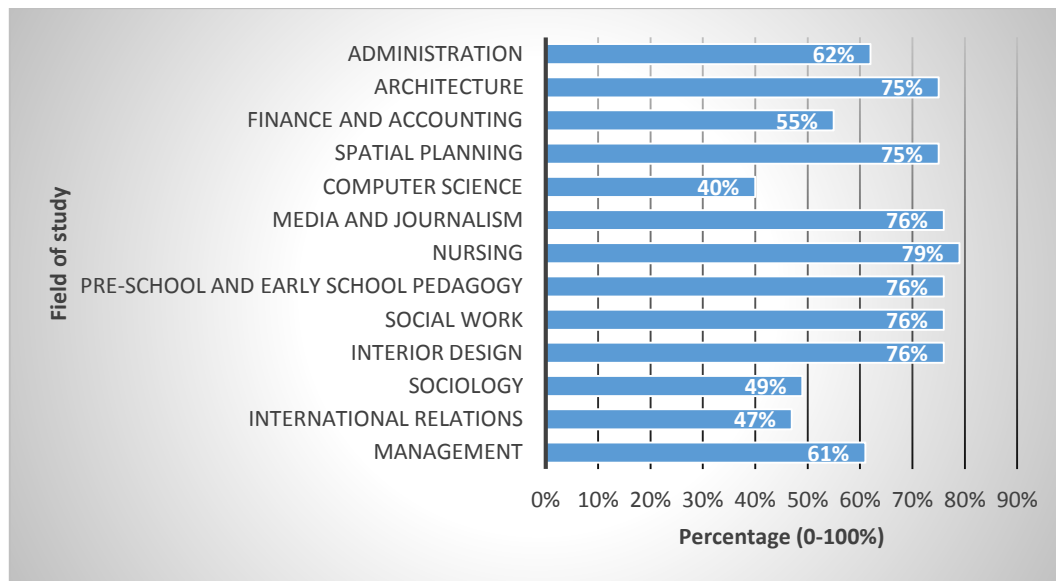


Figure 1. Percentage of classes conducted by business practitioners.

Source: Own elaboration.

The survey addressed to strategic allies – partners from the socio-economic environment was completed by 43 respondents. Business partners dominated in the sample (21 entities, which constitutes 48.8%), followed by NGOs (10 entities, which constitutes 23.3%) and public administration (9 entities, which constitutes 20.9%). Partners from the healthcare sector constituted 4.7% (2 entities), and education 2.3% (1 entity).

With regard to the duration of cooperation with WSPA, the range of 3–5 years was selected most often (58.1%), followed by 0–2 years (16.3%), 6–10 years (14%), above 10 years (9.3%), 1 respondent gave the answer no data (2.3%). The above results mean that most university partnerships are based on long-term cooperation.

Table 7 presents the division of respondents into individual fields of study within which they cooperate with the university (multiple-choice question).

Table 7.

Fields of study within which cooperation is carried out

Field of study	Number of responses obtained	Percentage of respondents
Computer science	10	23,3%
Architecture	9	20,9%
Interior design	8	18,6%
Management	7	16,3%
Administration	7	16,3%
Media and journalism	5	11,6%
Pre-school and Early School Pedagogy	5	11,6%
International Relations	3	7,0%
Finance and Accounting	3	7,0%
Social work	3	7,0%
Nursing	2	4,7%

Source: Own elaboration.

Among the most frequently selected forms of cooperation (multiple-choice question), the highest percentage of responses was obtained for internships and placements (58.1%), carrying out teaching classes (48.8%), organisation of popularisation events (conferences, seminars – 44.2%), and advisory councils (30.2%). Other forms of cooperation obtained one response each (2.3%) – support in workshops, presence at job fairs, promotion of activities for persons with disabilities, implementation of arrangement at a temporary exhibition, congress and fairs, and making software available.

Table 8 below presents the results of four scales built as the average of items in a given area. The highest rating was given to the quality of cooperation and the intention to continue it ($M = 4.40$), the lowest – the influence and involvement of the partner in the educational process ($M = 3.14$). The reliability of the scales measured by Cronbach's coefficient was good to very good ($\alpha = 0.798-0.869$).

Table 8.

