THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN POLAND IN BRIEF

MARCH 2014

1. Education population and language of instruction

In December 2012, the number of young people under 29 years of age was 14,150,000 and accounted for 36.7% of the population. The language of instruction is Polish.

2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

In 2012/13 almost all pupils attended public-sector schools (95%). Most of the funds on education come from the state budget. In line with the Education System Act of 1991, schools can be of two types: public (state) schools, which offer free education within the framework of the core curricula, and non-public schools. The latter can be civic (social), church or private schools. They are financed by fees received from parents. Funds can also come from private enterprises and foundations. Non-public schools with the rights of public schools are eligible for a grant calculated according to the number of pupils, which equals 100% of the average cost of educating those pupils in a public school. Non-public schools in Poland have the right to issue school certificates that are recognized by all other schools and by the universities.

There are two separate ministries in Poland: Ministry of National Education and Ministry of Science and Higher Education. The Ministry of National Education is responsible for nearly the whole system of education, with the exception of higher education which is under the supervision of the Minister of Science and Higher Education.

Vocational schools, which in the past were run by other ministries, are now the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education. At present only a few schools (artistic – only with respect to artistic subjects, as well as correctional institutions) are under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Justice, respectively.

National educational policy is developed and carried out centrally, while the administration of education and the running of schools, pre-school institutions and other educational establishments are decentralized. The responsibility for the administration of public kindergartens, primary schools and gymnasia has been delegated to local authorities (communes). It has become the statutory
responsibility of powiaty (districts) to administer upper secondary schools, artistic and special schools. The provinces (voivodships) have the coordinating function, supervising the implementation of the policy of the Ministry and being responsible for pedagogical supervision.

The inspection of teaching standards in schools comes directly under the Ministry of Education and is represented by a regional administrative body (kuratorium).

The advisory body for the higher education policy in Poland is General Council of Higher Education (Rada Główna Szkolnictwa Wyższego).

3. Pre-primary education

This educational level is regarded as the first level of the school system. It concerns children from 3 years of age. For children aged 3-4 pre-primary education is voluntary and is subject to parental decision.

Before 2011/12 six-year-old children were obliged to complete a year of preparation for primary education. Since 1 September 2011, in relation to the planned lowering of school starting age in 2014, all five year olds are obliged to complete a year of preparation for primary education in kindergartens or other pre-school institutions.

Both private and public schools can be fee-paying, however in the latter case the conditions specified in the legislation apply. Local authorities are responsible for the provision of free of charge classes in public schools in the framework of core curriculum (up to 5 hours a day). Any classes exceeding the 5-hour daily limit and all extracurricular activities and meals are paid for by the parents. Since September 2013 the amount of the fee cannot exceed 1 PLN per each additional hour, including the costs of extracurricular classes. Local authorities can organise support to financially disadvantaged families with young children in various forms, e.g.: full or partial kindergarten fee waivers, or financial and material support.

In 2012/13 there were 20.5thousand pre-school institutions attended by approximately 1 216.5 thousand children. The overall participation rate was 71.6 % for children aged 3-6 (in cities: 84.4 %, in the countryside 54.3 %)

4. Compulsory education

(i) Phases

Children must attend compulsory full-time education from the age of five (compulsory year of pre-primary education) and six years of primary school and three years of lower secondary school. Compulsory part-time education in the school or out-of-school forms lasts from 16 until 18 years of age.

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| Gimnazjum (3-year lower secondary school) | 13-16 years of age |
(ii) Admissions criteria

All pupils attend public schools free of charge. The only admission criterion is the age limit. At present parents can enrol their children in primary school when they reach the age of 6 or 7 years. Starting in September 2014 children born between January and June 2008 will start compulsory education in grade 1 of primary school. Starting in September 2015 all 6-year olds (and remaining 7-year olds) will be enrolled in grade 1 of primary school.

The admission criterion for gimnazjum is the certificate of primary school completion (to obtain this certificate a pupil needs to sit an external test at the end of primary school).

In 2012/13 there were 13,555 primary schools and 7,573 lower secondary schools (gimnazja), attended by approximately 2.16 million and 1.2 million pupils respectively.

