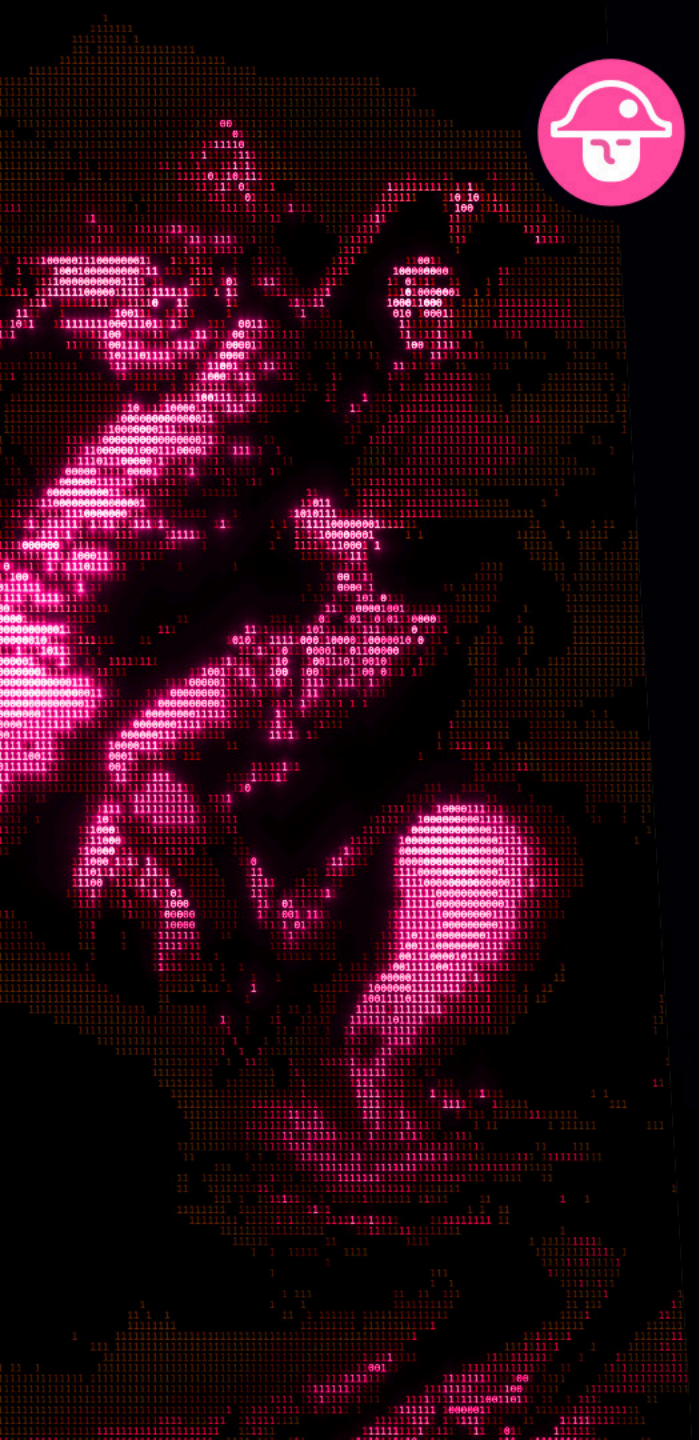


THE
WAR ROOM

Beyond Recruitment:

Universities as Innovation Partners

MAN vs MACHINE
ASPIRE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

How Companies Are Working with Universities

Consolidated findings from 38 company responses

September 2026

Survey Summary

26 / 38

companies report current university cooperation

37 / 38

express an optimistic or cautiously optimistic outlook

10

report a very optimistic outlook

1

company reports a pessimistic outlook

What drives cooperation

- **Talent pipeline and recruitment**
- Employer branding and candidate visibility
- Skills development and curriculum relevance

What companies do

- **Internships and student employment**
- Classes, workshops and student clubs
- Sponsorship, advisory boards and research

What limits scale

- **Fragmented contacts and administration**
- Legal complexity and unclear ROI
- Need for coordination and reusable frameworks

Public

What prevents cooperation

The recurring issue is not lack of interest. It is friction in finding, structuring and sustaining partnerships.