Summary of scales in four areas

Scale (area)	M	SD	Me	% ≥ 4	α
Influence and involvement of the partner in the educational process (depth of cooperation – questions 6.1-6.5)	3.14	1.25	2.80	32.6	0.857
Matching the offer to the market and the university's responsiveness (innovativeness of the offer in relation to labour market needs – questions 7.1-7.4)	3.87	0.80	3.75	48.8	0.837
Quality of cooperation and intention to continue (practical education, questions 11.1-11.4)	4.40	0.60	4.50	81.4	0.798
Internships/placements and employment potential (educational effects, students' competences questions 12.1-12.4)	3.92	0.84	4.00	58.1	0.869

Source: Own elaboration.

Analysis at the item level indicates that the highest ratings concerned the quality of cooperation with WSPA staff (question 11.2; $M = 4.65$), willingness to develop cooperation in the following years (question 11.4; $M = 4.49$) and the perceived beneficial nature of the cooperation model (question 11.3; $M = 4.37$). The lowest ratings were recorded in the area of involving partners in the evaluation of educational results (question 6.4; $M = 2.74$) and consultative activity concerning syllabuses and programmes (question 6.2; $M = 3.00$).

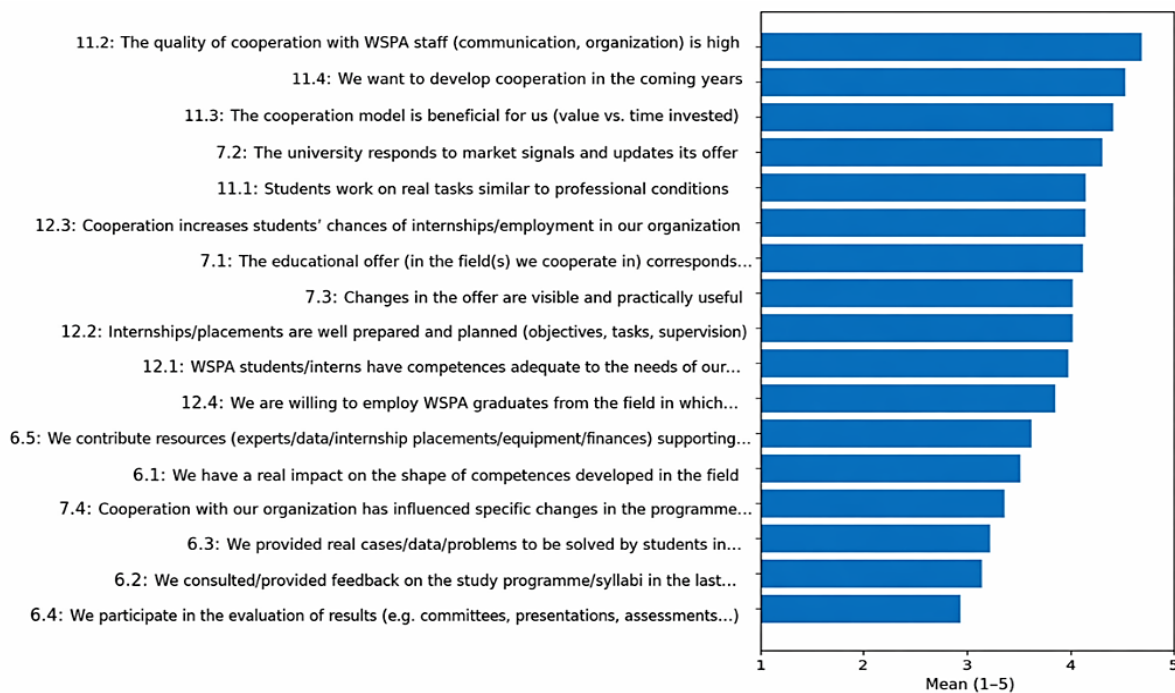


Figure 2. Mean ratings of items (scale 1-5), arranged in ascending order.

Source: Own elaboration.

In the question regarding reporting needs concerning shaping specific competences within the last 12 months, the answer “YES” was marked by 11 partners (25.6%), and “NO” – by 32 partners. Among partners who reported needs ($n = 11$), partial implementation was reported most often (36.4%) or full implementation (27.3%), while 27.3% indicated that implementation is in progress, and 9.1% – that the needs were not implemented. The declared time from reporting to reaction/implementation of the change most often amounted to 3-6 months (45.5%). In the whole sample, more than half of responses indicated “no changes” (55.8%), which can be interpreted as no reports or no implementations in the analysed period.

Comparisons of scale results between the three main types of organisations (Business vs NGO vs Administration; $n = 40$) did not show significant differences (Kruskal-Wallis test; all $p \geq 0.588$). Significant differences were revealed, however, depending on the activity of partners in the area of reporting competence needs (Table 9). Partners who had reported needs in the last 12 months obtained higher results in the area of influence/involvement (section 6 questions) and responsiveness/matching of the offer (section 7 questions). The effect size was large ($r \approx 0.50$ - 0.56).