(iii) Length of the school day/week/year

The school year comprises around 180 days and is divided into two semesters. The compulsory subjects are in general spread over five days a week.

(iv) Class size/student grouping

In 2012/13, the ratio of pupils to teachers in primary education was 13:1 and in lower secondary education – 11:1. The legislation does not define the standards for the number of students in a class except for the grades 1-3 of primary school where it is recommended that the number of students in a class does not exceed 26 (starting in September 2014 – 25). The main criterion for class composition is age.

One teacher is responsible for all subjects at the first stage of instruction (grades 1-3), with the exception of foreign language teaching (specialist teachers). From the fourth year on, each subject is taught by a specialist teacher.

(v) Curricular control and content

Core curricula for compulsory teaching, created at the central level by groups of experts appointed by the Ministry of Education, are the same for all pupils. For the first stage of primary school the curricula for integrated teaching apply, for the second stage of primary school and gimnazjum there are curricula for separate subjects.

The schools (teachers) can choose the textbooks from a list approved by the Ministry of Education. They are free to decide the teaching and assessment methods, introduce innovative teaching methods and choose curricula which are approved by the school head. They can also develop their own curricula – based on core curricula – and submit them to their school head for approval.

Compulsory subjects:

- Stage 1 (grades 1-3, primary school): early school education (including: mother tongue education, social education, natural sciences education, mathematical education, technology education, foreign language education, education in music and arts, computer education, physical education).

- Stage 2 (grades 4-6, primary school): Polish language, History and civics, Modern foreign languages, Mathematics, Natural science, Music/Art, Technology, Computer classes, Physical education, lessons with class tutor.

- Stage 3 (grades 1-3 of the gimnazjum): Polish language, History, Civic education, 2 Modern foreign languages, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography,
(vi) Assessment, progression and qualifications

The assessment of the knowledge and skills of pupils throughout the school year is not standardised in Poland and remains at the discretion of teachers provided the internal school assessment system is observed. Assessment is carried out on the basis of regular written and oral tests. The results obtained at the end of each semester must be approved by the teachers’ council of each school.

Pupils who obtain unsatisfactory results can repeat a year if the teachers’ council decides so.

The external evaluation system in compulsory education consists of the following external standardised tests and examinations:

**At the end of the 6-year primary school (age 13)** – general, obligatory test with no selection function; the entry for the test enables pupils to start education in the *gimnazjum*; it provides pupils, parents as well as both schools, i.e. the primary school and the *gimnazjum*, with information about the level of achievements of the pupils.

**At the end of the 3-year lower secondary school, *gimnazjum* (age 16)** – general, obligatory examination. Starting in 2012 this exam is adjusted to the new core curriculum. The exam is based on the requirements defined in the core curriculum and not, as before, on separate regulations. This examination consists of three parts: Humanities (History, Civic education and the Polish language), Mathematics and Natural Sciences (including Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Geography) and a Modern Foreign Language.

The results of the exam together with the final assessment of the pupils’ performance determine the admission to upper-secondary schools.

All external tests and examinations are organised by agencies – 8 Regional Examination Boards supported and supervised by the Central Examination Board.

### 5. Post-compulsory education/upper secondary and post-secondary level

#### (i) Types of education

Compulsory part-time education in the school or out-of-school forms lasts from 16 until 18 years of age (in line with the Constitution of the Republic of Poland).

| **Liceum ogólnokształcące** (general upper secondary school) | 16-19 years of age |
| **Technikum** (technical upper secondary school) | 16-20 years of age |
| **Zasadnicza szkoła zawodowa** (basic vocational school) | 16-19 years of age |
| **Szkoła policealna** (post-secondary non-tertiary school) | 19-21 years of age (very rarely 20) |

In 2012/13 there were 2 352 general upper secondary schools for youth with 580 000 pupils, 1978 technical upper secondary schools for youth with around 520 000 pupils and 1 378 basic vocational schools for youth with 184 000 pupils. In the same school year there were 2 735 post-secondary schools attended by 323 000 students.
(ii) Admissions criteria

The number of points indicated on the gimnazjum leaving certificate (based on the results achieved in specific subjects and other achievements) including the points received at the gimnazjum examination decides about the pupils' admission to an upper secondary school.

