

## UNESCO National Commission Country Report Template

Under the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference ([WHEC2022](#))

[Section for Higher Education](#) | Division for Education 2030

### **Higher Education Report: [Poland]**

UNESCO National Commission in alliance with the Ministry of Education and Science

Warsaw, 31/03/2022

#### **Abstract**

The country report provides relevant information on the higher education system in Poland, which is based on the Act of 20 July 2018 - Law on Higher Education and Science. Universities constitute the core of the higher education and science system in Poland.

The report explores the legal framework of the higher education institutions' organizational structure and the offered degree programs.

It presents the main goals of the National Science Policy, which is a strategic document indicating priorities in the system of higher education and science. The cooperation and consultations with representatives of the academic community and science as well as higher education system stakeholders is emphasised in terms of shaping policy together with the role of the National Science Congress.

The challenges refer to the European Education Area Strategic Framework 2030 and the pivotal role of the following entities: the National Science Centre Poland, the National Centre for Research and Development, and the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange. Among challenges, one has to mention COVID-19 impact on higher education's operational dimension, responsiveness to changes, and promotion of participation.

The recommendations are linked with the ongoing COVID-19 and emergencies, shaping responsible future research framework and public and private cooperation.

## Content

Abstract .....	1
Content.....	2
Acronyms.....	3
Presentation .....	4
Current situation of higher education.....	5
1.1 Historical enrolment and graduation rates .....	5
1.2 Quantity and types of higher education institutions .....	6
1.3 Legal and institutional framework of higher education.....	7
1.4. State Science Policy .....	10
Current challenges in higher education .....	11
Challenge 1 .....	11
Challenge 2 .....	11
Challenge 3 .....	11
Challenge 4 .....	12
Towards 2030 and beyond: recommendations for the future .....	12
Recommendation 1 .....	12
Recommendation 2 .....	12
Recommendation 3 .....	12
References.....	14
Annexes .....	17
Annex 1.....	17
Act of 20 July 2018, The Law on Higher Education and Science, English translation (pdf file) .....	17
Annex 2.....	17
Ustawa z dnia 20 lipca 2018 r. Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce, consolidated text, Polish Official Journal 2022 item 574, 583 (pdf file) .....	17

## **Acronyms**

HEIs Higher Education institutions

HE Higher Education

LHEaS Law on Higher Education and Science

NCN National Science Centre Poland NCBIR National Centre for Research and Development

NAWA Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange

PAC Polish Accreditation Committee

## **Presentation**

The report was prepared by the Polish National Commission for UNESCO in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Research of Poland. In the preparation of the report prof. Piotr Stec, expert in legal framework for higher education was involved. The structure of the report corresponds with the required content given in the template.

## Current situation of higher education

### 1.1 Historical enrolment and graduation rates

Figure 1 Number of enrolments and graduated in years 2010-2020

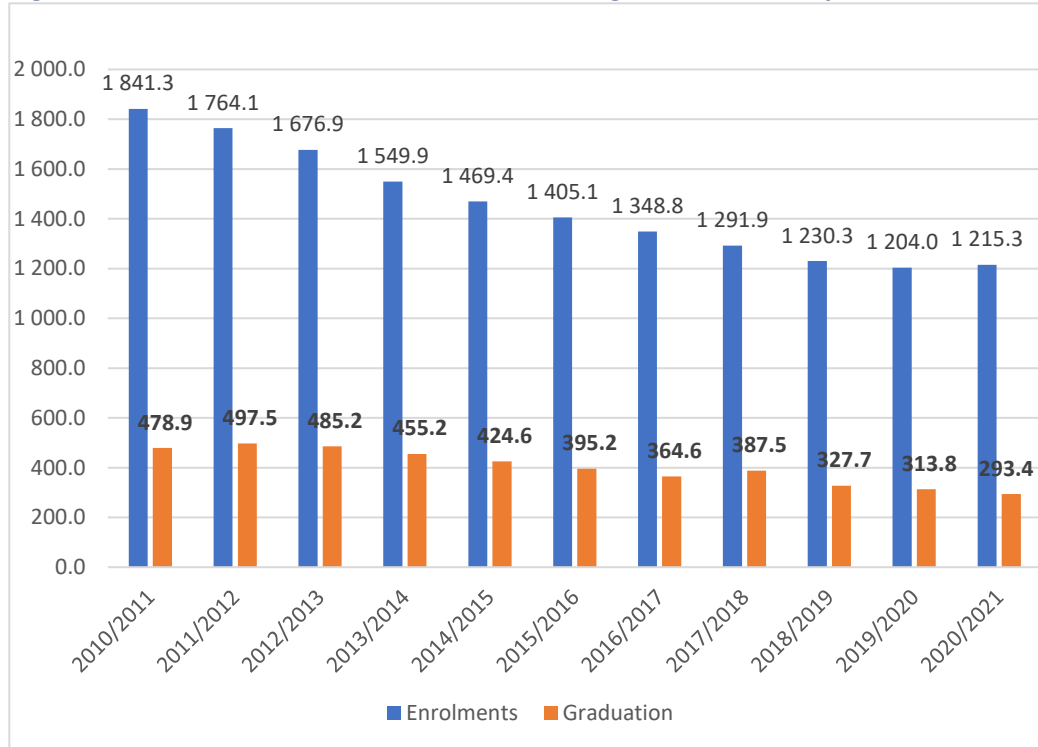
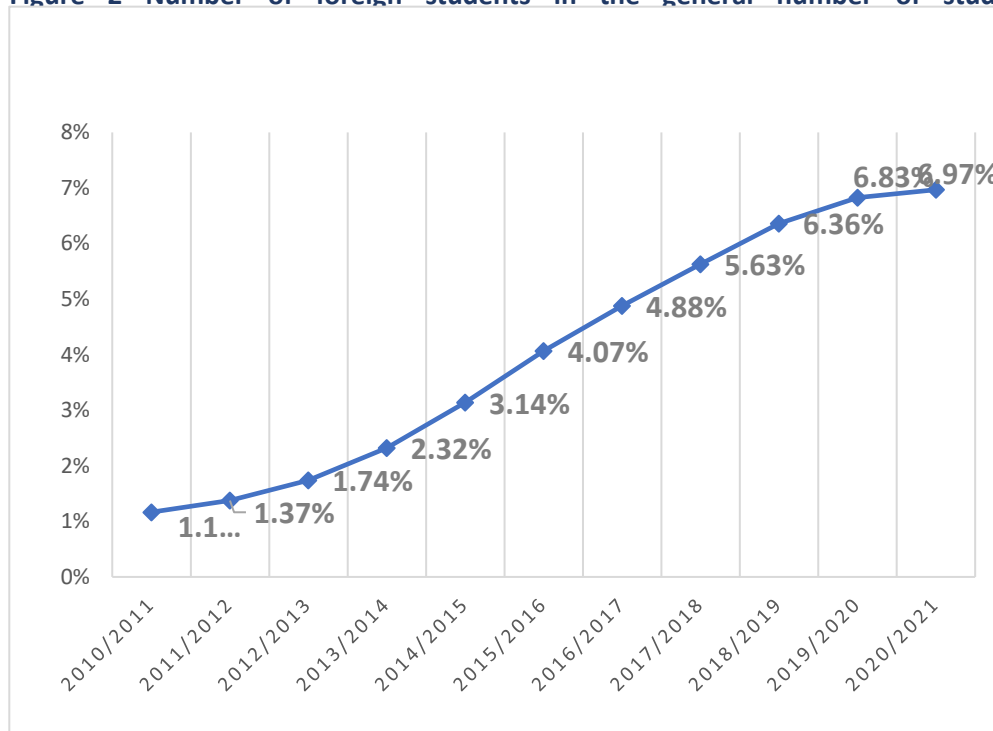


Figure 2 Number of foreign students in the general number of students



## 1.2 Quantity and types of higher education institutions

Universities constitute the core of the higher education and science system in Poland. Universities can operate as both public and private entities. Universities are autonomous in their activities, having their own legal personality and acting as independent entities that execute public tasks.

According to the data from the Integrated Information System on Science and Higher Education Pol-on, (as of 25.02.2022) the number of Higher Education Institutions (hereinafter: HEIs) in the country is 352, including:

- 131 public universities (97 academic and 34 vocational),
- 221 non-public HEIs with the status of operating HEIs (18 academic institutions, 203 non-university institutions). Pontifical universities' right to confer secular and religious degrees is recognized by the State through a special agreement with the Catholic Church, and other religious communities have the right to run seminaries conferring degrees in theology.

Supervision over public universities is exercised by:

- the Minister of Education and Science - 92 institutions
- the Minister of Infrastructure - 2 institutions
- the Minister of Culture and National Heritage – 19 institutions
- the Minister of National Defence - 5 institutions
- the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration - 2 institutions
- the Minister of Justice - 1 institution
- the Minister of Health - 10 institutions

In addition to universities, the system of higher education and science in Poland consists of the following:

- the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences
- scientific institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences (institutes act as separate entities)
- research institutes
- international scientific institutes
- federations of universities and other entities functioning in the system of higher education
- other entities conducting mainly independent and continuous scientific activity.

### **1.3 Legal and institutional framework of higher education**

Act of 20 July 2018. - Law on Higher Education and Science (Dz.U./Polish Official Journal of Law of 2021, item 478, as amended) (hereinafter: LHEaS) and the Act of 3 July 2018. - Introductory provisions of the Act - Law on Higher Education and Science (Dz.U. Polish Official Journal of 2018, item 1669, as amended).

The new law was created with the participation of stakeholders and after a widespread debate on the future of the educational system.

The LHEaS applies to both public and non-public higher education institutions. However, the Act does not apply to seminaries administered by churches and denominational organisations, with the exception of the Catholic University of Lublin (Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski), unless an agreement between the Polish government and church authorities provides otherwise.

A public higher education institution shall be established by a governmental authority. A public university-type higher education institution shall be established by a new legislative act, and a public non-university higher education institution shall be established by a regulation issued by the Minister of Education and Science. This type of regulation must indicate the name of the proposed higher education institution, its seat, and the assets that shall be endowed upon it.

A merger of existing public higher education institutions, research institutes, or institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences constitutes a specific method of establishing a public higher education. However, a statute must first be enacted by the Minister of Education and Science before such an institution can be established.

A private higher education institution shall be established by its founder, i.e. a natural person or a corporate body other than a local government or a State or local governmental entity. A non-public higher education institution may also be established through the merger of two non-public higher education institutions. The institution is then entered into the register of non-public higher education institutions by way of an administrative decision at the request of the founder. The register is maintained by the Minister. An application for the entry of a higher education institution into the register shall be accompanied by an application for permission to establish degree programmes in a specific field, along with the relevant level and profile. The Minister shall consult the Polish Accreditation Committee (PAC). A non-public higher education institution shall acquire legal personality from its entry in the register.

An entry in the register of non-public higher education institutions is valid for six years. Between twelve and six months before the expiry of the entry, the founder may request an extension of the entry's validity. The Minister, having consulted PAC, shall make a determination to either extend the validity of the entry for an indefinite period of time or refuse an extension. The Minister issues an administrative decision to this effect. Failure to submit a request for an extension of an entry's validity within the above-mentioned deadline shall result in the commencement of proceedings for the liquidation of the higher education institution.

Higher education institutions are free to make decisions with respect to their internal governance, including organisational structure. The statute defines units which may be created within the institution, while the organisational structure of a higher education institution, including the division of tasks, is laid down by the rector in internal organisational regulations. The managerial functions and posts, as well as the rules for appointment, are set out in the statute.

A higher education institution may conduct its activities in the place of its seat or within the area of the metropolitan union (regional association of municipalities). The activity may also be conducted in the place where the institution has set up its branch office. A branch office shall be established and shut down by the rector, with the establishment of degree programmes in a given field, level, and profile in the branch office requiring the consent of the Minister on each occasion. The branch office may provide the same field of study (at a given level and profile) with the same name or programme and containing the same learning outcomes assigned to the same discipline as in the main office.

Organisational regulation is the key act regulating the organisation and internal structure of a higher education institution. It shall be adopted by the rector in accordance with the procedure laid down in the statutes of the higher education institution. A detailed division of tasks within the internal structure of a higher education institution depends on the provisions of this act.

The Polish higher education system consists of universities and universities of applied sciences.

An academic higher education institution is a higher education institution which conducts scientific activities and has the scientific category A+, A or B+ in at least one scientific or artistic discipline. Academic higher education institutions shall provide BA programmes, MA programmes, or long-cycle programmes and doctoral schools.

A university of applied sciences is a higher education institution which provides education taking into account the needs of the socio-economic environment, and which does not fulfil the criteria of an academic higher education institution. It provides BA programmes and may also provide MA programmes, long-cycle programmes and specialist education (e.g. the university's own diplomas at associate level).

Universities of applied sciences have been entrusted with the extremely important task of providing education at the level of practical skills, which is a very important component when



adjusting the model of higher education to the needs defined by the labour market. Universities of applied sciences should take advantage of their location and close contacts with the socio-economic environment in order to actively participate in the economic development of the region and the country. Through the proper development of academic programmes, these institutions should quickly and flexibly respond to the needs of the country's economic development and the labour market, providing their graduates with beneficial conditions for professional employment, taking into account the assumptions of the region's development strategy.

A higher education institution shall have a legal personality and autonomy pursuant to the rules laid down in the Act on Public Higher Education Institutions.

The bodies of a public higher education institution shall consist of the board, the rector and the senate; a non-public higher education institution shall consist of the rector and the senate. The statutes of a higher education institution may also provide for other institutional bodies.

A higher education institution shall provide degree programmes in a given field, level and profile. A higher education institution shall assign a field of study to at least one discipline.

A higher education institution may provide degree programmes in co-operation with a body which confers authorisation to practise a profession, a body conducting examination proceedings for authorisation to practise a profession, a body of a professional self-government, a business organisation or a registration body. The rules of cooperation in the provision of degree programmes shall be laid down in a separate agreement. A higher education institution may provide dual programmes, which are programmes of a practical profile conducted with the participation of an employer. The organisation of programmes shall be laid down in a written agreement. A higher education institution may provide joint degree programmes with another higher education institution, an institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a research institute, an international institute, a foreign higher education institution or a scientific institution. The rules of cooperation are specified in an agreement concluded in writing.

Degree programmes are provided:

- at the level of BA studies, MA studies, long-cycle master programmes
- in the form of full-time and part-time studies,
- on a practical profile where more than half of the ECTS credits are allocated to courses developing practical skills, or on a general academic profile where more than half of the ECTS credits are allocated to courses related to research activities conducted at the university.

Regarding full-time studies:

- BA studies shall last at least 6 semesters, and if the curriculum includes learning outcomes enabling to acquire engineering competences, at least 7 semesters,
- MA programmes last from 3 to 5 semesters,
- comprehensive master's degree programmes shall last between 9 and 12 semesters.

Part-time programmes may last longer in comparison to full-time programmes.

The academic year shall run from 1 October to 30 September and shall be divided into two semesters. A detailed academic calendar is set by each higher education institution.

If it is possible in a given field of study, part of the learning outcomes may be achieved through courses delivered using distance education methods and techniques with the use of infrastructure and software ensuring synchronous and asynchronous interaction between students and teaching staff.

A university may offer postgraduate certificates. Higher education institutions shall establish postgraduate certificate programmes on their own. A prospective student must hold at least a BA to enroll in a postgraduate certificate programme. A person who has completed a postgraduate programme shall obtain a certificate of postgraduate studies. The detailed description of the certificate is specified by the university. The Minister of Education and Science shall determine only the necessary elements of the certificate.

The conditions, procedure and date of commencement, and completion of recruitment are determined by the institution. A resolution of the senate shall be made available not later than by 30 June of the year preceding the academic year in which recruitment is to take place and, where a higher education institution or degree programme in a specific field, level and profile is established, without delay.

Admission to BA programmes or long cycle master's programmes in a higher education institution is open to persons who fulfil the admission requirements set by the institution and hold a secondary-school leaving certificate. In turn, a BA or equivalent degree is needed for admission to second-cycle (MA) studies. Information about the rules and procedure for admission to degree programmes in a given academic year shall be made available by a higher education institution on its website within 14 days of the date of admission.

A higher education institution shall issue to graduates, within 30 days of the date of the completion of a degree programme, a diploma confirming the completion of a degree programme in a specific field and profile, and a professional title.

Details of the diplomas are specified by each higher education institution. The Minister of Education and Science determines only the necessary elements of diplomas and the specimen of the Diploma Supplement.

Professional titles conferred on graduates upon completion of studies:

- bachelor's degree, engineer's degree and equivalent titles: architectural engineer, firefighting engineer, bachelor of nursing, bachelor of midwifery - awarded to graduates of first-cycle (undergraduate) studies.

- magister, magister inżynier and the titles equivalent to:

-magister inżynier architekt, magister inżynier pożarnictwa, magister pielęgniarstwa, magister położnictwa - awarded to graduates of second degree courses in respective regulated professions: architecture, firefighting, nursery, midwifery.

Medical doctor, dental practitioner, veterinary surgeon, master of pharmacy, master engineer architect - awarded to graduates of uniform master's degree courses.

#### **1.4. State Science Policy**

The National Science Policy (PNP) is a strategic document indicating priorities in the system of higher education and science. Its goal is to determine and respond to the most important

development challenges for Polish economy and society. The solution is to conduct top level scientific research and support scholars at universities and doctoral schools.

The first draft was created on the basis of opinions and studies provided by members of the scientific community. During its creation, the team used works of the Scientific Policy Committee and publications that followed the National Science Congress ([www.nkn.gov.pl](http://www.nkn.gov.pl)). The National Science Congress collected materials and feedback through consultations with representatives of the academic community and science as well as higher education system stakeholders. Subsequently, the draft was sent for ministerial and public consultations.

The planned date of adoption for this document is during the second term of 2022.

## **Current challenges in higher education**

### **Challenge 1.**

The need to deal with COVID-19's impact on higher education in terms of organising education, adjusting to sanitary restrictions and building awareness among students. The "new normality" has influenced international cooperation with a strong shift to online collaboration models. This trend will be present in future collaboration among higher education institutions; however, future projects can only be partially based on it. The goal is to enable mobility and both maintain and broaden the scope of international cooperation in the research.

### **Challenge 2.**

As provided in the European Education Area Strategic Framework 2030 (Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) 2021/C 66/01, OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1–21)) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities {SWD(2022) 6 final}, higher education institutions are assigned a key role to play in creating the country's future. Different entities such as the National Science Centre Poland (NCN, Narodowe Centrum Nauki, [www.ncn.gov.pl](http://www.ncn.gov.pl)), the National Centre for Research and Development (NCBIR, [www.gov.pl/web/ncbr](http://www.gov.pl/web/ncbr)), Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA, [www.nawa.gov.pl](http://www.nawa.gov.pl)) are meant to stimulate development, international cooperation and help countries face challenges related to digital transformation, environmental, economic and social change.

### **Challenge 3.**

Promotion of participation in academic and social life regardless of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, economic status or other factors. Universities should support and respond quickly in terms of help and assistance to be given to refugees, with a special focus on scholars and students. The recent war in Ukraine has led to the preparation of a new offer of scholarships and funding for students and scholars from Ukraine. Fostering diversity and inclusiveness with various instruments tailored to the needs of specific groups is also a priority.

#### Challenge 4.

There are unclear prospects for the development of the HE sector. Despite a very strong focus on a binary HE system offering both academic (liberal arts) and professionally oriented (applied sciences) tracks, it is not clear if this two-track model will respond swiftly to social, political and economic changes. There is also a noticeably lower number of traditional students due to demographic changes. There is a growing gap between male and female enrollments, with a growing number of young women enrolled in STEM-related programs. On the other hand, young men seem to be less interested in pursuing degree courses and more interested in non-academic vocational training. So having a more balanced gender structure is good, but the diminishing number of male students may indicate another type of systemic problem. The changing structure of the population and new trends in knowledge acquisition will probably mean that universities will start catering to more diverse student populations and accommodating non-traditional students, such as mature students and executive education seekers. This calls for a change in teaching methods, but also in the structure and composition of degree programmes. Future learners will need modular, flexible degrees with a plethora of interim awards (certificates, diplomas, associate degrees), allowing them to structure the degree according to their needs. Many of these students will adopt a step-by step approach, earning interim credentials within a long time period and wishing to convert them into a degree. This will require more freedom for HEIs in the creation of curricula and degree standards and will force HEIs to rethink their core disciplinary curriculum policies. It should be noted that responses to this particular challenge will be in line with underlying principles of the higher education law currently in force; namely, making HEIs more independent and stakeholder-friendly.

### **Towards 2030 and beyond: recommendations for the future**

#### **Recommendation 1.**

COVID-19 and emergency situations

Reinforcing mechanisms that allow higher education institutions to respond to current threats and challenges as a result of recent developments. The dialogue with relevant stakeholders on different fora enables responsiveness to changes (social and economic impact of COVID-19, Russian aggression against Ukraine) and proposing new solutions in order to facilitate the processes and access to higher education by migrants and refugees. It poses new challenges for universities, requiring them to be more flexible and responsive to challenges of unpredictable labour market and students' needs. This should take into account not only initiatives like the UNESCO Qualification Passport, but also development of flexible, open standards for management and the development of online course materials, textbooks and university management.

#### **Recommendation 2.**

Building responsible research through the diversification of funding offered by different agencies (national, international levels) will strengthen the quality of research. The reinforcement of additional funding (programmes) devoted to the goals set in the national strategy of development and covering required fields of research (COVID-19 response) is recommended. Funding agencies should cater to various types of research, including novel and non-standard methodologies, and take into account the need to safeguard adequate funding for research performed on and by the members of minorities and other vulnerable groups.

#### **Recommendation 3**

Cooperation: public-private cooperation in shaping higher education.

Cooperation between the public and private sectors is needed to provide higher education institutions with proper feedback. The offer should be tailored to both global and national needs with an emphasis on building synergy between higher education institutions and the business sector. In terms of the national approach, the UNESCO Chairs and their networks' involvement in broadening the offering of studies at institutions should be considered. In this complex, uncertain and precarious world, stakeholder participation should be a pivotal element to re-imagine and re-structure higher education and research models. The need to cater for the minorities, displaced persons and other vulnerable communities calls also for more open and transparent practices, based on open data and open access (UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science). The OA model will enable them to access knowledge free of charge, and to enhance their chances to succeed in their educational endeavours.

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**Annexes**

**Annex 1**

Act of 20 July 2018, The Law on Higher Education and Science, English translation (pdf file)

**Annex 2**

Ustawa z dnia 20 lipca 2018 r. Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce, consolidated text, Polish Official Journal 2022 item 574, 583 (pdf file)