Table 9.
Comparison of scale results depending on reporting needs

Scale	M (YES)	M (NO)	p	r
Influence/ involvement (6)	4.36	2.72	<0.001	0.56
Responsiveness (7)	4.55	3.64	<0.001	0.503
Cooperation quality (11)	4.66	4.3	0.177	0.204
Internships/ placements (12)	4.16	3.84	0.312	0.155

Source: Own elaboration.

In the case of partners conducting internships/placements, higher ratings were noted in the area of internships/placements and employment potential (section 12; $p = 0.012$; $r = 0.38$) as well as a higher declared willingness to employ graduates (item 12.4; $M = 4.12$ vs 3.28 ; $p = 0.021$; $r = 0.34$). Table 10 compares scale of results depending on conducting internships/placements, and Table 11 presents willingness to employ graduates and conducting internships/placements.

Table 10.

Comparison of scale results depending on conducting internships/placements

Scale	M (internships YES)	M (internships NO)	p	r
Influence/ involvement (6)	3.35	2.86	0.226	0.186
Responsiveness (7)	3.98	3.72	0.392	0.131
Cooperation quality (11)	4.45	4.32	0.522	0.098
Internships/ placements (12)	4.21	3.53	0.012	0.381

Source: own elaboration.

Table 11.

Willingness to employ graduates (12.4) and conducting internships/placements

Variable	M (internships YES)	M (internships NO)	p	r
Willingness to employ (12.4)	4.12	3.28	0.021	0.340

Source: Own elaboration.

The survey addressed to WSPA Students was completed by 229 respondents (out of 2174 WSPA students, which constitutes 10.53% of the total number of students). The characteristics of the research sample were presented in Table 12 below.

Table 12.

Characteristics of the research sample – survey addressed to WSPA students

Indicator	Result
Full-time studies	123 (53.7%)
Part-time studies	101 (44.1%)
Year I	90 (39.3%)
Year II	87 (38.0%)
Year III	35 (15.3%)
Years IV-V	12 (5.2%)

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 3 presents the distribution of respondents by fields of study.

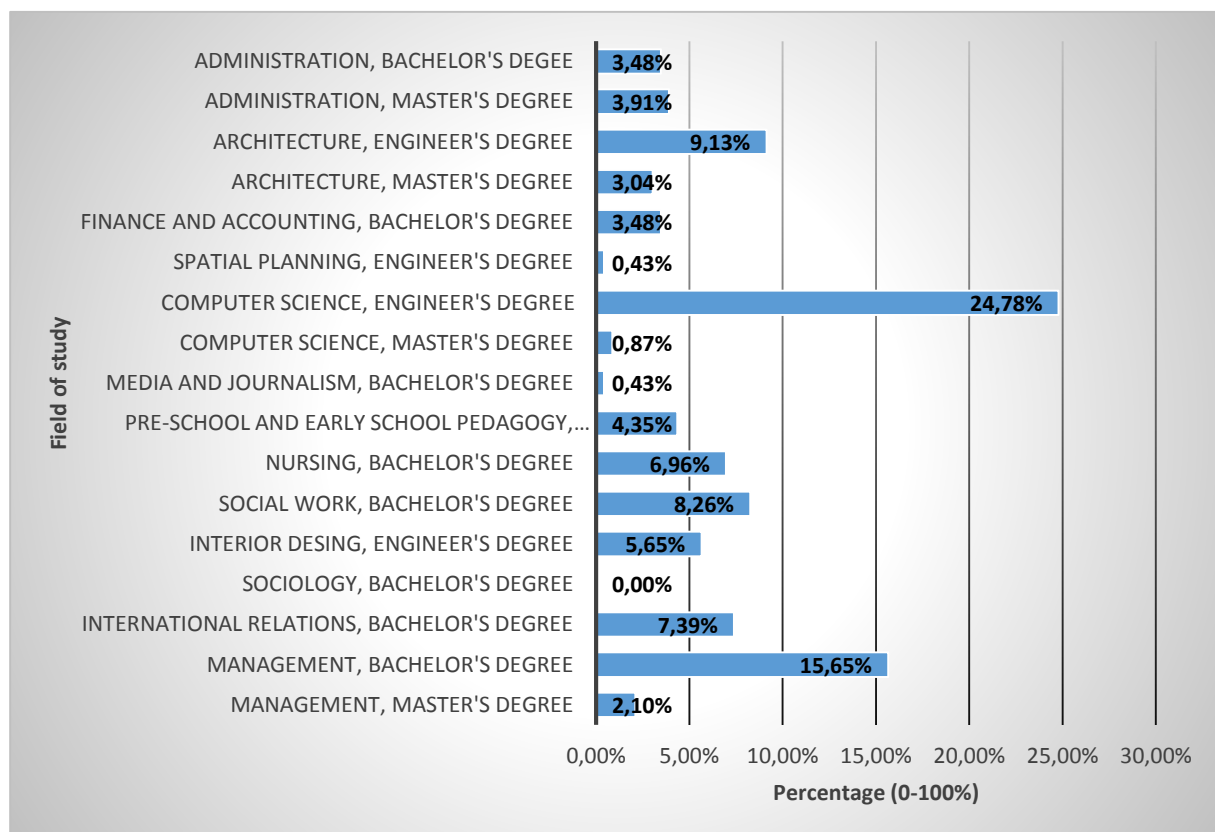


Figure 3. Respondents by fields of study.

Source: Own elaboration.

The key indicators of participation and exposure to partners are as follows: only 33.2% of respondents ($n = 76$) declared participation in activities with university partners. The implementation of projects or case studies based on real problems of partner organisations was rare (10.5%, $n = 24$), and an additional 27.9% ($n = 64$) of respondents were not able to determine unequivocally whether they had such experience. 8.3% of the respondents completed internships with a WSPA partner ($n = 19$), while work in an industry consistent with the field was declared by 29.7% ($n = 68$). A very large number of respondents (65.10%, $n = 149$) were not able to indicate the name of any WSPA partner.

The assessment of Likert scale items indicates a clear asymmetry between the general assessment of the practicality of education and the direct visibility of university partners. Students rated highly: the number of practical classes ($M = 4.09$), the usefulness of classes in relation to solving real problems ($M = 3.84$), the feedback received during classes, which allows the improvement of professional competences ($M = 3.84$), conducting classes by practitioners in a way useful for future work ($M = 3.83$) and the currency and compliance of content with the market situation ($M = 3.79$). At the same time, they rated poorly the amount of classes that are carried out jointly with the participation of university partners ($M = 2.61$), real contact with partners during classes ($M = 2.33$). The weakest result was knowledge of specific partners cooperating with a given field ($M = 2.26$).

All 4 analysed areas (exposure to cooperation with allies, currency and market orientation of the programme, practical dimension of education, preparation for work thanks to partnerships) achieved good or very good internal reliability (α from 0.840 to 0.923). The highest average result was obtained by the scale of the practical dimension of education ($M = 3.90$), while the lowest – by the scale of exposure to partners ($M = 2.40$). In practice, this means that students assess the usefulness of classes and the practical teaching style relatively highly, but this does not automatically translate into a sense of frequent and recognisable contact with external partners. Students declaring participation in activities with partners rated significantly higher exposure to partners ($M = 3.24$ vs 1.98), the currency and market orientation of the programme, and preparation for work thanks to partnerships. Differences in the overall practical dimension of education did not reach statistical significance, which suggests that the practical character of classes may also be present outside formally noticed cooperation with partners.

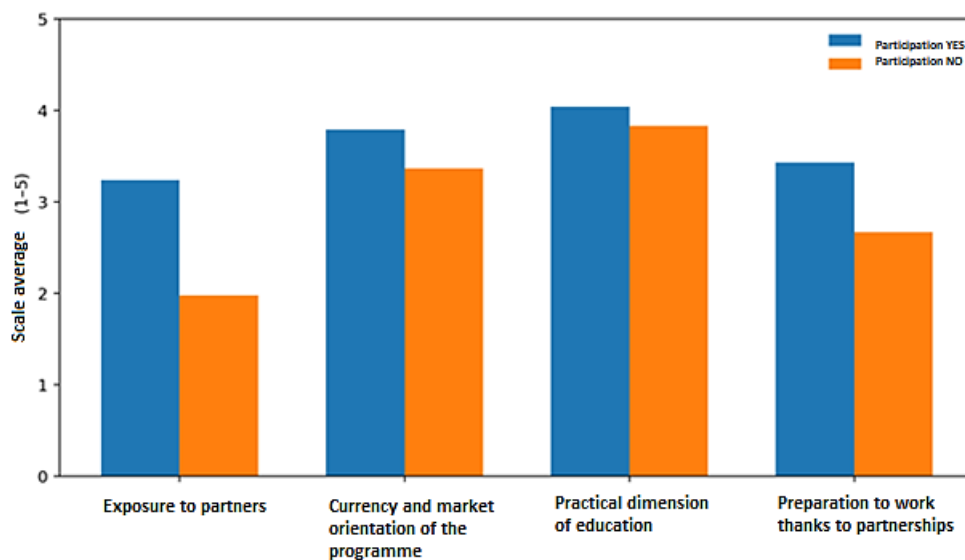


Figure 4. Differences between students participating and not participating in activities with partners.

Source: Own elaboration.

As many as 149 persons (65.1%) were not able to indicate any partner, while only 41 persons (17.9%) gave at least three partners. Self-assessment of knowledge about partners was moderately strongly linked to the actual ability to name them. In practice, this means that the problem of awareness of partnerships is not exclusively declarative – it is reflected in the actual difficulty of recognising cooperating institutions. Among the most frequently spontaneously mentioned partners were Sii, Lingaro, Homo Faber, Capgemini and the Lublin City Office. The distribution of responses was, however, dispersed, and the frequencies low, which suggests the lack of one strongly communicated ecosystem of partners at the level of the whole university.

The analysis of the block of questions concerning implementation effects (internships, placements, preparation for entering the labour market) indicated that perceived preparation for work was most strongly determined by two factors: the currency and market orientation of the programme and exposure to partners. After taking them into account, the declared participation in activities with partners itself ceased to be statistically significant. This is an important interpretative conclusion: the effectiveness of partnerships is determined not so much by the mere fact of participation, but by the degree to which these experiences are integrated with the programme and perceived as market-useful.

Discussion and conclusions

The results of the study conducted among WSPA deans partially confirm hypothesis H1 – they indicate a high, declarative quality of cooperation of fields with strategic allies. Particularly strong are the relational and strategic aspects (regularity, stability, linkage with strategy) as well as the practical component of teaching (participation of practitioners, use of data and problems of partners). At the same time, areas requiring deeper partnership (co-investing and participation in the evaluation of learning outcomes) remain relatively the weakest and may constitute a development priority. The results suggest that expanding the network of allies and increasing their role as a source of impulses for change may support a higher assessment of programme updating and the practicality of education.

The results of the study conducted among partners partially confirm hypothesis H2 – they indicate a very positive picture of the university's relations with partners in the organisational and communication dimension: the majority of respondents highly assess the quality of cooperation with staff, the usefulness of the cooperation model and declare willingness to develop it. At the same time, the area concerning the real influence of partners on the educational process was assessed moderately, and particularly low ratings were given to participation in the evaluation of results and consultative activity concerning syllabi and programmes.

Comparative results suggest that deeper forms of engagement – especially the implementation of teaching classes – are associated with a significantly higher perception of partners' influence and the responsiveness of the university. A similar pattern applies to partners reporting competence needs: in this group, the ratings of influence/involvement and responsiveness are clearly higher. This may reflect both greater activity of this group and better functioning cooperation channels (or greater awareness of these channels).

In the part concerning internships/placements, attention is drawn to the large percentage of responses indicating no admissions in the last 12 months. At the same time, partners conducting internships/placements rate the area of employment potential higher and more often declare

willingness to employ graduates. This indicates the importance of internships as a mechanism for building pathways for students' transition to the labour market.

The results of the study conducted among students partially confirm hypothesis H3. On the one hand, students highly assess the practical character of classes and the usefulness of working with practitioners, which indicates that the university builds a teaching environment perceived as relatively close to professional realities. On the other hand, the formal and conscious presence of partners in students' experience remains limited: partners are poorly recognisable, rarely spontaneously mentioned, and participation in organised activities is declared only by a minority of the sample.

Such an arrangement of results suggests that the practicality of education may be achieved through the style of conducting classes and orientation towards application, even if students do not interpret this as systemic cooperation with external partners. For the university, this means the need to better "make partnerships visible" – through clear maps of partners at the level of the field, signing and communicating projects carried out with organisations, more frequent case studies with clearly indicated origin, and better feedback on the effects of cooperation.

Limitations: a small sample of deans, the study had the character of a case study of one non-public university with a practical profile (WSPA in Lublin) and should not be automatically generalised to the entire sector. In the study of partners and students, some responses were descriptive or indicated a lack of data, which limited the possibility of full quantification of some effects, especially in the area of internships and continuation of cooperation after placements. From the perspective of further research, it seems justified to deepen research: on the visibility of partnerships in students' experience, on the participation of partners in the evaluation of learning outcomes, and on the transition of students from internships to employment.

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