The detailed admission rules are defined by each post-gimnazjum school which opens admissions to new pupils.

(iii) Curricular control and content

At the level of upper secondary education there are curricula for separate subjects. The Ministry of Education defines core curricula for general education for each subject in all types of school. Subjects can be taught at basic and advanced (extended) level (a pupil can choose between 2 and 4 subjects which he/she follows with a view to taking the Matura examination including at least one of the following subjects: History, Geography, Biology, Chemistry or Physics). Teachers can choose the textbooks from a list approved by the ministry. They are free to decide the teaching and assessment methods, introduce innovative teaching methods and choose curricula which are approved by the school head. They can also develop their own curricula – based on core curricula – and submit them to their school head for approval.

Core subjects (included in outline timetables):

**General upper secondary school:** Polish language, 2 foreign languages, History, Civic education, Culture studies, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Introduction to entrepreneurship, Information technology, Physical education, Education for safety, lessons for class tutor, subjects for additional subject teaching envisaged in the curriculum at advanced (extended) level.

**Technikum:** Polish language, 2 modern foreign languages, History, Civic education, Cultural studies, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Introduction to entrepreneurship, Information technology, Physical education, Education for safety, lessons for class tutor, subjects at advanced level, theoretical vocational training, practical vocational training.

**Basic vocational school:** Polish language, modern foreign language, History, Civic education, Mathematics, Physics, Geography, Biology, Chemistry, Introduction to Entrepreneurship, IT, Physical Education, Education for safety, theoretical vocational training, practical vocational training, lessons for class tutor.

(iv) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Assessment at this level of education is similar to the arrangements in compulsory education.

A pupil is promoted to a higher grade if he/she has received "acceptable" marks or above for all compulsory subjects at the end of the school year. In the case of one "unsatisfactory" mark the pupil can take an exam in this subject. A pupil who is not promoted and has not passed the exam has to repeat the same grade. (There is also a possibility of a conditional promotion of a pupil with one "unsatisfactory" mark only once during the educational cycle upon the consent of the teachers' council).

At the end of the course, all schools (except for the zasadnicze szkoły zawodowe) organize final/matriculation examinations (egzamin maturalny). The liceum ogólnokształcące, and the technikum may issue świadectwo maturalne (a certificate for those who sat for and successfully completed the final examination, which is required for admission to higher education). The upper secondary school leaving examinations are national external exams.
The *matura* examination (*egzamin maturalny*), entitling pupils for admission to higher education is made up of two parts: external written (prepared and assessed by Regional Examination Commissions) and internal oral (assessed by school teachers).

Starting 2015 the matura examination will be based on the requirements (outcomes) described in the core curriculum rather than on examination standards outlined in separate legislation.

The vocational qualification examination, called *egzamin potwierdzający kwalifikacje w zawodzie* assesses the pupil’s knowledge and skills in the scope of a particular qualification defined in the core curriculum for vocational education. The vocational qualification examination is carried out in the area of one qualification. The number of exams for a given vocation depends on the number of particular qualifications, in fact it includes from one up to three separate examinations for a given vocation.

The examination consists of two parts – written and practical. The written part is carried out in a form of a test, while the practical one includes a task which tests practical skills in the area of a given qualification in the particular vocation. Upon receipt of certificates confirming all the qualifications in the given vocation and upon completing the required level of education a graduate or an adult learner obtains a diploma confirming vocational qualifications. The vocational qualification examination is open to students in basic vocational schools, upper secondary technical schools and learners in post-secondary school as well as graduates of basic vocational schools, upper secondary technical schools and post-secondary schools and to persons who completed a vocational qualification course.

All tests and examinations are organised by agencies – 8 Regional Examination Boards supported and supervised by the Central Examination Board.


(i) Types of institution

The following types of state higher education institutions can be found: universities, technical HEIs, agricultural HEIs, HEIs for Economics, pedagogical HEIs, medical universities/academies, schools/universities of maritime studies, universities/academies of physical education, schools/academies of art, theological HEIs, military higher education institutions, government service higher education institutions. All the following types of HEIs may have the status of university or non-university institutions depending on whether at least one of their organisational units has the right to confer PhD degree. HEIs with no such rights have a non-university (professional) status.