Fragmented entry points

Relationship-building depends on individual contacts and local champions

Administrative burden

Companies request better communication and administrative support

Legal complexity

A recurring barrier for research and strategic cooperation

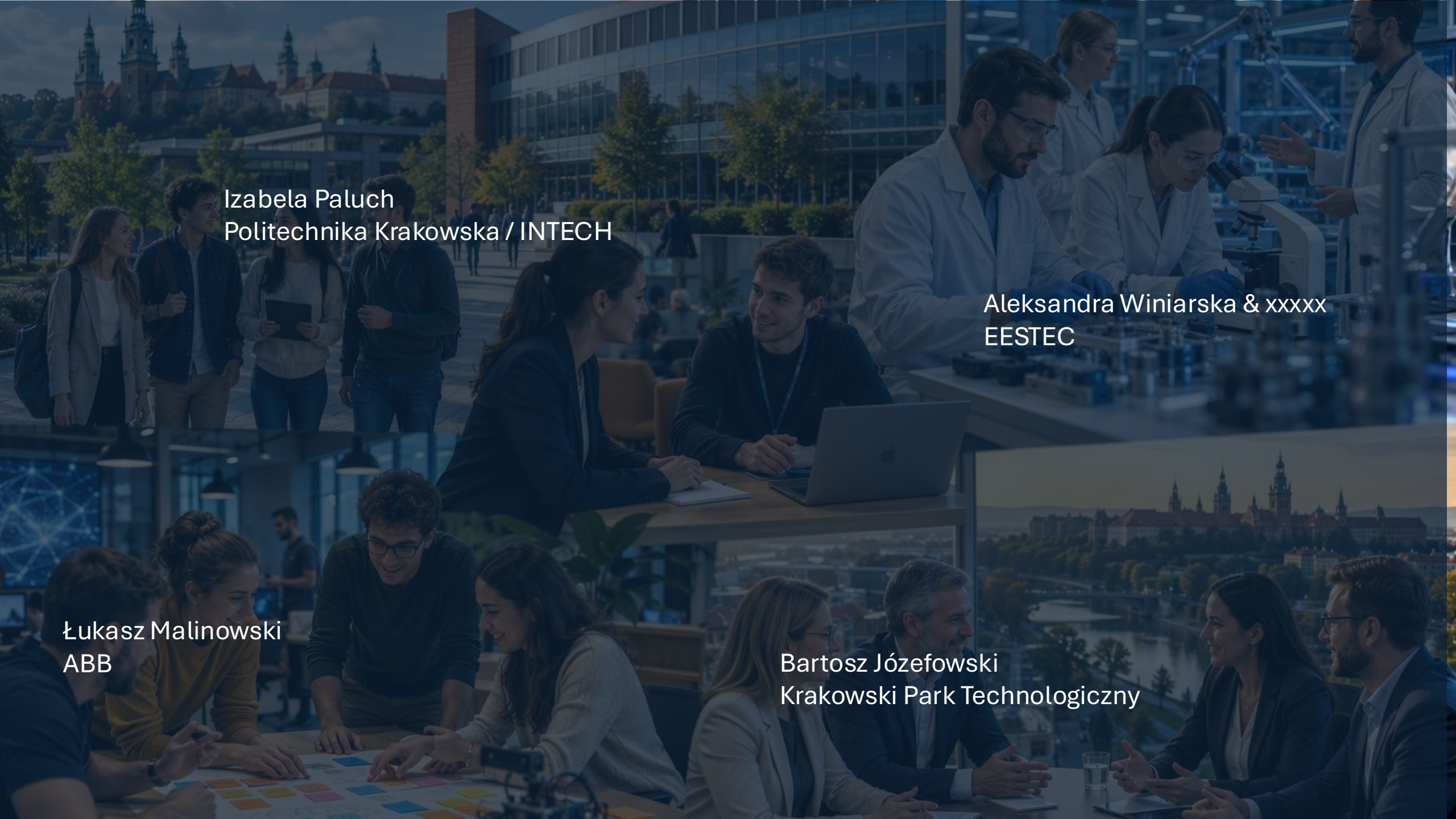
Misaligned objectives

Business timelines and university priorities do not always align

Unclear ROI

Long-term activities are harder to justify without measurable outcomes

Public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Why companies cooperate with universities

1	**Talent pipeline**	Recruitment, candidate databases and early identification of high-potential students
2	**Employer branding**	Visibility through fairs, lectures, clubs, events and sponsored activities
3	**Skills development**	Technical, finance, data, specialist and soft-skills teaching
4	**Innovation & R&D**	Research capability, strategic partnerships and access to specialised talent
5	**CSR & Community**	Social contribution and stronger local education links

Public

Where and how cooperation is organised

Four Kraków universities form the core network; governance is usually HR-led

Most frequently named university partners

- AGH University of Science and Technology
- Cracow University of Economics
- Jagiellonian University
- Cracow University of Technology
- Additional links across Silesia, Warsaw, Wrocław, Łódź, Tri-city and selected institutions outside Poland

Common governance models

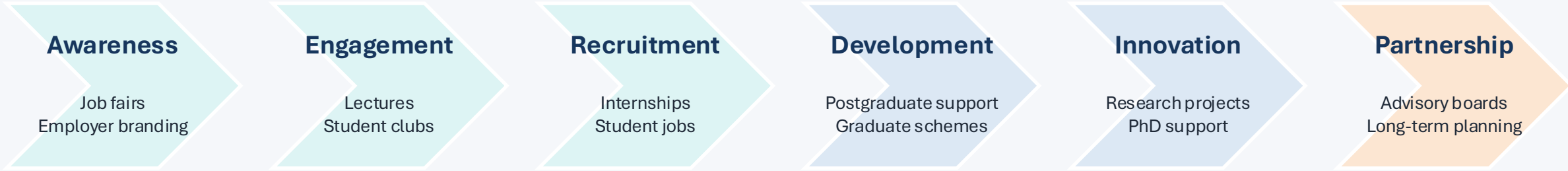
- HR-managed university links
- Subject-matter teams managing relationships directly
- Senior leadership coordination

Markers of higher maturity

- Dedicated role or cooperation group
- Participation in university advisory committees
- Long-term partnerships, co-funding or shared facilities

Public

The cooperation models



Scale of participation

Broad participation

Selective / advanced participation

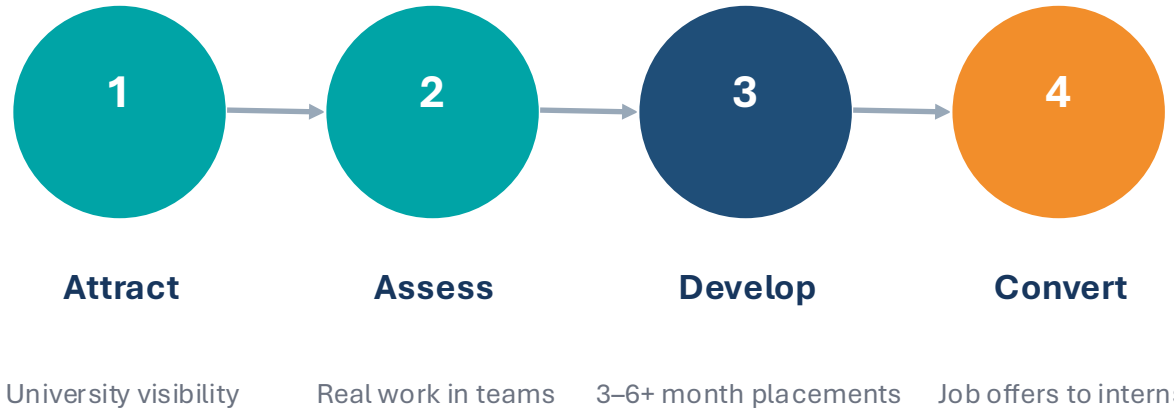
The strongest common denominator is employability: companies use cooperation to attract, assess, develop and convert talent.

Research and strategic cooperation appear as a more advanced layer rather than the default model.

Public

Internships

Programmes are commonly paid, team-based and connected to permanent hiring.



Survey pattern

- Many programmes take 6–20 or more than 20 interns
- Typical duration clusters around 3–6 months or longer
- Most reported programmes pay interns
- Many respondents report job-offer conversion above 30%
- Programme effectiveness is often rated satisfactory or extremely effective

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Effectiveness differs by activity

Hands-on employment and structured teaching receive stronger assessments than broad visibility activities.

Internships	Strong	Direct talent assessment and conversion
Classes & workshops	Strong to mixed	Effective when linked to company expertise and objectives
Student clubs	Mixed	Valuable early access, but coordination quality matters
Job fairs	Mixed	Useful for visibility; several respondents say they could be better
Sponsorship	Mixed	Relationship and branding value, with ROI scrutiny
Research cooperation	Selective	High strategic value where a clear project and governance exist

Public

Recommended ecosystem response

Create a shared operating model that lowers friction and moves more companies from activities to partnerships.

1	**Single front door**	University liaison function with clear routing by faculty, topic and cooperation type
2	**Reusable frameworks**	Standard agreements, IP principles, project templates and governance
3	**Shared learning platform**	Case studies, partner directory, programme calendar and peer exchange
4	**Co-funded pilots**	Match funding for research, PhD, teaching and infrastructure initiatives
5	**Outcome measurement**	Common KPIs for reach, engagement, conversion, capability and innovation

Public