
POLAND

MAY 2006

1. Education population and language of instruction

In 2005 (reference date: June 30, 2005), the number of the population aged 29 or under was 12 573 (36.2 % of the total population). Approximately 50 % of them were in education. There were about 4 201 young people of compulsory education age. German is the official language of instruction.

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

In 2004/05 almost all pupils attended public-sector schools (98%). Most of the funds come from the state budget. The administration, organization and decisions relating to the use of financial resources by schools are the subject of consultation between the school and the body running the school, i.e. local authorities (*gminy*) – in case of kindergartens, primary and lower secondary schools, and district authorities (*powiaty*) – in case of post-gymnasium schools. The inspection of teaching standards in schools comes directly under the ministry of education and is represented by a regional administrative body (*kuratorium*).

3. Pre-primary education

This educational level is regarded as the first level of the school system. It concerns children from 3 to 6 years of age. As of 2004/05 six-year-old children are obliged to complete a year of preparation for primary education (under municipal responsibility) called '0 grade'. The classes are attached either to kindergartens or primary-schools.

In the school year 2004/05, before the change in the legislation, as many as 98.1 % of six-year-old children of this age took advantage of the provision.

Both private and public schools can be fee-paying, however in the latter case the conditions specified in the legislation apply.

In 2004/05 there were 17 299 pre-school institutions (both kindergartens and pre-school classes attached to primary schools), attended by 831 923 children.

4. Compulsory education

(i) Phases

<i>Klasa zerowa</i> (pre-school '0' grade)	6 years of age
<i>Szkoła podstawowa</i> (6-year primary school)	7-13 years of age Stage 1 – integrated teaching, 7-10 years of age Stage 2 – teaching based on separate subjects, 10-13 years of age
<i>Gimnazjum</i> (3-year lower secondary school)	13-16 years of age Stage 3 – teaching based on separate subjects

(ii) Admissions criteria

All pupils attend school free of charge. The only admission criterion is the age limit (for '0' grade – to have reached 6 years of age during the calendar year in which compulsory education starts, for primary school – to have reached 7 years of age). The admission criteria for gymnasium is the certificate of completion the primary school (to obtain this certificate a pupil needs to sit a test at the end of primary school).

Parents are obliged to register their children in the school or in kindergartens ('0' grade) nearest to their home.

(iii) Length of school day/week/year

The school year is divided into two semesters. It comprises around 185 days between September and June. The compulsory subjects (a maximum of 23 forty-five-minute lessons for Stage 1, and a maximum of 28 to a maximum of 31 – for Stage 2 and 3) are in general spread over five days a week.

(iv) Class size/student grouping

In 2003/04, the ratio of pupils to teachers in primary education was 13:1. The average class had 20 pupils. The legislation does not define the standards for the number of students in a class. The main criterion for class composition is age.

Only one teacher is responsible for all subjects in the first stage of instruction, with the exception of foreign language teaching (specialist teachers) in those schools in which finances permit this type of teaching. From the fourth year on, each subject is taught by a specialist teacher.

(v) Curriculum control and content

Core curricula for compulsory teaching 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 gymnasium there are curricula for separate subjects and cross-curricular themes. 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 innovation teaching methods and choose curricula (from a list approved by the ministry of education). They can also develop their own curricula – based on core curricula – and submit them to the ministry for approval.

(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 totally at the discretion of teachers. Assessments are made 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 are required to 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 6-year primary school (age 13) – general, obligatory **test** with no selection function; to enter for the test enables pupils to start education in the gymnasium; it provides pupils, parents as well as both schools, i.e. the primary school and the gymnasium, with information about the level of achievements of the pupils. The skills required in core curricula are examined. It was conducted for the first time in 2002.

At the end of 3-year lower secondary school, gymnasium (age 16) – general, obligatory **examination**, the results of which are indicated on the gymnasium leaving certificate. This examination checks abilities, skills and knowledge in the field of humanities and science. It was conducted for the first time in 2002. The results of the test together with the final assessment of the pupils' performance determine the admission to the upper-secondary schools.

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

In 2004/05 there were 14 765 primary schools and 6980 gymnasia, attended by 2 723 661 and 1 648 677 pupils respectively.

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

(i) Types of education

<i>Liceum ogólnokształcące</i> (general upper secondary school)	16-19 years of age
<i>Liceum profilowane</i> (specialised upper secondary school)	16-19 years of age
<i>Technikum</i> (technical secondary school)	16-20 years of age
<i>Zasadnicza szkoła zawodowa</i> (basic vocational school)	16-18/19 years of age
<i>Uzupełniające liceum ogólnokształcące</i> (supplementary general secondary school)	18/19-20/21 years of age
<i>Technikum uzupełniające</i> (supplementary technical secondary school)	18/19-21/22 years of age
<i>Szkoła policealna</i> (post-secondary school)	19-21 years of age (very rarely 20)

As of September 2004 two types of schools have been introduced: supplementary general secondary schools and supplementary technical secondary schools.

(ii) Admissions criteria

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

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

(iii) Curriculum control and content

The ministry of education defines core curricula for general education for each subject and cross-curricular theme in all types of school. 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 (from a list approved by the ministry of education). They can also develop their own curricula – based on core curricula – and submit them to the ministry for approval.

(iv) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Assessment at this level of education is similar to the arrangements in compulsory education. At the end of the course, all schools (except for the *szkoły zasadnicze*) organize final examinations (*matura*). The *liceum ogólnokształcące*, the *liceum profilowane*, the *liceum uzupełniające* and the *technikum* may issue *świadectwo dojrzałości* (a certificate for those who sat for and successfully completed the final examination, which is required for admission to higher education). The *szkoły zasadnicze* issue *świadectwo ukończenia szkoły zasadniczej* (a leaving certificate that gives students access to the job market). Post-secondary schools prepare their students for professional life.

In 2004/2005 a new system of external standardised general examinations was implemented at the end of upper secondary schools. The new ***matura* examination**, entitling pupils for admission to higher education is made up of two parts: external written (prepared and assessed by external examination commissions) and internal oral (prepared and assessed by school teachers). In May 2005 it was conducted for the first time for all pupils.

In 2004 a new system of external standardised vocational examinations, called '***egzamin zawodowy***' was implemented for the first time in basic vocational schools. It will be introduced into the technical upper-secondary schools and post-secondary schools in 2006. The exam consists of two parts: written, which examines the knowledge and abilities connected with a specific job and running business activity, and a practical one, which examines the skills necessary to perform the job.

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

In 2004/05 there were 2 553 general upper secondary schools with 747 716 pupils, 5 611 technical and vocational upper secondary schools with 815 547 pupils and 1 845 basic vocational schools with 239 239 pupils. In the same school year there were 3 476 post-secondary schools attended by 291 223 students.

6. Higher education

(i) Structure

The following types of state higher education institutions can be found: universities, technical universities, agricultural academies, schools of economics, teacher education schools, medical academies, maritime schools, academies of physical education, artistic schools, theological schools, higher vocational schools, military schools, and internal affairs schools. There also exist non-state higher education institutions including higher vocational schools.

The following types of study are distinguished by the new law (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 HEIs are free of charge, with the exception of repeating classes required in the case of courses failed by a student.

(ii) Access

The final examination certificate (*świadectwo dojrzałości*) is required by all institutions for admission to higher education. Admission is based on the results of *egzamin dojrzałości* 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

Higher vocational education (the first cycle studies – according to the Act of 27 July 2005 ‘Law on Higher Education’) lasts from 3 to 4 years and finishes with the vocational qualification diploma and the title of *licencjat* or *inżynier* which gives access to the job market or to extended higher studies (the second cycle studies) and obtaining the title *magister* or equivalent.

Uniform master degree studies at the universities and other university-type institutions last from 4.5 to 6 years. They 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*, or *lekarz*, *lekarz dentyista*, *lekarz weterynarii*, *magister pielęgniarstwa*, *magister położnictwa*, depending on the field of studies they have followed. They can apply to do a doctorate (the third cycle studies).

In the process of harmonising Polish higher education with the recommendations of the Bologna process the following changes have been introduced:

- two – cycle studies (described above),
- supplement to a diploma (as of January 2005 compulsory in all HEI)
- the system of ensuring quality and issuing accreditation (State Accreditation Committee – *Państwowa Komisja Akredytacyjna*).

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

In the academic year 2004/05 there were 427 HEIs in Poland (both public and non-public) and 1 926 100 higher education students.

7. Special Needs

Special education is an integral part of the Polish education system. This is reflected in legislation, which is common to both mainstream and special education. Most children with special educational needs are taught in separate schools or special classes in mainstream schools (1.78 % of all pupils in compulsory education). Integration is subject to the favourable recommendation given by the competent authority and/or the parents.

8. Teachers

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

- I. Primary education level: the teacher is required to graduate from the first or second cycle studies (they last 3 or 5 years, teachers are awarded the titles of *licencjat* or *magister*), or from teacher training colleges (they last 3 years and finish with a diploma).
- II. Lower secondary education level: a degree of *licencjat* or *magister* is required.
- III. Upper secondary education level: a *magister* degree is required.

The completion of pedagogical training is also required at all the levels of education.

The amended Teachers’ Charter, adopted on the 18th of February 2000, has introduced 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.

In the school year 2002/03 there were 556 760 full-time teachers in Poland, of whom 31 930 were trainee teachers (5.7 %), 78 030 contract teachers (14.0 %), 403 200 appointed teachers (72.4 %), 40 950 chartered teachers (7.4 %) and 2 650 other teachers (0.5 %).

As of 2004 the teacher training standards have been modified. The Ministry regulation introduced the changes for students commencing their teacher training in September 2004. These changes concern the increased number of hours of professional training, the requirement to be competent to teach two subjects, to acquire ICT competencies and the command of a foreign language (B2, B2+ Common European Framework).

9. Current reforms and priorities

The new government programme in the field of education has been prepared and it proposes the following:

- Promoting pre-primary education by establishing new forms of pre-primary education in addition to the current net of kindergartens and pre-school classes attached to the primary schools. It is planned that the ministry will approve of the common core assumptions for the curricula in the elementary education.
- Lowering the start of the education in primary school: it is planned that six-year olds will go to the first class of primary school. This change is influenced by the increasingly fast psychomotor development of children and is in accordance with the solutions applied in most of the European countries.
- Including 5 year olds into compulsory pre-primary preparation for the school. The consequence of changing the age of starting compulsory primary education (see above) is an obligation to prepare five year olds for the primary school.
- Introducing English lessons in the first class of primary school and reaching European standards in this field. The demand for language teachers has been calculated. The proposals of new regulations increasing the number of language teachers have been prepared and the team amending the relevant core curricula has been called up. The new curricula are to contain the extra hours of English from the beginning of primary school.
- Regulating the market of textbooks and lowering their prices. The new rules for textbook market are to be established and the prices of the textbooks are to be lowered.
- Enhancing the quality and level of education in the rural areas. Removing the barriers in access to education, culture and sport for the rural communities will contribute to building an open society. The activities of The Programme of Development of Education in the Rural Areas will enable the residents of these areas to compete in domestic and foreign job markets.
- Creating conditions for training and enhancing qualifications in out-of-school forms for the adults. The regulations currently prepared lead to increasing the number of adults in continuing education. The conditions and definition of distance learning have been determined for the first time.
- Adapting the documents confirming qualifications to European standards. It is planned that a supplement to vocational diplomas will be introduced.

- In the area of finances, teachers' salaries are to grow and the wages for the teachers working during oral final secondary exam (*Matura*) are to be introduced.
- Establishing national institute of education responsible for matters connected with the development of attitudes and values of children and youth. It is planned that the institute will be a public institution with consultative, research and promotional activities in the field of children and youth education.
- Creating a coherent system of financial support for children and youth. A new governmental programme has been prepared: Activating and Supporting Local Governments and Non-governmental Organizations in Providing Financial Support for Pupils in the Field of Education. The draft of another programme whose aim is to give equal access to education for pupils from the families of former workers of state agricultural companies has also been drawn up.
- Introducing amendments and regulations to the Act of 27 July 2005 'Law on Education'. This act is a comprehensive regulation on the system of higher education in Poland and aims at the improvement of functioning of HEIs, the improvement of access to higher education, provision of high quality teaching and making the Polish higher education system compatible with the other European HE systems.
- Including teacher training colleges into the system of higher education. The proposed change is to regulate the position of teacher training colleges, which would enable the colleges to take advantage of the status possessed by the HEIs.

The drafts of some of the acts and regulations enforcing the proposed changes have already been prepared.

For more detailed information on education systems in Europe, you may consult the EURYDICE data base, EURYBASE (<http://www.eurydice.org>)