The following types of study are distinguished by the Act of 27 July 2005 'Law on Higher Education': full-time and part-time studies. The full-time studies are defined as the basic type of studies, unless the school's statutes decide otherwise. Full-time studies at state Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are free of charge, with the exception of repeating classes required in the case of courses failed by a student.

In the academic year 2012/13 there were 453 HEIs in Poland (both public and non-public) and 1 677 000 higher education students.

(ii) Access

The final upper secondary examination certificate (*świadectwo maturalne*) is required by all institutions for admission to higher education. Admission is based on the results of *egzamin maturalny* examination. Additional admission requirements depend on the type of institution or faculty (e.g. predisposition tests in the field of arts and sports).
(iii) Qualifications

The first cycle studies (Bachelor) – according to the Act of 27 July 2005 'Law on Higher Education' – last from 6 to 7 semesters and finish with the vocational qualification diploma and the title of licencjat or inżynier which gives access to the job market or to the second cycle studies and obtaining the title of magister or equivalent. Only full-time daytime studies at state HEIs are free of charge.

Uniform (long cycle) master degree studies (in e.g.: medicine, law, psychology) at universities and other university-type institutions last from 9 to 12 semesters.

Second cycle studies and long cycle studies (Master) finish with the dyplom ukończenia studiów wyższych (the university higher education diploma). Students are awarded the title of magister, magister sztuki, magister inżynier, magister inżynier architekt, magister inżynier architekt krajobrazu, magister inżynier pożarnictwa or lekarz, lekarz dentysta, lekarz weterynarii, magister pielęgniarstwa, magister położnictwa, magister farmacji depending on the field of study they followed. Master degree holders can apply for access to doctoral (third cycle) studies.

7. Special needs

Special education is an integral part of the Polish education system. This is reflected in the legislation, which is common to both mainstream and special education.

Children can be qualified for suitable forms of special education on the basis of the opinion issued after the psychological, pedagogical and medical examination, carried out by specialists from psychological and educational services centres or external experts,

Approximately half of children with special educational needs statements are taught in separate schools or special classes in mainstream schools and the other half – in integration and mainstream schools and classes. Children with special educational needs statements account for 2.7% of all pupils in primary schools and 4.3% in lower secondary schools (2012/13 school year). Enrolment of a child with SEN in a mainstream school is possible subject to the recommendation given by the competent authority and/or the parents’ consent.

8. Teachers

Teachers must have a higher education qualification. The type of training required depends on the stage of education.

1. Pre-primary and primary education level: the teacher is required to graduate from minimum first cycle studies with a degree of licencjat (equivalent of BA).

2. Lower and upper secondary education level: a degree of magister (equivalent of MA) is required.

Professional training is also required at all the levels of education. The training preparing for the teaching of the first subject consists of three compulsory modules including subject-related training, psychological and pedagogical training and methodological training.

The Teachers’ Charter, specifies four categories in the teaching career:
- trainee teacher;
- contract teacher;
- appointed teacher
- chartered teacher.
Chartered teachers with an outstanding record may also be awarded the title of honorary school education professor.

Trainee and contract teachers have the status of contractual employees (on the basis of the Teachers’ Charter); in the case of trainee teachers the contract is offered for a limited period of employment, in the case of contract teachers – for an unlimited period. Appointed and chartered teachers enjoy the status of career civil servants (also on the basis of the Teachers’ Charter).

In the school year 2012/13 there were approximately 479 000 teachers in Poland (in full-time equivalents), of whom 3.3% were trainee teachers, 17.0% contract teachers, 27.1% appointed teachers and 50.5% chartered teachers. Teachers with no defined level in the teaching career accounted for 2.3% of all teachers.

Academic teachers are subject to separate legislation.

Information provided by the Polish Eurydice Unit.

For more detailed information, you may consult EURYPEDIA which provides descriptions of educational systems and policies in the Eurydice network countries: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurypedia.