

# EDUCATION SYSTEM IN POLAND

DEPARTMENT FOR RECOGNITION OF EDUCATION AND AUTHENTICATION OF  
DOCUMENTS – ENIC-NARIC POLSKA



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## CONTENTS

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1	General overview .....	6
1.1	Legal bases.....	6
1.2	Recent and ongoing reforms .....	7
1.3	Graphic scheme .....	8
1.3.1	Post-reform structure.....	8
1.3.2	Pre-reform structure .....	9
1.4	Polska Rama Kwalifikacji – PRK (Polish qualifications framework) and Zintegrowany System Kwalifikacji – ZSK (integrated qualifications system) .....	10
1.4.1	What is PRK?.....	10
1.4.2	PRK levels and their characteristics.....	10
1.4.3	Overview of validation, certification, quality assurance and supervision rules.....	13
1.4.4	Zintegrowany Rejestr Kwalifikacji – ZRK (Integrated Qualifications Register) .....	14
1.4.5	Graphic symbols for qualifications included in the ZSK .....	15
2	Early childhood education and care .....	17
2.1	0-3 years .....	17
2.2	3-6 years .....	17
3	Compulsory general education .....	18
3.1	General rules .....	18
3.2	Organisation .....	19
3.2.1	Time organization.....	19
3.2.2	Pupil/students grouping for learning .....	19
3.2.3	Choice of teaching methods and materials.....	19
3.3	Compulsory general education: structure before reform (6-year primary school + 3-year lower secondary school).....	20
3.3.1	Primary education .....	20
3.3.2	Lower secondary education .....	21
3.4	Structure after reform: 8-year single structure education .....	22
3.4.1	8-year primary school.....	22
4	Secondary Education .....	24
4.1	Reform: structure changes .....	24
4.2	General secondary education .....	25
4.2.1	Admission .....	25
4.2.2	Curriculum .....	25
4.2.3	Maturity exam ( <i>egzamin maturalny</i> ) .....	27
4.3	Vocational education and training .....	28

4.3.1	Evolution.....	28
4.3.2	Classification of occupations for the education system.....	29
4.3.3	Employer-based routes of training.....	30
4.3.4	Structure before reform .....	30
4.3.5	Structure after reform .....	31
5	Assessment system .....	34
5.1	Grading system.....	34
5.2	Promotion.....	35
6	Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Education .....	35
6.1	Overview.....	35
6.2	Admission .....	36
6.3	Curriculum .....	36
6.4	Assessment system .....	36
6.5	Final examination .....	37
7	Specific field and purpose education .....	37
7.1	Artistic education system .....	38
7.1.1	General information .....	38
7.1.2	Types of artistic schools .....	39
7.2	Sport-focused education .....	41
7.3	Schools and education institutions under cross-ministerial supervision.....	42
7.3.1	General information .....	42
7.3.2	Agricultural education institutions.....	42
7.3.3	Forestry schools.....	43
7.3.4	Maritime schools, fishery schools and inland navigation schools.....	43
7.3.5	Fire Service Schools .....	44
7.3.6	Military classes .....	44
8	Education for students with special needs.....	45
8.1	General information .....	45
8.2	Possible forms of education .....	45
8.3	Education in penitentiary institutions .....	46
8.4	Gifted students.....	47
9	Colleges .....	47
9.1	Overview.....	47
9.2	Colleges of social work .....	47
9.2.1	General information .....	47
9.2.2	Admission and organization of education.....	48

9.2.3	Assessment and certification .....	48
9.3	Colleges of teacher training.....	49
10	Higher Education .....	50
10.1	Legal bases.....	50
10.2	Types of higher education institutions.....	50
10.2.1	Public vs non-public higher education institutions .....	50
10.2.2	Academic vs. professional higher education institutions.....	51
10.2.3	Classification based on scientific domains and ministerial supervision.....	52
10.3	Types of higher education programmes .....	56
10.3.1	Profiles.....	56
10.3.2	Modes of study.....	56
10.3.3	Use of distance learning methods and techniques .....	56
10.3.4	Cycles of study.....	57
10.3.5	Non-degree postgraduate (post-diploma) studies (studia podyplomowe) .....	62
10.3.6	Specialist education in HEIs with professional profile (level V of the PRK).....	63
10.4	Assessment of students' achievements at first-, second- and long-cycle studies .....	63
11	Quality assurance in higher education .....	65
11.1	Responsible institutions .....	65
11.2	Quality evaluation processes.....	66
11.3	Foreign HEIs which want to establish themselves in Poland .....	68
11.4	Evaluation of doctoral schools .....	68
12	Further academic career .....	69
12.1	The degree of doktor habilitowany.....	69
12.1.1	Conditions and procedure.....	69
12.1.2	Awarding the rights equivalent to those of holders of doktor habilitowany (post-doctoral degree).....	70
12.2	Awarding the title of profesor (professor) .....	70

# 1 GENERAL OVERVIEW

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This publication describes the structure and main aspects of education system in Poland, including school education and higher education.

The description generally presents the state of the system in the first quarter of 2020. However, it also explains selected aspects of education paths and qualifications existing in the past, since 1990's, with focus on solutions specific to Poland. It also aims to clarify changes introduced as a consequence of the most recent reforms.

Education financing and teachers' training are not specifically dealt with in the text.

## 1.1 LEGAL BASES

The fundamental rights and rules related to education stem from the [Constitution of the Republic of Poland](#). Its article 70 guarantees the right to education to every individual and stipulates that education is compulsory until the age of 18. Education in public schools and public higher education institutions is free of charge (public HEIs may require payment for certain education services only when acts of parliament specifically allow for it). Public authorities shall ensure universal and equal access to education creating and maintaining systems of financial and organizational support for pupils and students. Citizens and institutions have the right to establish educational institutions of all levels, under the rules set out in acts of parliament. Parents have free choice to send their children to non-public schools. Higher education institutions shall have their autonomy ensured in accordance with the rules laid down in acts of parliament.

The bases for practical organization and functioning of the education system are established in acts of parliament and more detailed issues are stipulated in ministerial regulations and ordinances.

On executive level the education system is divided between two branches of government:

- **education and upbringing** (currently in competence of the Minister of National Education) – which comprises the school system, from pre-school care to post-secondary non-tertiary education, both general and vocational, as well as adult education at non-academic level;
- **higher education and science** (currently in competence of the Minister of Science and Higher Education) – which comprises university level education for young adults, lifelong learning at academic level and research activity, including further career in science.

Where educational aspects intersect with issues in the competence of other authorities, the acts of law usually give the relevant authorities (e.g. other ministers) certain powers in establishing detailed rules and/or certain supervision tasks over education institutions.

The main legislation governing **the school education system** (as of November 2019) comprises:

- Act of 14 December 2016 - Law on School Education ([Ustawa z dnia 14 grudnia 2016 r. - Prawo oświatowe](#));
- Act of 14 December 2016 - Provisions introducing the Law on School Education ([Ustawa z dnia 14 grudnia 2016 r. - Przepisy wprowadzające ustawę - Prawo oświatowe](#));
- School Education Act of 7 September 1991 – substantially amended ([Ustawa z dnia 7 września 1991 r. o systemie oświaty](#));
- Act of 27 October 2017 on the Financing of School Education Tasks ([Ustawa z dnia 27 października 2017 r. o finansowaniu zadań oświatowych](#));

- Act of 26 January 1982, The Teachers' Charter ([Ustawa z dnia 26 stycznia 1982 r. - Karta Nauczyciela](#)).

The **higher education system** in Poland is regulated by the following basic legislation:

- Act of 20 July 2018 - Law on Higher Education and Science ([Ustawa z dnia 20 lipca 2018 r. - Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce](#) )
- Act of 3 July 2018, Provisions introducing the Law on Higher Education and Science ([Ustawa z dnia 3 lipca 2018 r. - Przepisy wprowadzające ustawę - Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce](#))

Rules of classification of both school education and higher education qualifications in relation to the Polish Qualifications Framework are regulated under:

- Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualifications System ([Ustawa z dnia 22 grudnia 2015 r. o Zintegrowanym Systemie Kwalifikacji](#))

## 1.2 RECENT AND ONGOING REFORMS

The description of the Polish school education system and, to a certain extent, also higher education system, has to take into account the reforms which have recently been implemented or are still in progress. Pupils and students who entered a cycle of education under the previous provisions need to have a chance to complete certain stages of learning in accordance with the previous requirements and be able to continue education on the next level. As persons educated in the previous system will be present for many years at the education and job market, it seems useful to present both the structure existing so far and the new one, based on the law currently in force.

The ongoing reform of the school system, initiated in December 2016, has two main dimensions:

- it reintroduces the structure of education system and some of the principles underlying it before 1999 (two-stage education: 8 years of compulsory primary school + 4 or 5 years of secondary education or 3 (+2) years of sectoral vocational school, instead of three-stage education: 6 years of primary school + 3 years of lower secondary school + 3 or 4 years of secondary education or 3 years of basic vocational school, which was provided in school years 1999/2000 – 2016/2017)
- it is one more step in evolutionary changes in approach to professional and vocational education, which include defining qualifications in terms of learning outcomes, classifying them in relation to national qualifications framework and gradually enabling integration of partial qualifications acquired outside the school system.

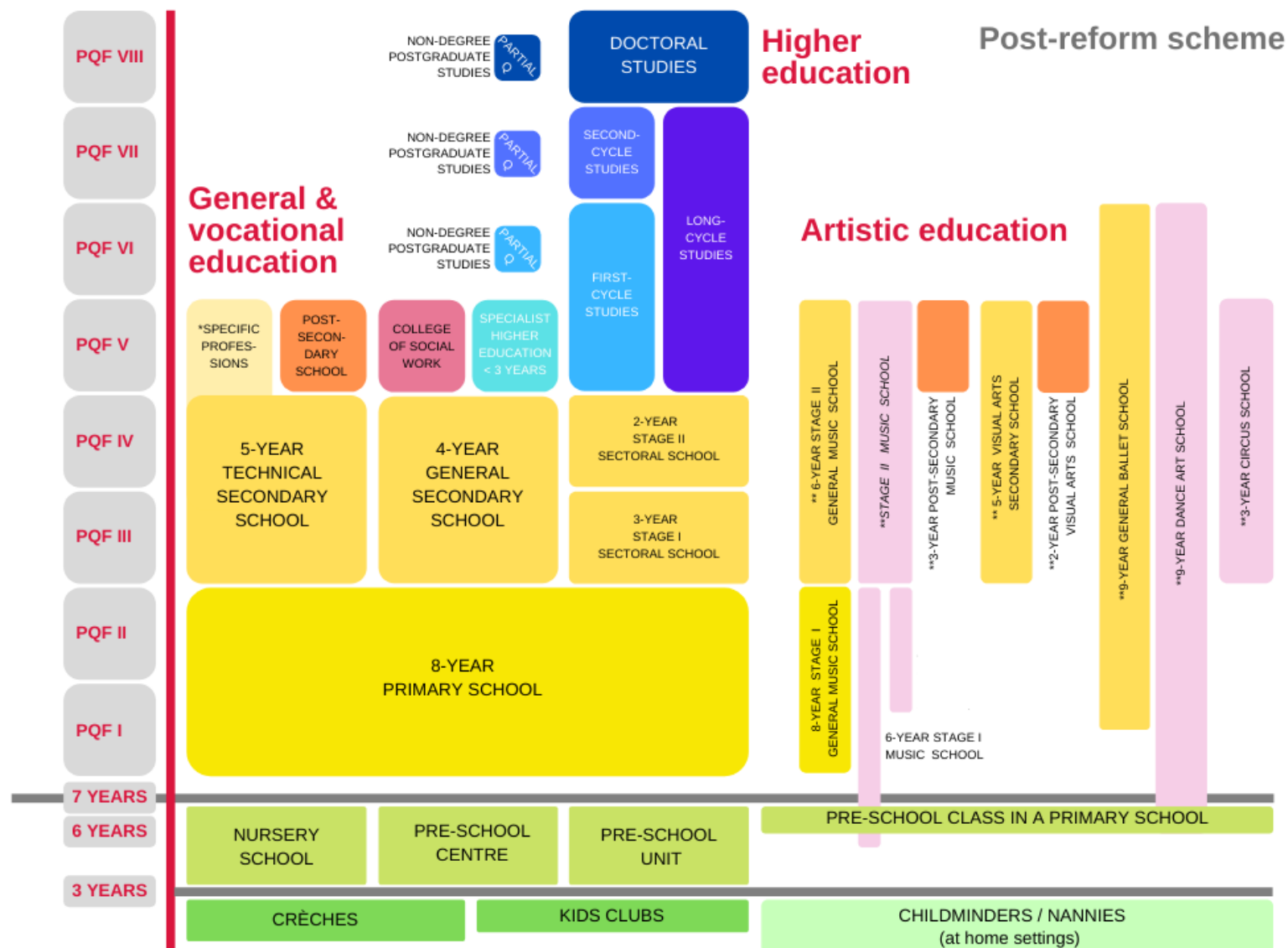
On the other hand, the higher education system reform which started in 2018 was focused not on structure but rather on the rules of organization, functioning and financing of higher education institutions, including quality assessment of scientific and didactic activity of HEIs and research institutions.

### 1.3 GRAPHIC SCHEME

#### 1.3.1 Post-reform structure

\* completion of technical secondary school and passing external vocational examination in most professions leads to obtaining PQF level IV qualifications; for specific professions the same type of education and exam leads to level V qualifications.

\*\* artistic education at secondary and post-secondary schools and passing diploma examination leads to obtaining level V qualifications unless the competent minister establishes a different level for an artistic profession.

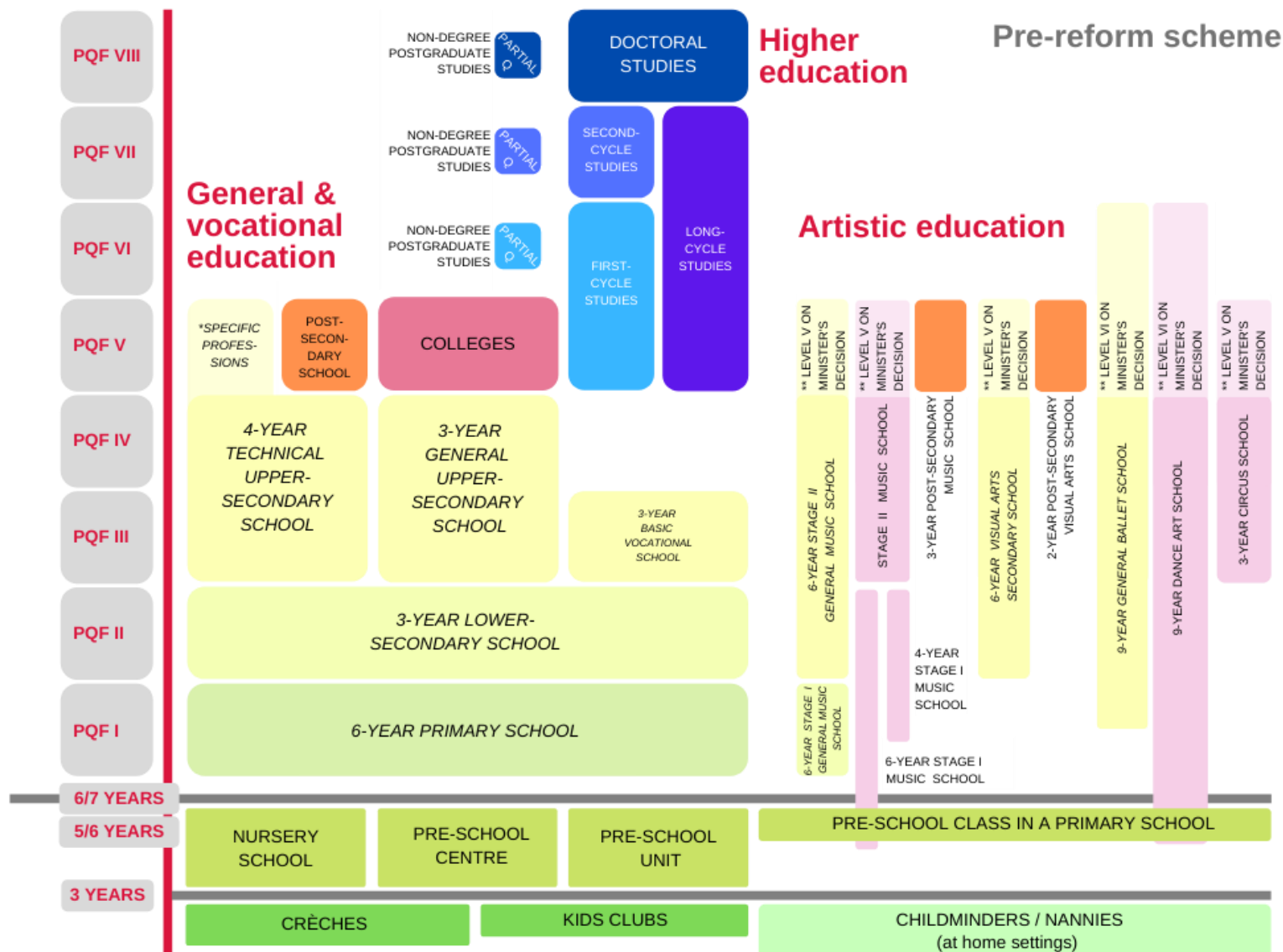




1.3.2 Pre-reform structure

\* completion of upper-secondary technical school and passing external vocational examination in most professions led to obtaining PQF level IV qualifications; for specific professions the same type of education and exam led to level V qualifications.

\*\* secondary school artistic education and passing diploma exam led to level IV qualifications unless the competent minister established a different level. In 2017 level V was assigned to most artistic professions; level VI was assigned to *dancers*.



## 1.4 POLSKA RAMA KWALIFIKACJI – PRK (POLISH QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK) AND ZINTERGROWANY SYSTEM KWALIFIKACJI – ZSK (INTEGRATED QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM)

### 1.4.1 What is PRK?

The **Polska Rama Kwalifikacji – PRK (Polish Qualifications Framework)** is a reference system for qualifications awarded in Poland. After a period of thorough analyses and discussions with experts in education and different branches of economy, the framework has been established with the [Act of 22 December 2015 on Integrated Qualifications System](#) and entered into force in 2016. The PRK classifies qualifications awarded in Poland into 8 levels and enables to refer them to the levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and through the EQF to the levels of qualifications in individual EU countries.

According to the Polish legislation, a **qualification** is defined as a set of learning outcomes consisting of knowledge, skills and social competences, acquired in the course of formal and non-formal education or as a result of informal learning; the achievement of the learning outcomes has to be **validated** (checked in a structured, objective procedure) and formally **certified** (confirmed with an official document) by an authorised institution.

This definition is in line with the general idea behind modern qualification systems. It states that it is not that much important how and where a person learned something – the crucial is what they really know and can do and that their knowledge, skills and competences have been actually verified in controlled conditions.

### 1.4.2 PRK levels and their characteristics

PRK (Polish Qualification Framework) consists of 8 levels, which roughly correspond to levels of official, structured state education. However, the framework is also a universal tool of reference for all other types of qualifications and it provides logical tools that allow for assigning any qualification (including those acquired in non-formal or even informal types of education) to a particular level or levels.

It is possible thanks to the system of so called **characteristics** which describe the degree of complexity of knowledge, skills and competences required at each of the levels.

**First stage characteristics** are established directly in the annex to the [Act of 22 December 2015 on Integrated Qualifications System](#). They provide very general outline of the level of:

- knowledge (theories, facts, notions, terms and relations between them),
- skills (what a person can understand, communicate, and do, how much complicated problems they can solve and in which conditions),
- social competences (ability to deal with social rules and roles, take responsibility, think independently and assess aspects of reality, collaborate with others, take decisions, lead by example and promote certain attitudes),

as expected from a person after a certain course of education.

However, those descriptions are very wide and unspecific. They create rather abstract, theoretical categories, so they could not be sufficient to build an organized system in which every qualification could be easily assigned to its place and compared to others. For that reason, the Act of 22 December is complemented with 4 regulations which establish so called **second stage characteristics**.

Separate regulations, providing more detailed and more concrete descriptions for each category – so called **second stage characteristics** – are issued for:

- **levels 1-4** (by the minister competent for education and upbringing, as the one responsible for official forms of school education at these levels),
- **level 5** (jointly by the minister competent for education and upbringing and the minister competent for higher education and science – as both ministers supervise certain organized forms of education at this level),
- **levels 6-8** (by the minister competent for higher education and science, as the one responsible for official forms of higher education at these levels),
- **vocational qualifications for levels 1-8** (by the minister competent for education and upbringing, as responsible for coordination of vocational education and coordination of the whole framework).

**Second stage characteristics** develop the contents of first stage characteristics and precise them further in relation to specific conditions and requirements of certain stage(s) of education. They break the general notions of knowledge, skills and competences into smaller, more concrete ideas and elements. For instance, second stage characteristics for higher education (levels 6-8) are formulated separately for each group of sciences and for some groups also specify differences between programmes with research profile and practical profile. Second stage characteristics for vocational education, on the other hand, focus exclusively on sets of knowledge, skills and competences which are necessary to practise professional activity.

More specific contents of second stage characteristics make it easier to identify the level that each qualification should be assigned to as well as design new education programmes leading to acquisition of a qualification at a certain level.

The decision on assignment of a PRK level to a qualification is made by the minister competent for the qualification according to a specific procedure and is based on opinions of experts in education and in the field of the qualification.

It is also important to remember that qualifications acquired on completion of education or training in a particular type of institution (e.g. technical secondary school + vocational examinations) or after a programme with a particular name and organizational standards (e.g. non-degree post-graduate studies) **do not have to be assigned all to the same PRK level**.

#### 1.4.2.1 Zintegrowany System Kwalifikacji – ZSK (Integrated Qualifications System)

Polish Qualifications Framework was the basis for building the Polish **Zintegrowany System Kwalifikacji (ZSK)** which can potentially cover and classify all qualifications acquired and awarded in Poland by public and non-public institutions (including private training companies), provided that they are acquired, validated and certified in line with quality assessment requirements. All qualifications in the ZSK have to be described according to a certain scheme and conditions and have a PRK level assigned.

#### 1.4.2.2 Types of qualifications

Apart from the obvious assignment to levels of the Polish Qualifications Framework, the qualifications included in the Polish Integrated Qualifications System – ZSK may be divided into groups based on other factors.

**Full qualifications** are awarded only in the system of formal education and correspond to completion of a specific stage of school education or higher education (e.g. maturity certificate on completion of general secondary education or master's diploma on completion second-cycle studies).

All other qualifications (e.g. a driving licence, or a certificate confirming qualifications of a statutory auditor, certificates of completion of non-degree post-graduate (post-diploma) studies (*świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych*) regardless of level, are **partial qualifications**. They refer to a coherent sets of knowledge, skills, and competences, that may be acquired after a certain (rather shorter than full qualifications) period of education. They may be obtained in formal education or as a result of an alternative form of learning and training, but always have to be verified and confirmed in an independent and standardized procedure.

Another classification is as follows:

- **qualifications awarded in the system of school education and higher education** (*kwalfikacje w oświacie i szkolnictwie wyższym*) both full and partial, which are established in national law and awarded according to state regulations – they automatically constitute a part of the ZSK;
- **regulated qualifications** (*kwalfikacje uregulowane*) – awarded outside the school system and the academic system but required by the law to practise particular (regulated) professions or functions. These are always partial qualifications. The Polish law requires all ministers to screen the regulated qualifications in the scope of their competence and decide which shall be included into the ZSK;
- **market-based qualifications** (*kwalfikacje rynkowe*) are not based on legal regulations but rather on practical market requirements for sets of knowledge, skills and competences necessary for a particular type of position. These are always partial qualifications and may be entered into the ZSK following an official procedure (to confirm that they are described appropriately and they have validation and certification procedures that meet quality requirements).

#### 1.4.2.3 General rules of the Zintegrowany System Kwalifikacji – ZSK (Integrated Qualifications Register)

The following basic rules underlie the ZSK:

- all qualifications included into the ZSK (regardless of their type) are **indicated in a public register called Zintegrowany Rejestr Kwalifikacji – ZRK (Integrated Qualifications Register)**;
- each qualification in the ZSK has to be described in a particular way (learning outcomes have to be clearly specified in all three spheres: knowledge, skills and competences; it is necessary to provide information important for potential learners, validation and certification institutions and for the government; methods of validation have to be clearly explained);
- each qualification has to have a PRK level assigned; the decision on the level is based on comparison of the requirements for obtaining the qualification in question with first and second stage characteristics established for each PRK level;
- a qualification included in the ZSK may only be awarded as a result of positive outcome of a validation procedure (i.e. checking if the learning outcomes have been actually achieved by the candidate, e.g. by means of an exam, assessment of a prepared project or piece of work etc.);
- a qualification included in the ZSK may only be awarded by institutions authorised by the competent minister or in legal regulations (also private institutions may be authorised if they meet conditions; an official procedure is designed to apply for and award such authorisations);
- each awarding institution (*instytucja certyfikująca*) has their internal quality assurance system and, in addition, is subject to external quality assurance procedures determined in the ZSK Act;
- the institutions that ensure external quality assurance to awarding institutions are entrusted with this task by the minister competent for a given qualification;

- each minister has supervisory powers and instruments to ensure quality of qualification awarding procedure with regard to qualifications in their area of competence;
- minister competent for education and upbringing (currently, in March 2020, the Minister of National Education) is responsible for coordination of the Integrated Qualifications System; the minister may perform many of their coordination functions through subordinate institutions.

The [website of the Coordination Point for Polish and European Qualifications Framework](#) functioning in the structure of the Polish Ministry of National Education is an important source of the information on PRK and ZSK; a short and concise description of the mechanisms is available in their [booklet](#).

#### 1.4.3 Overview of validation, certification, quality assurance and supervision rules

Qualifications included in the ZSK may only be awarded by authorised institutions. Such authorisations either result directly from the provisions of the Polish law or are awarded by the minister competent for a qualification in question to institutions (public or private) which meet conditions established by the law. Such conditions include having expert staff, ability to ensure appropriate physical and organizational conditions for validation and certification procedure, have implemented required internal system for quality assurance and can truthfully declare their good standing).

Validation and certification are usually done by the same institution (e.g. the same Regional Examination Board conducts examinations for vocational qualifications and issues relevant certificates and when a person has passed exams for all qualifications required for a certain profession – issues for them a vocational diploma in the profession). However, the provisions allow also for other solutions:

- the certifying institution may authorise another institution or body to conduct validation procedure as long as such procedure is carried out in accordance with legal requirements;
- the certifying institution may recognise learning outcomes validated and certified by another body if they constitute a part of the learning outcomes necessary for obtaining the qualification this institution is authorised to confirm.

It is also important that learning achievements (validated sets of learning outcomes) necessary for any market-based qualification acquired in different places and times may be accumulated stage by stage and finally may become a basis for awarding of a qualification by the appropriate certifying institution.

Validation and certification procedures are covered by **quality assurance system** which **consists of**:

- **internal quality assurance system** – operational procedures implemented in the certifying institution and followed by its staff, experts, candidates etc., in particular, the solutions which ensure that education and training processes are separated from validation, constant monitoring and assessment of validation and certification methods and their internal evaluation (at least once in every 3 years for each qualification, which is documented with a report for external quality assurance institution).
- **external quality assurance system** – external supervision by an independent expert body approved for this role by the minister competent for education and upbringing and assigned to the certifying institution by the minister competent for the qualification which is certified by this certifying institution. This includes monitoring of the certifying institutions' internal quality assurance systems, periodical assessment of their activity and checking whether the certifying institution keeps meeting all legal requirements. At least one in 5 years the results for each supervised institution are documented in a report, which indicates eventual irregularities and shortcomings as well as recommendations.

All external quality assurance institutions have to meet conditions established by the law (expert staff, knowledgeable and experienced both in the certain scope of qualifications and in qualifications systems as such; own internal quality assurance system; declared good standing; independence with regard to certifying institutions). The approval for the role is expressed in the form of an official administrative decision which is valid for 6 years and may be prolonged for another 6-year period upon positive opinion on its activity.

External quality assurance institutions which obtain the approval of the minister competent for education and upbringing are entered into the list, with information on the scope of qualifications they may cover with their services. The ministers competent for each market-based qualification assign one of the institutions from the list to each of the certifying institutions that award qualifications in this minister's scope of competence. For this purpose an agreement between the minister and the external quality assurance institution is concluded. Only when the agreement enters into force the qualification in question is considered an active, functioning qualification in the ZSK system and certification may start. Moreover, external quality assurance institutions are obliged to inform the supervising minister of all serious irregularities.

Another dimension of quality assurance is the ministerial supervision. Each minister has this responsibility with regard to certifying institutions and external quality assurance institutions dealing with qualifications in the minister's area of competence. Ministers receive evaluation reports from both types of institutions and are entitled to organize and conduct controls of their activity. Moreover, the law gives them power to implement sanctions which might include suspension or even withdrawal of the institutions' rights to carry out certification or provide services of external quality assurance.

#### 1.4.4 Zintegrowany Rejestr Kwalifikacji – ZRK (Integrated Qualifications Register)

The ZSK Act established legal basis for creation of a public register of all qualifications included into the Polish Integrated Qualifications System. The system is held in electronic form and is available to the general public at the website: <https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/>. The information is regularly updated.

ZRK was designed to accumulate knowledge on all qualifications in Poland in one place and become an easily accessible source for learners, employees wishing to acquire new qualifications, employment advisors, employers, schools and higher education institutions, training companies, labour offices and all other interested stakeholders. In March 2020 it included over 10 000 qualifications.

Each entry for a single qualification contains information on the type of qualification, the PRK level assigned, the learning outcomes to be achieved, certifying institution(s), name of the confirming certificate and the minister competent for its supervision. A browser helps to search relevant data in the database.

The ZRK is also furnished with functionalities which allow institutions and entrepreneurs to apply for:

- inclusion of a market qualification in the ZRK;
- the right to certify qualifications (becoming a certifying institution);
- inclusion into the list of external quality assurance entities.

Since 2018 the institution responsible for maintaining the register is the [Educational Research Institute \(Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, IBE\)](#).

The institution also collects information on the numbers of awarded qualifications and the results of evaluations of certifying institutions and external quality assurance bodies.

#### 1.4.5 Graphic symbols for qualifications included in the ZSK

It is easy to tell whether a recently issued qualification is included in the *Zintegrowany System Kwalifikacji* - ZSK (Integrated Qualifications System) only by taking a glance at the document which attests it.

Since 2017 a graphic symbol indicating the PRK level of qualifications is placed on diplomas, certificates and other documents. This concerns documents issued by schools, district examination committees, chambers of crafts and higher education institutions as well as those issued by other certifying institutions, including private entities, which award qualifications that belong to the system and meet its requirements.

The obligation to place the graphic symbol on documents and the shape of the symbol itself have been established with two legal acts:

- regulation of the Minister of National Education of 13 July 2016 on the designs of graphic symbols informing about the Polish Qualifications Framework levels assigned to the full and partial qualifications included in the Integrated Qualification System;
- regulation of the Minister of National Education of 3 April 2017 amending the Regulation on the designs of graphic symbols informing about the Polish Qualifications Framework levels assigned to the full and partial qualifications included in the Integrated Qualification System;

It is also important to know that PRK levels in graphic symbols are marked with **Roman numerals for full qualifications** and with **Arabic numerals for partial qualifications**.



The symbols for each type and level are presented below:

Partial qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level one	<b>P R K 1</b> Kwalifikacja cząstkowa na poziomie pierwszym Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	<b>P R K I</b> Kwalifikacja pełna na poziomie pierwszym Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	Full qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level one
Partial qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level two	<b>P R K 2</b> Kwalifikacja cząstkowa na poziomie drugim Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	<b>P R K II</b> Kwalifikacja pełna na poziomie drugim Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	Full qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level two
Partial qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level three	<b>P R K 3</b> Kwalifikacja cząstkowa na poziomie trzecim Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	<b>P R K III</b> Kwalifikacja pełna na poziomie trzecim Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	Full qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level three
Partial qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level four	<b>P R K 4</b> Kwalifikacja cząstkowa na poziomie czwartym Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	<b>P R K IV</b> Kwalifikacja pełna na poziomie czwartym Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	Full qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level four
Partial qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level five	<b>P R K 5</b> Kwalifikacja cząstkowa na poziomie piątym Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	<b>P R K V</b> Kwalifikacja pełna na poziomie piątym Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	Full qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level five
Partial qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level six	<b>P R K 6</b> Kwalifikacja cząstkowa na poziomie szóstym Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	<b>P R K VI</b> Kwalifikacja pełna na poziomie szóstym Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	Full qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level six
Partial qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level seven	<b>P R K 7</b> Kwalifikacja cząstkowa na poziomie siódmym Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	<b>P R K VII</b> Kwalifikacja pełna na poziomie siódmym Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	Full qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level seven
Partial qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level eight	<b>P R K 8</b> Kwalifikacja cząstkowa na poziomie ósmym Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	<b>P R K VIII</b> Kwalifikacja pełna na poziomie ósmym Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacji	Full qualification at Polish Qualifications Framework level eight



## 2 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

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### 2.1 0-3 YEARS

**Children aged 0-3 years** may receive day care at:

- crèche (żłobek) - since the 20th week of age;
- kids club (klub dziecięcy) – since 1 year of age;
- settings where care is provided by day-care providers or child minders (opiekun dzienny) and nannies (niania).

Children attend such institutions till the age of 3, but where there are difficulties to provide them pre-school education, they may stay there till the age of 4.

The functions of early childcare institutions include care, upbringing and education but formally they are **not considered a part of the education system**. They are supervised by the minister competent for family and social policy.

The [Act of 4 February 2011 on Care for Children up to the age of 3](#) (*Ustawa o opiece nad dziećmi w wieku do lat 3*) and regulations that stem from it define the rules of organization, financing, functioning and provision of services by early childcare providers as well as qualifications required from the staff and conditions to be met by the facilities used.

### 2.2 3-6 YEARS

**Children aged 3-6 years** are entitled to a place in a pre-school education and care institution.

For 3-, 4- and 5-year-old children pre-school education is optional (parents may choose to bring up their children only in home setting). However, for 6-year-olds it is obligatory.

In justified cases, younger children of 2.5 years of age may be enrolled upon the consent of the head of a nursery school (e.g. if their older siblings already attend the same institution and there are still places available).

The following types of institutions provide education and care for children aged 3-6 years:

- **nursery school** (przedszkole) – is open throughout the year (no vacation break) and provides at least 5 hours of childcare a day (most work around 9 hours);
- **pre-school class in a primary school** (oddział przedszkolny w szkole podstawowej) – works like a nursery school but under supervision of a head of a primary school and is located at the school premises;
- **pre-school unit** (zespół wychowania przedszkolnego) – which provides activities only on certain weekdays, except for breaks in classes – at least 3 hours per day and 12 hours per week (the number of hours depends on the number of children enrolled);
- **pre-school centre** (punkt przedszkolny) – works on all weekdays throughout the year, except for breaks in classes, providing childcare at least 3 hours a day and 12 hours a week (the number of hours depends on the number of children enrolled).

The institutions may be public (established by local authorities of the commune – *gmina*) or non-public (run by natural persons or entities with legal personality). Regardless of the status they have to employ qualified pre-school education teachers and base their educational activities on the national core curriculum established by the Minister of National Education, as pre-school education is considered the first level of education.

The rules of organization, number of hours of care provided and detailed conditions of functioning vary according to the type of institution (and the non-public ones have more freedom in day to day organization issues). The facilities used have to meet sanitary and safety conditions established in the law.

Local authorities of the commune are responsible for creation and funding of sufficient number of pre-school education institutions to satisfy local needs. Moreover, since 2015 pre-school institutions network is under the supervision of the regional education authority (*kurator oświaty*) whose approval is necessary for certain local authority's decisions.

## 3 COMPULSORY GENERAL EDUCATION

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### 3.1 GENERAL RULES

The first obligatory stage of compulsory education is so called **pre-school year**. All children at the age of 6 (in the school year in which they reach this age) have to attend a pre-school institution for one year in order to acquire basic skills and socialize before they start school.

Compulsory school education starts at the age of 7 (at the beginning of the school year in the calendar year in which the child turns 7). Each school at primary level has a catchment area and all children residing within it are the right attend the school. If a school can offer more places, it may accept children from other catchment areas on their parents' request.

The minimum level of compulsory education that everybody has to acquire is completion of 8-year primary school, unless one does not manage to do it till the age of 18. (In the system before reform it was obligatory to complete 6-year primary school and 3-year lower secondary school.)

Everyone is obliged to learn till the age of 18. On completion of single structure primary education (or primary and lower secondary education) the obligation is fulfilled by attending a secondary school (or upper secondary school for pre-reform cycle) or entering professional out-of-school education at employer's establishment.

The Polish law also allows for so called "**home education**", however, under certain conditions. Parents who want to educate their children outside the school system have to receive official approval from the head of a school at the level relevant for the child's age located at the territory of the voivodeship (*województwo*) of the child's residence. They need to support their request with an opinion of a counselling and guidance centre and officially declare that they can provide conditions which will allow the child to acquire knowledge, skills and competences required by the national core curriculum. Moreover, they declare that after each stage of education (as agreed with the head of the school) their child will take extramural classification exams (more information on the exams available on [the subpage of Central Examination Board's website](#)). Parents who received the approval are also entitled to certain forms of support from the school, like access to course books and other didactic materials or consultations before the exams. The approval is withdrawn if the child does not take the classification examination or fails it, or when it was proven that the approving decision was issued unlawfully.

## 3.2 ORGANISATION

### 3.2.1 Time organization

The **school year** starts on 1 September each year and ends on 31 August of the subsequent year. Classes in a school year last from the first working day of September until the first Friday after 20 June. The school year is divided into two semesters, which are separated by a two-week winter break (its dates are set differently for different regions, between mid-January and the end of February). The summer break begins on the Saturday following the last day of classes and ends on 31 August.

Lessons normally take place from Monday to Friday, but individual schools may introduce a 6-day week (permanently or every second week) if necessary due to the working conditions (too many classes in relation to the number of classrooms). Each lesson (class hour) lasts **45 minutes**, except in forms I to III where the teacher adjusts the breaks to natural pupils activity. Breaks usually last from 5 to 25 minutes.

Classes normally start at **8 a.m.** and finish around **2–3 p.m.** in upper forms where the school works in one shift, however, schools may work in shifts if necessary, with some groups of pupils starting around midday and staying till late afternoon. The decisions are taken by the school heads, based on the size of the school building, the number of classrooms and other facilities for afterschool activities.

Detailed weekly timetables of subjects are established by individual schools on the basis of national outline timetables.

### 3.2.2 Pupil/students grouping for learning

As a general rule, especially at the lower stages of the education system, pupils/students are grouped into classes according to their age. However, certain age differences within one class may occur as a result of changing age of compulsory schooling, children being sent to school one year earlier (or later) by their parents according to individual development conditions or repeating a year due to unsatisfactory achievements.

Each class is supervised by a class tutor, who normally keeps this function for the whole stage of education (e.g. forms 1-3 or 4-8 in primary school). The legislation establishes specific hours each week to be used by the class tutor to meet their pupils/students and deal with all organization and social issues concerning the class.

The national legislation does not set a minimum or maximum number of pupils per class. The exception is the first stage of primary school (forms 1-3) where the maximum number per class is 20, including up to 5 pupils with disabilities, for integration classes (attended by pupils with and without disabilities) in mainstream schools and in integration schools. For certain subjects and types of classes the pupils/students are divided into smaller groups (physical education, foreign languages, IT classes, labs).

### 3.2.3 Choice of teaching methods and materials

The basis for planning all teaching activities for each level and class is the core curriculum establishing the scope of knowledge, skills and competences to be achieved by pupils/students at each stage of their education. Moreover, national outline timetables define the number of hours that shall be devoted to each subjects or type of activity during each education cycle, form and per week.

Teachers have a certain degree of freedom in choosing teaching methods and approaches as they plan the learning process within that frame. They have to adjust them to such factors as the number of students per class or teaching and learning facilities and resources available in the school (for example,

the number of computers or other teaching aids) as well as to the needs and abilities of the specific group of young people concerned.

The **detailed curriculum** to be used during a school year can be:

- developed by the teacher individually or jointly with other teachers;
- chosen by the teacher from the set of curricula developed by other author(s), for example, from among those available on the market;
- developed by other author(s) and modified by the teacher.

General education curricula and vocational education curricula have to be approved for the use at school by the head of a given school, at the request of the teacher or the team of teachers concerned and after consultation with the school's teaching council. Teachers may choose a textbook from the list of textbooks approved for the use at school.

### 3.3 COMPULSORY GENERAL EDUCATION: STRUCTURE BEFORE REFORM (6-YEAR PRIMARY SCHOOL + 3-YEAR LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL)

#### 3.3.1 Primary education

Starting from the school year 1999/2000 the first phase of actual school education was **6-year primary school**.

##### 3.3.1.1 Admission age

Children were admitted to primary schools at the age of 6 or 7.

Before 2014 admission of 6-year-olds to 1<sup>st</sup> form of primary school was left to their parents' discretion. In 2014 education in primary schools was compulsory for 6-year-old children born in the first half of 2008 (before the end of June 2008), which was a first step in the plan to lower the age of compulsory schooling to 6 years for all children. However, as a result of government changes and controversies among parents the idea was abandoned and from the school year 2016/2017 the school starting age was again raised from 6 to 7 years. In specific cases on parents' request the admission to primary schools could be postponed by the school head upon consultation with a counselling and guidance centre.

##### 3.3.1.2 Education stages

The education was divided into two stages:

- **Early school education** provided during the first 3 years (**forms 1-3**) – characterized by integrated teaching which aims to support children in their intellectual, emotional, social, ethical, physical and aesthetic development. Knowledge from different areas was combined and provided by a generalist teacher and activities were conducted according to a flexible timetable. Music education, art education, physical education, computer classes and modern foreign language classes could be taught by a specialist teacher with relevant qualifications. Minimum number of integrated teaching hours as well as hours of other subjects was established in the curriculum.
- **Subject based education** provided in the next 3 years (**forms 4-6**) – with teaching arranged by subjects taught by different teachers and organized in lessons lasting 45 minutes each. Minimum number of teaching hours of each subject was established in the curriculum.

At both stages children could also take part in non-compulsory religion or ethics classes conducted on schools premises.

### 3.3.1.3 Curriculum

Education in primary schools was based on the **core curriculum** (*podstawa programowa*), which defined the learning outcomes and certain general requirements for the organisation of teaching.

However, teachers had freedom to choose or develop their own curricula based on the core curriculum and adjusted to the needs and abilities of their own pupils, as long as they were accepted by the school head. The number of hours to be devoted to particular subjects in the whole cycle and per week were defined in **outline timetables** (*ramowe plany nauczania*).

The core curriculum established in 2008 and gradually introduced since the school year 2009/2010 was defined in terms of general and detailed learning outcomes regarding knowledge and skills that have to be acquired by each pupil as a result of the learning process. The implementation process was to be completed in 2015, when the first cohort of pupils educated according this curriculum took their final tests, adjusted to curricular requirements.

### 3.3.1.4 Final test

At the end of form 6 pupils took obligatory external standardized test, set by the Central Examination Board and assessed by Regional Examination Boards. It consisted of two parts: the first checked knowledge and skills in the Polish language and mathematics, the second – in a modern foreign language.

The results of the test had informative value. Regardless of the outcome (and the grades on the school leaving certificate), the head of the local lower-secondary school had to admit a primary school graduate residing in the school's catchment area.

Starting from the school year 2016/2017 the final 6<sup>th</sup> form test was abolished, as the education in primary schools was extended to 8 years. Pupils of 6<sup>th</sup> form of primary school became pupils of 7<sup>th</sup> form of primary school as from the school year 2017/2018.

**Certificate of completion of the 6-year primary school confirms a full qualification at level I of the PRK.**

## 3.3.2 Lower secondary education

The lower-secondary school (*gimnazjum*) offered 3 years of full-time general education for pupils who had completed the 6-year primary school (generally aged 13 to 16). It was a compulsory stage of education for all pupils.

### 3.3.2.1 Admission

The only criterion for admission to lower secondary school was successful completion of 6-year primary education, confirmed with a primary school leaving certificate. Just as in the case of primary schools every child had the statutory right to a place in a lower secondary school within the catchment area of their residence. Children from other catchment areas were admitted subject to availability of places, in accordance with additional criteria.

### 3.3.2.2 Curriculum

Educational contents and activities were based on the national **core curriculum**, defining minimum knowledge components and skills to be acquired at this educational stage. Additionally, **outline timetables** specified the minimum number of teaching hours which had to be devoted to each school subject during the whole 3-year education cycle and per week. A teaching hour equalled 45 minutes.

The regulations also specified types of classes and activities which required that education was provided in smaller groups – e.g. physical education, foreign languages, ICT classes and subjects with practical components such as lab work.

### 3.3.2.3 Final exam for lower secondary schools

At the end of the 3rd year all pupils took obligatory external examination set by the Central Examination Board and administered and assessed by Regional Examination Boards. The exam consisted of three parts testing:

- abilities, skills and knowledge in the field of **humanities** (Polish language, history and civic education),
- abilities, skills and knowledge in the field of **science** (mathematics and natural sciences: biology, chemistry, physics and geography),
- competence in a **modern foreign language** (basic or extended level).

The exam gave access to upper-secondary education. Its results were annexed to the lower-secondary school leaving certificate. They were comparable on a national scale and had strong impact on admission to upper-secondary schools (the better the outcomes, the higher the chance to get admitted to the upper secondary school of the candidate's first choice; the competition for admission to the most recognized or most popular upper secondary schools could be very strong).

**Certificate of completion of the lower secondary school** confirms a **full qualification at level II** of the **PRK**.

### 3.3.2.4 Transition years

As a result of the reform, 3-year lower secondary schools were phased out and finally ceased to exist on 31 August 2019. The last cohort of pupils started their education in such schools in the school year 2016/2017 and finished in the school year 2018/2019.

The first two years of lower secondary education have been integrated into the new 8-year primary school. The lower secondary school leaving exam was replaced by the eighth-form exam.

## 3.4 STRUCTURE AFTER REFORM: 8-YEAR SINGLE STRUCTURE EDUCATION

### 3.4.1 8-year primary school

As of 1 September 2017, the Polish Parliament has re-established 8-year primary school (so called single structure education), which is compulsory for all pupils who are usually aged 7-15.

#### 3.4.1.1 Admission age

Starting from the school year 2016/2017 the age of 7 years is again the official compulsory schooling age. However, 6-year-olds may enter the primary school at their parents' request, provided that they have completed one-year preparatory pre-primary education or hold a school readiness certificate from a counselling and guidance centre. For individual pupils school entry may also be postponed up to one year by the head of a given school, on parents' request and upon consultation with a counselling and guidance centre. Further postponement is possible only in exceptional cases, due to the disability of the pupil, where they require special needs education.

#### 3.4.1.2 Education stages

Post reform primary education is also divided into two stages, with the first year of the second stage seen as preparation and transition to the new learning process organization and requirements:

- **Stage I**, which includes **forms 1-3**, offers **early school education** with integrated teaching. It is designed so as to cater to pupils' natural developmental needs and support them building individual knowledge and transition from childhood to adolescence. Classes are taught according to a timetable developed by the teacher, with the duration of lessons and breaks depending on pupils' activity. The teacher also decides on the day to day organisation of time devoted to acquisition of knowledge and skills in different thematic areas covered in the curriculum, within the number of hours specified for the whole integrated learning process.
- **Stage II**, which includes **forms 4-8**, offers **subject based education** provided by different teachers. Minimum number of teaching hours of each subject is specified in outline timetables.

#### 3.4.1.3 Curriculum and hours

Primary education framework is defined by the **national core curriculum** for general education (which defines curricular contents, aims and knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired) and by **outline timetables** (which specify minimum weekly number of hours for specific subjects or groups of subjects in each form). They are the basis for detailed curriculum designed or adopted by each teacher and approved by the head of the school.

The reform included development of a new core curriculum, adjusted to the structural and other changes planned for the whole system.

The **core curriculum for the stage I** specifies the areas of knowledge and competence regarding the Polish language, mathematics, social education, natural sciences, art education, technology, ICT education, music education, modern foreign language and physical education which shall be covered by integrated education.

The **timetable for the stage I** provides for 20 hours of early school education per week during each form (3 of which have to be allocated to physical education) plus 2 hours left to the school head's discretion - to be allocated on an annual basis to classes or activities developing pupils' interests, abilities and aptitudes, and, in particular, activeness and creativity.

The **core curriculum for the stage II** defines knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired in particular subjects: the Polish language, music, art education, history, civic education, natural sciences, geography, biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, computer science, technology, safety education, modern foreign languages, physical education. The number of subjects changes as pupils go to upper forms, e.g. natural sciences taught as one subject on form 4 are later divided into separate classes of geography, biology, chemistry, physics. Pupils start learning their 1st modern foreign language since 4<sup>th</sup> form and a 2nd modern foreign language is added in 7<sup>th</sup> form.

The **timetable for the stage II** assigns number of hours of each subject per week to be organized for each form. 3 hours per week are left to the school head's discretion to be used for additional classes or activities during this stage.

Separate regulations specify the conditions of organization and the number of hours to be devoted on each stage to:

- religion or ethics classes;
- classes of regional, national or ethnic minority language and culture, and geography of the country which a national minority identifies with;
- sports activities;
- classes or activities as part of psychological and educational support;



- rehabilitation classes or activities for pupils with disabilities.

Moreover, starting from 7<sup>th</sup> form primary schools have a possibility to organise **paths of bilingual education**, with additional hours of foreign language classes and at least two subjects for which a chosen foreign language is, alongside Polish, a language of tuition. Such classes have to be taught by teachers with both linguistic and subject-matter competences.

#### 3.4.1.4 Eight-form examination

At the end of 8<sup>th</sup> form all pupils take obligatory external [eight-form examination](#) which covers the knowledge and skills specified in the core curriculum for selected subjects. The exam is prepared by the *Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna* – CKE (Central Examination Board) and administered and assessed by *Okręgowa Komisja Egzaminacyjna* (Regional Examination Boards). It was organized for the first time at the end of the school year 2018/2019.

For the first three years (since 2019 till 2021) the examination shall be taken in three compulsory subjects:

1. Polish language;
2. mathematics;
3. a selected modern foreign language (English, French, Spanish, German, Russian, Ukrainian or Italian). A pupil can only choose a language which he/she has been learning at school during obligatory classes.

From 2022 onwards, form 8 students will take the examination in four compulsory subjects:

1. Polish language;
2. mathematics;
3. a selected modern foreign language (English, French, Spanish, German, Russian, Ukrainian or Italian);
4. a selected additional subject (biology, chemistry, physics, geography or history).

There is no minimum score to pass the eighth-form exam and its results have no impact on completion of primary education. However, they are of major importance as one of the criteria in the process of admission to secondary schools. A certificate with results of the eighth-form exam is issued to each pupil by the relevant Regional Examination Board.

**Certificate of completion of 8-year primary school** confirms a **full qualification at level II** of the PRK.

## 4 SECONDARY EDUCATION

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### 4.1 REFORM: STRUCTURE CHANGES

Before the reform pupils who completed **lower secondary school** (*gimnazjum*) could choose to continue their education in the following types of schools:

- 3-year general upper-secondary schools (*liceum ogólnokształcące*);
- 4-year technical upper-secondary schools (*technikum*);
- 3-year basic vocational schools (*zasadnicza szkoła zawodowa*).



Pupils who complete **single structure education** according to the new path, on completion of 8-year primary school can choose between:

- 4-year **general secondary schools** (*liceum ogólnokształcące*);
- 5-year **technical secondary schools** (*technikum*);
- 3-year **stage I sectoral vocational schools** (*szkoła branżowa I stopnia*), with the possibility to continue education in 2-year **stage II sectoral vocational schools** (*szkoła branżowa II stopnia*);

In the school year 2019/2020, **students who have finished the new 8-year primary school are, in parallel, enrolled in the new 4-year general secondary schools.**

## 4.2 GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION

General secondary education is chosen mainly by those pupils who plan to start higher education in future, as the programme does not give concrete professional qualifications, but focuses instead on best possible preparation to maturity exams, the results of which are the main criterion of access to higher education.

### 4.2.1 Admission

The chances for admission to general secondary schools of candidate's choice depend mainly on the results achieved in the previous stage of education.

Before the reform the admission points were counted on the basis of outcomes of the lower secondary school exam as well as final grades achieved in chosen areas of study and other achievements indicated on the lower-secondary school leaving certificate.

With the current single structure education, the points are counted on the basis of results of eight-form exam as well as final grades achieved in chosen areas of study and other achievements indicated on the primary school leaving certificate.

The final grades that count are Polish language, mathematics and two other subjects selected by the head of a given secondary school, usually in line with the 'profile' of education provided (e.g. science or humanities) related to subjects that will be taught at extended level. Other achievements taken into account include high average results of study, high places reached in local knowledge, sports or artistic competitions or recognized voluntary work. The system for converting the criteria into points and detailed arrangements for the admission process are laid down in the national legislation.

Winners of regional-level competitions of knowledge and artistic achievements in particular school subjects or study areas, are accepted by the secondary school of their choice regardless of the criteria applied to other applicants.

Schools which organize bilingual tracks of education according to post-reform provisions can conduct additional language examinations with approval of the Minister of National Education (which concern also winners of regional-level competitions other than the competition in language that would be the subject of examination).

### 4.2.2 Curriculum

Before the reform the education in:

- 3-year general upper-secondary schools (*liceum ogólnokształcące*)
- general subjects in 4-year technical upper-secondary schools (*technikum*)

was based on common core curriculum which was designed as a continuation of development of knowledge, skills and competences acquired in lower secondary schools. During the school years when these two types of schools were phased out (till 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 respectively) the curriculum was still used to teach pupils who started education according to old provisions. Simultaneously a new core curriculum, serving as a bases for education in 4-year general secondary schools and for general subjects in 5-year technical secondary schools is being introduced for cohorts starting secondary education according to new provisions.

Like at the previous stages of education, the number of hours devoted to particular subjects is defined in outline timetables (defining the minimum number of teaching hours weekly and for the whole learning cycle). Unlike the curriculum, timetables are established separately for general and technical secondary schools, as at the latter students learn vocational subjects alongside the general ones and their overall education cycle is one year longer.

Both the pre-reform and the post-reform curricula and outline timetables make a distinction between subjects taught at the basic and extended levels and additional subjects (which may include one more modern foreign language or subjects based on schools' own curriculum as no core curriculum has been established for them). Timetables also indicate the number of hours to be devoted to rehabilitation and compensatory activities for pupils with disabilities.

Separate regulations specify the number of hours for the following subjects/types of classes: religion or ethics; family education; national or ethnic minority or regional language; national or ethnic minority or regional history and culture. Secondary schools are also obliged to provide career guidance and activities of psychological counselling.

Both pre-reform and post-reform provisions regulate which subjects may be taught both on **basic** and **extended levels** and which can only have one determined level.

**In the post-reform core curriculum** the subjects that may be taught at either basic or the extended level include: Polish language, a modern foreign language, language of national or ethnic minority or regional language, mathematics, history, civic education, philosophy, geography, biology, chemistry, physics, information technology.

Music, art education, introduction to entrepreneurship, physical education, safety education, family education and ethics may only be taught at basic level.

History of music, history of art and Latin and ancient culture may only be taught at extended level.

Within those limitations, the head of each school, having taken account of the teachers', pupils' and parents' opinions and the financial and human resources available, takes decision which subjects shall be thought at extended level; then each pupil chooses 2 or 3 extended subjects from the offered ones.

Pupils should also continue learning one of the modern foreign languages that they started in primary school (at basic or extended level), while with the other language they may choose whether to learn a new one from beginner's level or also continue with a language already familiar from primary education.

Since the school year 2019/2020 general and technical secondary schools will also be able to create **bilingual paths of education**, in which a chosen modern foreign language, alongside the Polish language, becomes a language of tuition. Instruction in the foreign language chosen must then be provided in at least two subjects, including at least one among biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, general and world geography, world history. The Polish language, Polish history and

geography of Poland, on the other hand, have to be taught in Polish. A school which offers only bilingual paths of education is called a **bilingual school**.

**Secondary bilingual schools** and **secondary schools with bilingual paths of education** may open preparatory classes (*klasy wstępne*) with curriculum strongly focused on teaching the modern foreign language which is going to be the language of tuition in the school or education path (18 hours of language classes a week).

More detailed information on pre-reform and post-reform curricular arrangements is available [here](#).

#### 4.2.3 Maturity exam (*egzamin maturalny*)

Both pre-reform upper secondary schools and post-reform secondary schools (general and technical ones) prepare pupils to the final external secondary education level exam called **maturity (or matriculation) exam (*egzamin maturalny*)**.

The examination verifies whether the candidates have acquired knowledge, skills and competences required by the curriculum for the subjects in which it is taken. Passing the exam also means that the graduate has achieved at least minimum level of knowledge and skills legally required at secondary level in the Polish language, mathematics and a selected modern foreign language.

Moreover, the results of the exam are the main (and often only) criteria for admission to higher education institutions (HEIs). HEIs are obliged to announce in advance which subjects and at which level will be taken into account in the recruitment process to first-cycle and long-cycle programmes which they offer. Entry examinations are organised only in specific cases (e.g. when it is necessary to check predispositions or knowledge not covered by (upper) secondary school curricula).

As the first cohort of pupils started the 4-year general secondary and 5-year technical secondary in the school year 2019/2020, the first maturity exams adjusted to the post-reform core curriculum will take place in the school year 2022/2023 (for general secondary school students).

Till that date the maturity exams for 3-year general secondary schools and 4-year technical secondary schools are still based on pre-reform core curriculum and rules.

Each upper secondary school graduate is required to take:

- 1) two examinations in the oral part (internal and assessed in the school),
- 2) four examinations in the written part (set by the Central Examination Board, and assessed by examiners included in the registers of Regional Examination Boards).

The compulsory exams in the oral part are:

- 1) the Polish language (no level specified),
- 2) a modern foreign language (no level specified).

The compulsory examinations in the written part are:

- 1) the Polish language (at basic level),
- 2) mathematics (at basic level),
- 3) a modern foreign language (at basic level),
- 4) a selected additional subject (at extended level).

The additional subject may be one of the foreign languages (English, French, Spanish, German, Russian and Italian) or one of these subjects: biology, chemistry, philosophy, physics, geography, history, history of music, history of art, information technology, Latin and ancient culture, a minority language (ethnic or national), Polish language, regional language, mathematics or society education .

Graduates from schools or school sections with a national minority language as a language of tuition are additionally required to take an examination in that minority language, both in the oral part (no level specified) and in the written part (at the basic level).

**To pass the maturity exam** and obtain the **świadectwo dojrzałości (maturity certificate)**, the candidate has to:

- score at least 30% of points in each of the compulsory subjects in the oral part, and
- score at least 30% of points in each of the compulsory subjects in the written part, and
- take an examination in a selected additional subject at the extended level in the written part (no pass threshold is specified for this exam).

Apart from the compulsory written examination in selected subject at the extended level candidates may choose to take additional exams in up to five other subjects. While the results of examinations in additional subjects taken on voluntary basis do not count towards passing, they are still indicated on the maturity certificate. The choice of additional subjects usually correlates with entry requirements of higher education institutions for the study programmes which each secondary school graduate wants to get enrolled to.

Winners and finalists of knowledge/science competitions for upper-secondary schools who took part in such competitions while attending upper-secondary schools are exempted from taking the maturity examination in the respective subject, and are awarded a maximum score in that subject at the maturity certificate.

Candidates who have taken their examinations in all mandatory subjects and at least one additional subject and fail one mandatory subject only in the written part or in the oral part have the right to a retake session for this subject. Those who passed the exam but are dissatisfied with results or have changed their plans for further studies and need to take exam in different subject(s) may do so voluntarily in the next sessions.

Detailed information on maturity examinations may be found at [the dedicated subpage of Central Examination Board's website](#).

**Świadectwo dojrzałości (maturity certificate)** confirms a **full qualification at level IV** of the PRK.

## 4.3 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### 4.3.1 Evolution

Vocational education and training (VET) in Poland has been undergoing gradual changes practically since the beginning of the XXI century. Content based and hardly flexible paths of education characterized with internal assessment of students' final achievements have been gradually transformed into a system based on learning outcomes, enabling external evaluation of students' knowledge, skills and competences, with growing flexibility of the training paths. The changes followed gradual developments in long life learning strategy and now they are able to incorporate to a certain extent also learning outcomes achieved through informal and non-formal learning.

A number of fundamental changes were introduced in the VET system between 2011 and 2015 to improve its quality and effectiveness and adjust training to the needs of employers and the labour market. The reform programmed in 2016-2018, which is still being implemented, mainly introduced organisational changes for VET schools but also opened more possible routes of training which may lead to obtaining full vocational qualifications in a certain occupation.

#### 4.3.2 Classification of occupations for the education system

The basic instrument which brings order to designing VET paths is the **classification of occupations for the education system**, issued by the minister competent for national education in the form of a ministerial regulation. The classification lists all professions for which training may be provided in the state VET system, together with the types of schools and institutions that can offer particular training programmes, length of the programmes and the minister responsible for each profession as such. It may also indicate some other specific limits regarding, for instance, training paths specifically reserved for pupils with certain kind of disability.

More recent versions of the classification, issued after implementation of the PRK (Polish Qualifications Framework) and ZSK (Integrated Qualifications System), define also which qualification or qualifications in the system correlate with each profession and what is their level and status according to PRK. Moreover, classification of occupations for the education system has to be in line with the general classification of professions and specialties on the job market issued every few years by the minister competent for labour and based on research on types professions and occupations actually functioning on the market, which ensures correspondence with real-life developments and is useful for statistical purposes.

The classification of occupations for the education system is frequently amended, as ministers competent for branches of government administration may request inclusion of new professions, and education programmes get adjusted to market and technology requirements, which has impact on the qualifications they include and the forms of training which they require.

##### 4.3.2.1 Core curriculum

**Core curricula** are developed for each occupation listed in the classification. They define the learning outcomes to be achieved for each of the qualifications correlated with the occupation in question. Each occupation may cover up to 3 separately defined qualifications and the number and type of qualifications covered relates to the types of schools in which training is to be provided. The core curriculum developed for an occupation is also a reference for designing programmes of professional qualifications courses for adult learners, so it is possible to obtain such qualifications also outside the school system. Students and adult learners can acquire qualifications one by one throughout the education process (not only upon finishing the school).

Achievement of learning outcomes necessary for each qualification defined in core curriculum may be confirmed by passing **external vocational examinations**, which are taken for each qualification separately. If a particular VET path covers more than one qualification, the student/learner may pass examination confirming one of them before they complete the whole path for the occupation.

Having passed an exam for a given single qualification, the students/learners receive a certificate for this qualification (*świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie*). After passing exams for all the qualifications required to practise a given occupation (and having completed the required level of education), students/learners receive a *dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe* (**diploma attesting to qualifications for a given occupation**). Since September 2019 the diploma is obligatorily issued together with a **Europass Certificate Supplement** (structured in line with the rules adopted by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES). The Supplement provides more details about the qualifications, as well as about the knowledge, skills and competences of a diploma holder. Earlier holders of such diplomas could receive the supplement upon request.

### 4.3.3 Employer-based routes of training

The Polish VET system also gives option of **dual training**, in which youthful workers combine theoretical education at vocational schools with practical training at an employer's establishment.

If the practical training is organized by an employer that is a member of a craft chamber, instead of the vocational examination organized by Regional Examination Boards the youthful worker may take **journeyman examination** in craft under the provisions of **Craft Act** (of 1989 with amendments). The traditional system of craft training and exams confirming craft qualifications are being gradually incorporated into the ZSK and defined in relation to PRK. More information on craft qualifications examinations is available (in Polish) [at the dedicated website of the Związek Rzemiosła Polskiego \(Polish Craft Association\)](#).

### 4.3.4 Structure before reform

The pre-reform vocational education and training at secondary level included:

- 4-year technical upper-secondary schools (*technikum*);
- 3-year basic vocational schools (*zasadnicza szkoła zawodowa*).

Formal **admission criteria** for both types of school were the same as for general secondary schools: the most important were the results of the final lower secondary school exam and grades on the certificate of completion of lower secondary school.

#### 4.3.4.1 Technical upper-secondary schools (*technikum*)

In 4-year **technical upper-secondary schools (*technikum*)** education in general subjects (based on the same core curriculum and rules which were used in general upper-secondary schools) was combined with professional education based on **vocational education and training (VET) core curriculum**, which defined knowledge, skills and competences common for all occupations, those relevant for a certain group of occupations and those specific to one particular occupation.

The **outline timetables** specified the number of hours per week and in the whole learning cycle. They included both hours for general subjects and hours for theoretical and practical vocational education. Moreover, each student had to complete a practical placement. Its length was defined in core curriculum but the head of school determined its exact timing (the form at which it should be organised). Placements longer than 4 weeks could substitute part of vocational training hours to be completed at school (in the calculation 60 minutes of a practical placement correspond to 1 teaching/class hour).

Graduates obtained qualifications to practise occupations as defined for the labour market, which they could additionally confirm with a ***dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe* (diploma attesting to qualifications for a given occupation)** if they passed **external vocational examination** organized by Regional Examination Boards. Moreover, they could take **the maturity exam** and, upon passing the exam, continue education at a higher education institution.

A ***dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe* (diploma attesting to qualifications for a given occupation)** obtained upon completion of a technical upper secondary school, after passing professional exams for that occupation confirms a **full qualification at level IV** of the **PRK** (Polish Qualifications Framework), unless a different level of the PRK has been established for the qualification in this occupation in accordance with the provisions of the Polish law.

The final cohort of students who finished the pre-reform lower secondary school was enrolled in 1<sup>st</sup> form of pre-reform 4-year technical upper secondary schools for the school year 2019/2020.

#### 4.3.4.2 Basic vocational schools (*zasadnicza szkoła zawodowa*)

In **basic vocational schools** education in general subjects was combined with vocational education and training. The objective was to prepare professionals in a given occupation who will be able to meet requirements of the job market and life in the contemporary society.

The **core curriculum** for general subjects in basic vocational schools was regulated separately from those for upper secondary schools. However, since 2012 (for students who started education in the school year 2012/2013) in most of the general subjects (apart from the Polish language and mathematics) it corresponded with the core curriculum for subjects taught at basic levels in general and technical upper secondary schools.

The school did not prepare to take maturity examination, so its graduates had no access to higher education programmes.

Before 2012 they could, however, continue education in so called *uzupełniająca liceum ogólnokształcące* (**complementary general secondary schools**), which provided education only in general subjects or *technikum uzupełniająca* (**complementary technical secondary schools**), which provided education both in general and vocational subjects (so the occupation chosen for further education had to be closely related to the occupation learned at basic vocational school). Both types of complementary schools were phased out starting from the school year 2012/2013. Since then basic vocational school graduates could only continue education in 2<sup>nd</sup> form of a general upper secondary school.

A *dplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe* (**diploma attesting to qualifications for a given occupation**) obtained upon completion of a **basic vocational school**, after passing professional exams for that occupation, confirms a **full qualification at level III** of the **PRK** (Polish Qualifications Framework), unless a different level of the PRK has been established for the qualification in that occupation in accordance with the provisions of the Polish law. Similarly, a **journeyman certificate** awarded upon passing the journeyman examination under the Craft Act in an occupation indicated in the **classification of occupations for the education system** confirms a **full qualification at level III** of the **PRK** to those who passed a basic vocational school, unless a different level of the PRK has been established for the qualification in that occupation in accordance with the provisions of the Polish law.

#### 4.3.5 Structure after reform

Graduates of post-reform primary schools who wish to undertake education that allows for obtaining concrete vocational qualifications can choose between:

- **5-year technical secondary schools** (*technikum*)
- **3-year stage I sectoral vocational schools** (*szkoła branżowa I stopnia*) with the possibility to continue education in **stage II sectoral vocational school** (*szkoła branżowa II stopnia*) or in 2<sup>nd</sup> form of general secondary school.

##### 4.3.5.1 Technical secondary schools

As a result of the reform, **4-year technical upper-secondary schools** (*technikum*) have been transformed into **5-year technical secondary schools** (*technikum*). The first cohort of students (first graduates of post-reform 8-year primary school) started education in the new type of school in the school year 2019/2020.

**5-year technical secondary schools** shall allow students to obtain both vocational qualifications in a given occupation (confirmed by external vocational examination) and take the maturity exam. Provided they pass, graduates can continue education in higher education institutions. The most



important change is the fact that taking vocational examinations will be obligatory for all students. Failing to do so will mean that they cannot complete the year (semester) in which it is scheduled and, as a result, finish the school.

Just like before the reform, teaching general subjects is based on the same core curriculum as in post-reform general secondary schools (as established in the [regulation of 30 January 2018](#)). Subjects are still divided into those taught at the basic level and extended level, and additional subjects.

New technical secondary schools, just like general secondary schools, can introduce bilingual paths of education or become bilingual schools and may open preparatory classes based on the same rules.

The learning outcomes to be achieved as a result of vocational training for a given occupation are established in a new core curriculum, however, they continue to be defined in terms of qualifications, which can be obtained and confirmed separately ([Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 16 May 2019](#)).

The new outline timetable specific for this type of school (established in annex 5 to the [Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 15 February 2019](#)) indicates the number of hours for each subject weekly and for the whole education cycle, including the minimum number of hours to be allocated to compulsory vocational training. The vocational training hours are distributed by the school head. The number of hours allocated to practical training may not be lower than 50% of the total number of hours allocated to vocational training.

Using new core curriculum for vocational education means that also the external vocational examinations will be conducted according to revised formula, adjusted to the new list of occupations and required learning outcomes, as defined in the [regulation of the Minister of National Education of 28 August 2019](#). Passing **vocational examination (*egzamin zawodowy*)** for a single qualification will be confirmed with a ***certyfiakat kwalifikacji zawodowej* (vocational qualification certificate)**, while those who successfully go through exams for all qualifications specified within a given occupation, will receive a ***dyplom zawodowy* (vocational diploma)**. The document will now be always accompanied with a Diploma Supplement issued in line with *Europass* rules, which shall help to explain the nature of the obtained qualifications to prospective employers and foreign institutions.

A ***dyplom zawodowy* (vocational diploma)** or a ***dyplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe* (diploma attesting to qualifications for a given occupation)** obtained upon completion of a technical secondary school confirms a **full qualification at level IV** of the **PRK**, unless a different level of the PRK has been established for the qualification in a given occupation in accordance with the provisions of the Polish law.

#### 4.3.5.2 Sectoral vocational schools (*szkoła branżowa*)

##### 4.3.5.2.1 Stage I

Starting from the school year 2017/2018 basic vocational schools were transformed into a new type of school: **3-year stage I sectoral vocational schools (*szkoła branżowa I stopnia*)**.

The objective of such schools is to enable students to obtain a diploma confirming vocational qualifications and complete basic education for a given sector/trade. Students finishing the school shall be prepared to take up employment. However, they also learn general subjects according to a core curriculum specific for this type of school.

Students who in the school year 2017/2018 started form 2 or 3 of their vocational education continued to receive training based on the pre-reform arrangements, despite the fact that the school was transformed.



Students who started education in stage I sectoral vocational schools in the school year 2017/2018 (on completion of lower secondary schools) were the first to learn according to a **new core curriculum for vocational training** (established in the [regulation of the Minister of National Education of 31 March 2017](#)) and **new outline timetables**.

Both groups may confirm their vocational qualifications in the occupation learned with an external examination set by the Central Examination Board and conducted by Regional Examination Boards in a formula adjusted to their education path. The requirements and procedure for the exam specific for the group following the core curriculum of 2017 is described in detail at the Central Examination Board [website](#).

In the school year 2019/2020 stage I vocational schools enrolled also the first cohort of graduates of 8-year primary schools. Since their previous path of education was different, they **also learn general subjects according to a different core curriculum** than graduates of lower secondary schools who started education in 3-year stage I sectoral vocational school in the same year.

However, all students who started education in such schools in the school year 2019/2020 share **the same core curriculum for vocational training**, introduced in September 2019 on the basis of the [regulation of the Minister of National Education of 16 May 2019](#) and adjusted to the revised **classification of occupations for the education system**.

According to the provisions they will also be the first cohort to take their **external vocational examination as obligatory requirement** to complete education. The exam will be organized according to a revised formula, as defined in the [regulation of the Minister of National Education of 28 August 2019](#) (the students who are youthful workers employed by craftsmen associated in craft chambers may choose to take the examination regulated under the Craft Act instead).

Passing vocational examination (*egzamin zawodowy*) for a single qualification will be confirmed with a ***certyfiakat kwalifikacji zawodowej* (vocational qualification certificate)**, while those who successfully go through exams for all qualifications specified within a given occupation, will receive a ***dyplom zawodowy* (vocational diploma)**. The document will always be accompanied with Diploma Supplement issued in line with *Europass* rules, which shall help to explain the nature of the obtained qualifications to prospective employers and foreign institutions.

A ***dyplom zawodowy* (vocational diploma)** or a ***certyfiakat kwalifikacji zawodowej* (diploma attesting to qualifications for a given occupation)**, for those who pass the exam in the previous formula) obtained upon completion of a **stage I sectoral vocational schools** confirms a **full qualification at level III** of the PRK, unless a different level of the PRK has been established for the qualification in a given occupation in accordance with the provisions of the Polish law. Similarly, a **journeyman certificate** awarded upon passing the journeyman examination under the Craft Act in an occupation indicated in the classification of occupations for the education system confirms a **full qualification at level III** of the PRK to those who completed **stage I sectoral vocational schools**, unless a different level of the PRK has been established for the qualification in that occupation in accordance with the provisions of the Polish law.

#### 4.3.5.2.2 Stage II

**Stage II sectoral vocational school (*szkoła branżowa II stopnia*)** will enable interested students who have finished a stage I vocational school to continue education and take the maturity exam.

Students can continue their vocational education only in an occupation related to the one they learned at stage I (the new occupation has to have one qualification in common with the occupation learned at the previous stage). Their professional qualifications will be confirmed by passing obligatory external

**vocational examination** according to the revised formula specified in the [regulation of the Minister of National Education of 28 August 2019](#).

The general education component in this type of schools is provided in a more limited range of subjects compared to the previous stage and to technical secondary schools: it covers the Polish language, one modern foreign language, mathematics, information technology, society education (only for post-reform primary school graduates), ethics, physical education and may include a language of a national or ethnic minority or a regional language.

Taking into consideration that in stage I schools students were taught on the basis of two different curricula (depending whether they were lower secondary school or 8-year primary school graduates), also stage II vocational schools will teach students from each group separately, according to a core curriculum and outline timetables adjusted to their previous education path.

A **dplom zawodowy (vocational diploma)** obtained upon completion of a **stage II sectoral vocational school** confirms a **full qualification at level IV** of the **PRK**, unless a different level of the PRK has been established for the qualification in that occupation in accordance with the provisions of the Polish law.

## 5 ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

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### 5.1 GRADING SYSTEM

In **pre-school education** stages there is no assessment. However, teachers are required to observe children's behaviour and achievements to be able to assess their needs and adapt teaching and learning methods accordingly. They should signal any worrying education- or behaviour-related issues to parents, as well as collaborate with a counselling and guidance centre and parents in supporting children's development. Teachers are also required to assess school readiness of 6-year-olds (or 5-year-olds at their parents' request) and provide a report to the parents.

Pupils in **forms 1 to 3 of the primary school** receive one general end-of-year grade for achievements in educational activities and one end-of-year grade for behaviour. The grades have descriptive form.

**Starting from 4<sup>th</sup> form** pupils' achievements in each subject are assessed separately. Subject teachers do it throughout the year but there are also end-of-semester and end-of-year grades which relate to the achievements in the whole period concerned.

Throughout all the stages of school education, **from 4<sup>th</sup> form of primary school to post-secondary non tertiary schools (including schools for adults)**, following **scale of grades** is used:

- 6 – excellent (*celujący*),
- 5 – very good (*bardzo dobry*),
- 4 – good (*dobry*),
- 3 – satisfactory (*dostateczny*),
- 2 – acceptable (*dopuszczający*),
- 1 – unsatisfactory (*niedostateczny*).

The lowest passing grade 2 is (*dopuszczający*).

Teachers may differentiate the scale a bit further adding plus (+) or minus (-) to each grade (e.g. 4 + means a bit higher achievement than 4 while 4- is a bit lower than 4). However, these additional signs are not counted in statistical calculations and may not be used for official end-of-semester nor end-of-year grades nor final examination grades. In primary education teachers may also use descriptive

assessment in compulsory or optional subjects if this is provided for in the assessment system of the school.

Moreover, pupils in primary education (as well as pre-reform lower secondary education) and general and technical (upper) secondary schools for young people also receive end-of-semester and end-of-year **grades for behaviour (conduct)** according to the following scale:

- excellent (*wzorowe*),
- very good (*bardzo dobre*),
- good (*dobrze*),
- acceptable (*poprawne*),
- unacceptable (*nieodpowiednie*),
- inadmissible (*naganne*).

The grade for behaviour normally should not influence subject grades nor the promotion to the next form, however, in specific, justified cases the school may deny the promotion on the grounds of pupil's inadmissible behaviour.

## 5.2 PROMOTION

In the first stage of primary education (forms 1 to 3) children are promoted to the next form on the basis of the descriptive grade. They may be kept in the same form for another year only in exceptional cases, when it is favourable to them due to their development or health conditions. Such decision is taken after consultation with psychologists and with parents' acceptance.

Starting from form 4 in order to get promoted a pupil has to obtain positive grade (upper than unsatisfactory) for all compulsory subjects at the end of the year. With negative grade in just one subject they have a second chance – they can take a **repeat/resit exam**. If they still fail, they do not get promoted unless the teaching council of the school decides to promote them conditionally.

The same assessment and promotion rules applied to pre-reform lower secondary schools and upper secondary education, as well as to the post-primary school types introduced with the reform.

## 6 POST-SECONDARY NON-TERTIARY EDUCATION

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### 6.1 OVERVIEW

Post-secondary non-tertiary education is considered a part of the school education system and in terms of legal bases, rules and organisation is closely linked with vocational education at secondary level.

Post-secondary schools are an alternative for general secondary schools' graduates who do not want to go to higher education or cannot do it, because they have not passed the maturity exam.

The schools offer VET programmes up to 2.5 years which allow to obtain concrete vocational qualifications in occupations listed in the **classification of occupations for the education system**, so the qualifications they are well recognisable on the market. According to the classification of 2019 the offer of post-secondary schools comprises over 30 occupations, including qualifications for professions (especially from the medical support sector) which are taught exclusively at this level and type of schools.

In public post-secondary schools education is free of charge. However, most post-secondary schools are non-public and define the level of their tuition fees.

There are post-secondary schools for young people or adult learners, and others providing special education.

## 6.2 ADMISSION

Most post-secondary schools (*szkoły policealne*) do not require maturity certificate but only (upper) secondary school-leaving certificate. Those which require passing the maturity exam are called *szkoła pomaturalna*. In the post-reform structure post-secondary schools will also accept graduates of stage I sectoral vocational schools.

Very often there are no additional criteria and candidates are accepted in chronological order of submission of their applications. Sometimes an entry interview is conducted.

Post-secondary schools for adults only take candidates aged 18 or over.

## 6.3 CURRICULUM

Taking into account vocational education, students of post-secondary schools have to achieve learning outcomes defined by the core curriculum for a given qualification and occupation. Where education preparing for the occupation may be provided in more than one type of school (e.g. in technical secondary and post-secondary school) students/learners of each type of school are expected to achieve the same professional knowledge, skills and competences. Post-secondary schools also have to follow the rule that at least 50% of the hours of vocational training have to be devoted to practical training. Practical training includes a compulsory practical placement, the duration of which is defined by the core curriculum for each occupation.

Post-secondary schools practically do not provide general education. Young people in addition to theoretical and practical professional training, have to attend classes of physical education but this requirement does not apply to schools for adults.

Although post-secondary schools were much less affected by the recent education reform in terms of structural changes, they had to adjust their curricula to new core curricula for vocational education and new outline timetables twice, just like in other types of VET.

Starting from the school year 2017/2018 students/learners beginning the first semester were taught on the basis of the vocational core curriculum of 2017 (established in the [regulation of the Minister of National Education of 31 March 2017](#)), while previous semesters still kept to the vocational core curriculum of 2012.

Since the school year 2019/2020 post-secondary schools introduced in their first semester the core curriculum of 2019 (specified in the [regulation of the Minister of National Education of 16 May 2019](#)).

As a result of the reforms, due to curricular changes at previous stages of education, post-secondary schools have to organize classes of entrepreneurship for students/learners who have not had such subject at their previous stages of education.

## 6.4 ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Post-secondary teachers use the same system of grades (1 – 6) as at the previous stages of education. Only learning achievements are assessed – there are no grades for conduct.

However, unlike in secondary schools, students are promoted after completion of each semester of the programme. To receive promotion they have to pass internal examinations in all compulsory

subjects. The rules giving a chance to resit exam to students with only one unsatisfactory grade and allowing for conditional promotion (once during the entire education cycle in a post-secondary school) are the same as in the previous stages of education.

## 6.5 FINAL EXAMINATION

Students/learners following core curriculum of 2017 can confirm each vocational qualification obtained by taking [external examination](#) set by Central Examination Board and assessed by Regional Examination Boards. Those who pass it receive a ***świadectwo potwierdzające kwalifikację w zawodzie (certificate for this qualification)***. After passing exams for all the qualifications required to practise a given occupation (and having completed the required level of education), students/learners receive a ***dplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe (diploma attesting to qualifications for a given occupation)***.

For students/learners who started a post-secondary school in September 2019 or later, according to the core curriculum of 2019, taking the **external vocational examination** is obligatory – it is a condition to receive the certificate of completion of post-secondary school. Positive result of the exam for a single qualification is attested with a ***certyfikat kwalifikacji zawodowej (vocational qualification certificate)*** and passing exams for all qualifications within the occupation – with a ***dplom zawodowy (vocational diploma)***.

Certificates and diplomas are accompanied with **Europass Certificate Supplement**, which provides more details about the qualifications, as well as about the knowledge, skills and competences of the diploma holder.

A ***dplom potwierdzający kwalifikacje zawodowe (diploma attesting to qualifications for a given occupation)*** obtained upon **completion of a post-secondary school** confirms a **full qualification at level IV** of the **PRK**, unless a different level of the PRK has been established for the qualification in a given occupation in accordance with the provisions of the Polish law.

A **vocational diploma** obtained **upon completion of a post-secondary school in an occupation for which training is provided only at post-secondary school level** confirms a **full qualification at level V** of the **PRK**, unless a different level of the PRK has been established for the qualification in this occupation in accordance with the provisions of the Polish law.

## 7 SPECIFIC FIELD AND PURPOSE EDUCATION

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The Polish education system includes schools in which education process is aimed at development of pupils' and students' special talents that could not be taken care of appropriately within the normal school system, such as art, music, dance, performance or sports. These are either schools which combine general education with lessons and practical activities focused on the specific field of art or sports discipline or schools which provide only artistic education activities and their education path is complementary to the general education provided in the normal system at a given level.

Artistic and sports school at primary level do not have established catchment areas. Instead, the most important admission criterion is the result of check of candidates' predispositions and/or physical capacity. As they are often attended also by pupils/students from quite distant areas, many of them provide accommodation at a boarding house or dormitory.

## 7.1 ARTISTIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

### 7.1.1 General information

Artistic education institutions in Poland are supervised by the minister competent for culture and national heritage. Although they have to work in line with the general laws governing the Polish education system, substantial issues regarding structure, admission age, student promotion conditions, organization and functioning are governed by a separate set of regulations issued by their supervising minister.

Since 2015 the minister is supported by the *Rada do spraw Szkolnictwa Artystycznego* (Council for Artistic Education) – an advisory body consisting of art professors and other figures with extensive knowledge and experience in the field, who analyse and issue official opinions on projects of reforms and regulations concerning artistic education.

Artistic schools which provide general education follow the general education core curricula and – only in this respect – are under supervision of the regional education authorities (*kurator oświaty*). However, a separate body – *Centrum Edukacji Artystycznej* (Artistic Education Centre) – is the main supervisory institution responsible for the quality of education in artistic schools and institutions.

Non-public artistic schools which provide education in accordance with the regulations award the same qualifications as the public ones.

To get admitted to artistic education institutions the candidate has to prove their predispositions for particular artistic branch in a procedure called **predispositions check** (*badanie przydatności*). Other requirements include being in a specific age range and minimal level of previous education completed (which may mean completion of a certain grade in general education, not necessarily completion of a certain type of school as such).

Artistic professions are currently included in the regulation on **classification of artistic occupations** (*klasyfikacja zawodów szkolnictwa artystycznego*) which is a separate regulation complementary to the **classification of occupations for the education system** issued by the minister competent for education and upbringing. Just like in the case of professions in vocational education, each artistic occupation has a **core curriculum** established by the regulation of the minister of culture which constitutes the basis of school education programmes. The minister establishes also **outline timetables** (*ramowe plany nauczania*) for all types of public artistic schools (for those which provide general education the timetables include hours for both general and artistic subjects).

On this bases, on completion of an artistic school which provides education at post-primary level students take a **diploma examination** (*egzamin dyplomowy*), which consists of a practical part (performance, preparation of a work of art) and a theoretical part checking knowledge of theories and history of the artistic discipline in question. Those who pass are awarded a professional artist qualification in their discipline, which is confirmed by the **Dyplom ukończenia szkoły artystycznej potwierdzający uzyskanie tytułu zawodowego** (**Diploma of art school confirming obtaining a professional title**) in a given artistic profession.

**Diploma of art school confirming obtaining a professional title** in the profession **dancer** (*tancerz*) confirms **full qualification at level VI** of the **PRK**.

**Diploma of art school confirming obtaining a professional title** in all other artistic professions:

- visual artist (*plastyk*)
- circus actor (*aktor cyrkowy*)



- musical stage actor (*aktor scen muzycznych*)
- musician (*muzyk*)

confirms **full qualification at level V** of the **PRK**.

### 7.1.2 Types of artistic schools

In Poland there are the following types of artistic schools and institutions at **primary** and **secondary** level:

#### 7.1.2.1 Music education

- Schools providing both **general education and music education**:
  - **I stage general music school – (*ogólnokształcąca szkoła muzyczna I stopnia*)** – the entry age for pupils is 6 or 7 years, as the school provides general education according to primary school curriculum and primary level music education, including learning to play a chosen musical instrument; currently its learning cycle is 8 years (before the recent education system reform it had 6-year cycle just like pre-reform primary schools);
  - **II stage general music school – (*ogólnokształcąca szkoła muzyczna II stopnia*)** – the entry conditions are completion of I stage (general) music school and completion of primary education; it provides general education at secondary school level and secondary level music education); currently the learning cycle is 6 years (certain specializations last 4 years but they can only be started at 3rd form). On completion students take the **diploma examination** as well as **maturity examination** in general subjects. Graduates may continue education at HEIs.
- **Schools providing music education only**:
  - **I stage music school in 4-year cycle (*szkoła muzyczna I stopnia 4-letnia*)** – the admission age is 8-16 years; the school provides primary level music education, including learning to play a chosen musical instrument during individual classes; pupils attend classes in their free time from education in general schools.
  - **I stage music school in 6-year cycle – (*szkoła muzyczna I stopnia 6-letnia*)** – the admission age is 5-10 years; the school provides primary level music education, including learning to play a chosen musical instrument during individual classes; pupils attend classes in their free time from education in general schools.
  - **II stage music school – (*szkoła muzyczna II stopnia*)** depending on specialization it may have 6-year or 4-year cycle; the entry age is 15-23 years and candidates have to pass entry exams with practical and theoretical component (depending also on specialization); the school provides only secondary level music education with specializations in playing a musical instrument, singing (different styles), eurhythmics or violin making. On completion students take the **diploma examination**. Graduates may continue education at HEIs provided that they have also passed the maturity exam.
  - **Post-secondary music schools (*policealne szkoły muzyczne*)** – provide 3-year cycle of artistic education in two specializations:
    - singing and acting (*specjalność wokalna-aktorska*),
    - singing and dance (*specjalność wokalna-baletowa*).

Such schools admit candidates up to 23 years of age who completed secondary education and passed entry examination (checking practical skills and theoretical knowledge in the chosen specialization).

On completion students take the **diploma examination** in the profession of musical stage actor (*aktor scen muzycznych*).

#### 7.1.2.2 Visual arts education

- **General visual arts schools (*ogólnokształcące szkoły sztuk pięknych*)** with **6-year cycle** – maximum entry age for candidates was 14 years. The schools provided **general education** at lower-secondary and upper-secondary school level **and education in visual arts** (in various specialisations: from painting, sculpture and graphic arts through design, renovation and scenography to photography and film). At the end of form 3 students took lower secondary school exam (*egzamin gimnazjalny*). On completion students took the **diploma examination** in their specialization as well as **maturity examination** in general subjects. Due to the recent education reform this type of school is being phased out.
- **Visual arts secondary schools (*liceum sztuk plastycznych*)** – maximum entry age for candidates is 17 years. The school currently has 5-year cycle and provides both **general education at secondary school level** and **education in visual arts** (in various specialisations, as above). On completion students take **diploma examination** in their specialization as well as **maturity examination** in general subjects.
- **Post-secondary visual arts schools (*policealne szkoły plastyczne*)** – offer 2-year cycle of artistic education in visual arts; admit candidates up to 23 years of age who completed secondary education and passed entry examination (checking practical skills in drawing, painting and art composition and theoretical knowledge in the chosen specialization). On completion students take the **diploma examination**, which includes preparation of a work of art and defending its artistic value as well as checking the theoretical and history knowledge in the field of visual arts.

#### 7.1.2.3 Dance education

- **General Ballet Schools (*ogólnokształcące szkoły baletowe*)** – provide both general education and artistic education in ballet dance; admit children no older than 10 years (about to start form 4 in primary education) but for older children it is possible to join higher form if they pass a qualification exam in ballet dance skills. This type of school works in **9-year cycle** (forms 1-5 reflect forms 4-8 of primary school while forms 6-9 reflect forms 1-4 of general secondary school). General education is provided according to general core curriculum for 8-year primary school and 4-year general secondary school. On completion students take **diploma examination** in ballet dance as well as **maturity examination** in general subjects.
- **Dance Art Schools (*szkoły sztuki tańca*)** – offer a 9-year cycle of dance education; the admission age for candidates is 6-16 years. Such schools do not provide general education but only focus on practical training and knowledge in the field of dance (both classical ballet dance and other dance styles). Pupils/students attend such schools in addition to education in different general schools (primary or secondary, depending on age), so classes are organized in the afternoon or at the weekends. On completion students take **diploma examination** in dancing.



#### 7.1.2.4 Circus art education

In Poland there is only one Circus School with **3-year education cycle**. The entry age for candidates is 13-23 years. Each candidate has to provide medical opinion of sports medicine doctor confirming good state of health and lack of contraindications to practice circus professions. The entry exam involves physical challenges as well as dance and acting skills. The first year activities are focused on advanced physical training and basics of each circus specialization as well as general acting and performance skills. In their second year students choose a specialization in which they are going to take their final diploma exam. They also learn make-up techniques, the basics of healthy diet and anatomy, the history of circus and German as a foreign language. The **diploma examination** at the end of third year consists in designing and performing a stage act.

#### 7.1.2.5 Artistic circles

**Artistic circles (*ogniska artystyczne*)** are less time-requiring but structured paths of artistic education which are often organized by artistic schools. They offer the possibility to develop one's artistic passion outside general school setting with qualified teachers (usually the same who teach at artistic schools). Students and pupils attend individual or group activities according to the general outline timetables established in the ministry regulation. Moreover, they prepare for and take part in performances or show their artworks at exhibitions. Artistic circles include:

- **Music circles (*ogniska muzyczne*):**
  - Children division – 4-year cycle with the programme of 13 hours of activities a week;
  - Young people division – 4-year cycle with the programme of 15 hours of activities a week;
- **Visual arts circles (*ogniska plastyczne*)**
  - Children division – 2-year cycle with the programme of 10 hours of activities a week;
  - Young people division – 2-year cycle with the programme of 16 hours of activities a week;
- **Dance circles (*ogniska taneczne/baletowe*)**
  - Children division – 4-year cycle with the programme of 14 hours of activities a week;
  - Young people division – 4-year cycle with the programme of 20 hours of activities a week.

## 7.2 SPORT-FOCUSED EDUCATION

Children and youth excelling in sports may develop their talents in:

- **sport classes in general schools** (primary and post-primary) which provide training in one or more sports for at least three subsequent forms (years) of education in this school (with minimum 20 pupils/students in the starting year);
- **sport schools** (primary and post-primary) – schools with at least two sport classes (each consisting of at least 15 pupils/students in the starting year), each of them providing sports education for at least 3 subsequent forms (years) of education in this school;
- **sport champions class in general schools** (primary and post-primary), which provide advanced training in one or more sports for at least three subsequent forms (years) of education in this school (the minimum number of pupils/students is not established, the class consists of as many as there are with a comparable level of sport skills);

- **schools for sport champions** (primary and post-primary) – schools providing sport-focused education with at least one sport champions class in which pupils/students receive sports training for at least 3 subsequent forms (years) of education in this school.

A sport class or sport champions class does not have to be started at from the lowest level – it may be created for pupils/students at higher forms (e.g. in 8-year primary school it is now possible to create them from 6<sup>th</sup> form).

Admission to all sport-focused forms of education depends mainly on the results of tests of physical fitness and preparation. For post-primary schools completion of primary education is required but learning achievements are a secondary criterion. Moreover, candidates have to provide medical opinion confirming that their state of health allows them for trainings that are part of the school/class programme.

All the forms of education mentioned above follow the general rules of organization and functioning established for mainstream settings and provide general education at primary or secondary level according to general core curriculum (and vocational core curriculum for classes and schools which simultaneously provide post-primary professional education). In addition, their pupils/students pass a determined number of hours at compulsory structured sports activities and trainings (minimum 10 hours per week for sport classes and schools; minimum 16 hours per week for sport champions classes and schools).

The sport activities are conducted according to a training programmes designed by official sports associations for a given discipline and approved by the minister competent for physical culture.

### 7.3 SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS UNDER CROSS-MINISTERIAL SUPERVISION

#### 7.3.1 General information

Schools that specifically prepare for certain professions or functions in state services and closely connected with fields of activity governed by other ministers, are subject to double supervision:

- by the **minister competent for education and upbringing** and, in practical dimension, by the **regional education authority** (*kurator oświaty*) – mainly in respect to the quality of general education based on core curriculum appropriate for the school level;
- by the **minister competent for the area of government activity to which the professions in question belong** – especially in respect to organization and quality of vocational education, including ensuring necessary facilities and equipment and compliance of the learning outcomes with requirements regarding regulated professions; the minister may create and finance a specific supervisory institution for this purpose; ministers may also establish new schools providing education in “their” professions.

At the end of their professional education students take **professional examinations** like in all schools with vocational training. In technical secondary schools (technikum) students take **maturity examinations** at the end of their last year.

#### 7.3.2 Agricultural education institutions

Agricultural education institutions usually consist of a few types of post-primary schools (e.g. sectoral school, technical secondary school and post-secondary school) which provide education in the same

physical seat in occupations assigned to the minister of agriculture according to the **classification of occupations for the education system**.

Such schools are located outside cities, in the country, and they normally possess certain area of agricultural land and other facilities which enables them to teach practical skills in natural conditions, by actually running a farm. They also cooperate with local companies specialised in such areas as food production, agricultural machinery or bio-chemistry products. Because of their location they normally offer accommodation in a boarding house or dormitory at least to a certain number of their students.

According to the data at the Ministry of Agriculture website of March 2020, there are 54 agricultural education institutions on the territory of Poland. In order to ensure qualified teachers for such schools the minister can establish their own teacher training institutions.

### 7.3.3 Forestry schools

Forestry schools are supervised by the minister competent for environment and offer post-primary education (at general technical school or sectoral school level) only in professions assigned to this minister according to the **classification of occupations for the education system**. The education prepares for work in state services and institutions responsible for forest management or environment protection and for other activities connected with use and protection of forest resources (e.g. work of forest machinery operators).

Just as agricultural schools, forestry schools are located in the country, close to large forest areas, in order to provide their students opportunity to learn practical skills in the environment they are going to work in. For this reason they normally offer boarding house accommodation. Traditionally their students wear uniforms for classes. There is also emphasis on students physical fitness – the graduates are expected to be able to work outside in different weather conditions.

Forestry schools cooperate with local forest administration units, national parks and environment protection areas but also with hunting associations, which allows their students to gain experience and contacts in their future professional environments (through professional placements and participation in local actions and events).

According to the data at government websites of March 2020 there are 11 such schools at the territory of Poland.

### 7.3.4 Maritime schools, fishery schools and inland navigation schools

All those types of schools, although they provide education in different groups of professions, work within similar legal framework and organizational rules, as the government activity areas they belong to currently fall under supervision of the same minister (Minister of Maritime Economy and Inland Navigation).

**Maritime schools** are co-supervised by the minister competent for maritime economy and offer post-primary education in professions assigned to this minister according to the **classification of occupations for the education system**. The vocational core curriculum for some of the professions is designed in such a way as to meet the requirements for seafarers trainings established in the *International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers* (STCW Convention). The quality of schools as training establishments is certified by the minister. As a result, graduates gain professional qualifications valid in Poland and in all countries of the convention. Therefore, candidates for education in professions which involve such trainings have to present a medical opinion that their state of health allows them to work on ships.

Maritime schools are generally located in cities and towns of northern Poland, close to the sea, and usually offer boarding house accommodation to their students. Because of specific training requirements such schools need to possess or have access to specific technical equipment, e.g. simulators of navigation devices or ship machinery or even their own vessel. Their students traditionally wear uniforms.

**Fishery schools** are co-supervised by the minister competent for fishery and provide post-primary education in professions fundamental for this area of economy according to the **classification of occupations for the education system** – including both inland and maritime setting. For maritime fishery, the education and training needs to meet requirements of international conventions specifying qualifications necessary to work at fishery vessels. In consequence, like for other maritime professions, the candidates' state of health has to allow them for work in such conditions, which has to be confirmed by a medical certificate.

**Inland navigation schools** are co-supervised by the minister competent for inland navigation and offer post-primary education in professions assigned to this minister according to the **classification of occupations for the education system**. They prepare for work on vessels circulating on rivers, canals and lakes or in inland ports. However, the education path may also include elements of training which meet requirements of the STCW Convention. Their students traditionally wear uniforms.

According to data of March 2020 in Poland there are only 3 such schools and two of them are certified by the minister as providers of trainings in line with STCW Convention requirements.

### 7.3.5 Fire service schools

All **fire service schools** are established and supervised by the minister competent for internal affairs. They provide post-secondary vocational education to candidates for professional firefighters as well as specialist training for those already employed in the service. Candidates' maximum entry age is 25 years and they have to possess maturity certificate confirming passing examination in mathematics, a chosen foreign language and one of the subjects: physics, chemistry, information technology or biology. Moreover, they have to be in good health and physically fit – their stamina is checked during recruitment procedure.

Full cycle of education in the profession of **fire service technician (*technik pożarnictwa*)** is based on a **core curriculum** and lasts 2 years. The majority of the activities are practical trainings: physical and technical, but theoretical knowledge in technical and life sciences and crisis management constitutes an important underlying component. The aim of classes is to stimulate activity and independent thinking, the ability to combine scientific knowledge with the practice in functioning of rescue and firefighting units, including the ability to carry out rescue and firefighting operations. Therefore, fire service schools need to have specialist equipment, laboratories and training grounds which allow for controlled exposure to potentially dangerous situations in order to train students' skills and reactions.

The programme is concluded with a **professional examination**. Those who passed are awarded a **full qualification at level V of the PRK**, which is simultaneously the full qualification for a regulated profession, and are entitled to receive a particular grade in the hierarchy of the public Fire Service.

According to data of March 2020 there are 3 fire service schools in Poland.

### 7.3.6 Military classes

The act of 14 December 2016 – Law on School Education introduced a regular possibility to create **military preparation classes (*oddziały przygotowania wojskowego*)** in post-primary schools as first such programmes, organized as educational experiments and they gained substantial popularity. The

idea was to provide a legal framework for engagement of the Ministry of Defence into development of a unified core curriculum and for collaboration between schools and local military units (e.g. engaging military specialists as instructors, students' access to military facilities and training grounds for practical activities). Such education aims on development of skills useful for military service and shaping students patriotic and pro-security attitudes.

The first military preparation classes (known also as 'uniform classes' – *klasy mundurowe*) organized within the new framework in general and technical secondary schools are planned to start in the school year 2020/2021 (maximum 130 classes in best prepared schools chosen by the ministry).

## 8 EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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### 8.1 GENERAL INFORMATION

The Polish system of education provides specific solutions for children and young people who are either not able to follow a normal path of education or need assistance and adjustment of the learning environment due to disabilities, long-lasting illnesses or traumas, behavioural or emotional disorders, specific learning difficulties or social maladjustment. On the other hand, special needs in education may also mean the necessity to take into account pupils' or students' outstanding intellect and special talents.

Depending on the type of educational needs, the following groups of students are distinguished:

- students with disabilities:
  - with mild, moderate and severe intellectual disabilities;
  - deaf and with hearing impairment;
  - blind and with visual impairment;
  - with a motor disability, including aphasia;
  - with autism, including Asperger's syndrome;
  - with multiple disabilities;
- socially maladjusted students;
- students at risk of social maladjustment.

Specific solutions are available also for:

- students (with or without disabilities) undergoing a period of treatment in healthcare facilities due to long-term illness or trauma;
- particularly gifted students.

### 8.2 POSSIBLE FORMS OF EDUCATION

Pupils and students with special needs, depending on their individual situation and their parents' or legal guardians' decision, may receive education within the mainstream education system or in special education institutions, often specialized in particular types of impairments or difficulties.

Young children with special needs receive education in:

- special nursery schools;
- mainstream nursery schools and other pre-school settings with:
  - special classes only for children with the opinion confirming need for special education;

- integration classes for children with the opinion confirming need for special education and peers without disabilities.

Pupils and students with special needs receive(d) education in:

- special schools:
  - primary schools, including primary schools for pupils with a moderate or severe intellectual disability;
  - lower secondary schools (before they were phased out as a result of the recent reform);
  - 3 year schools preparing for employment – secondary schools for students with moderate or severe intellectual disability, or multiple disabilities (on completion students receive a certificate of preparation for work (*świadectwo potwierdzające przysposobienie do pracy*), they are also not required to take the final vocational examination but they may do it if they want to;
  - general and vocational (upper) secondary schools (in pre-reform or post-reform shape);
  - post-secondary schools;
- mainstream schools at all levels, where pupils or students may attend:
  - a special class only for pupils or students with the decision confirming need for special education;
  - an integration class composed of pupils or students with the decision confirming need for special education and their peers without disabilities;
  - a mainstream class.

Students whose need for special education has been diagnosed may also have the duration of their education extended (by one year in forms I to III and by 2 years in forms IV to VIII of the primary school, and by 1 year in a post-primary school). Students with disabilities and those at risk of social maladjustment may attend mainstream schools until the end of the school year in the calendar year when they reach the age of 20 in the case of primary schools or 24 in the case of post-primary schools.

Regardless of their learning setting, all pupils and students in education for children and youth with special needs, except those with a moderate or severe intellectual disability, receive the same types of school certificates and external exam documents as in mainstream education. Regardless of the type of school, end-of-year and school leaving certificates for pupils and students with a moderate or severe disability are issued in a special format and include descriptive assessment. Students finishing a special school preparing for employment receive a certificate confirming preparation for work.

### 8.3 EDUCATION IN PENITENTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Socially maladjusted pupils and students required to stay in youth detention centres, juvenile shelters, prisons or arrest houses receive education in schools at relevant level supervised by the Minister of Justice. Organization of the school year in such establishments may be adjusted to the needs of the reformatory process; classes of different forms may be combined if necessary and some schools do not provide full education cycle. At post-primary level such schools usually provide vocational education.

## 8.4 GIFTED STUDENTS

At the other end of the spectrum, talented, highly intelligent students who need less time to acquire knowledge and skills required by the core curriculum at each stage of education and in any type of school may follow:

- an individualised study programme for one or more subjects/types of classes included in the school curriculum for a given year;
- an individualised learning path leading to completion of education in any time;
- school within a shorter period.

Such children and young people may also develop their talents and interests during extracurricular activities provided by the school.

## 9 COLLEGES

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### 9.1 OVERVIEW

Colleges are a very specific type of education institutions, situated on the border between school education and higher education. On the one hand, from the point of view of national legislation colleges belong to the school education system. On the other hand, they provide education using methods and schemes characteristic rather for higher education institutions and have legal obligation to cooperate with a HEI which shall offer them guidance in scientific and didactic sphere.

Colleges were established to offer 3-year programmes highly focused on practical skills, preparing qualified specialists in specific professions. Currently this type of education has almost been phased out – at the beginning of 2020 only 4 such institutions, all providing education in the profession of social worker, still exist. However, it is important to understand the value of qualifications they awarded, as college graduates are still active on the job market, especially in education and social assistance sector.

### 9.2 COLLEGES OF SOCIAL WORK

#### 9.2.1 General information

In Poland social worker is a regulated profession under the supervision of the minister competent for social security. Therefore, rules of organization and didactic activity of *kolegium pracowników służb społecznych (colleges of social work)* are determined in two regulations issued by this minister on the basis of School Education Act of 7 September 1991:

- [Regulation of the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy of 15 September 2016 on colleges of social work](#) (Journal of Law of 2016, item 1543), which lays down detailed arrangements for the establishment, restructuring and liquidation of colleges of social work, regulates its operations, relations with other supervisory, education and higher education institutions and establishes conditions and procedures for issuing, and specimens of documents provided to college students and graduates, including graphic symbols on college diplomas which identify the level of the Polish Qualifications Framework;
- [Regulation of the Minister of Social Policy of 7 April 2005 on the national standards for initial training programmes in colleges of social work](#) (Journal of Law of 2005, no. 62, item 555), which specifies duration of programmes and practical placements, subjects to be taught, the minimum course load and general curricular contents, the scope and duration of practical



placements, and the profile of graduates. The requirements provide the basis for detailed curricula to be developed by colleges.

According to the provisions, colleges may be public or non-public institutions. Opening such institution requires approval of the minister competent for social security.

All the colleges which still work in 2020 are public institutions, established and run by regional authorities. Activity of a college is based on a statute, which regulates such issues as the detailed organization of education, competences of the internal authorities and bodies, rights and obligations of students or internal grading system. In general, colleges have more autonomy in shaping their internal rules of operation than post-secondary schools. However, like other institutions of the school system, they are also subject to supervision by the regional education authority (*kurator oświaty*).

The academic year at colleges lasts from 1 October to 30 September of the following calendar year. It is divided into two semesters which end with winter and summer examination periods and are separated by winter and summer breaks.

### 9.2.2 Admission and organization of education

Basic requirement for **admission** is having a **maturity certificate**. Detailed rules and requirements of the admission process are adopted by colleges individually.

Colleges of social work provide 3-year education programmes with quite multidisciplinary theoretical content adjusted to the needs of the profession and strong practical component. Moreover, each college has to conclude an agreement of scientific and didactic guidance and supervision with a HEI which offers higher education programmes in the field of social work. The HEI appoints an academic teacher holding at least a doctoral degree as a coordinator of all actions and responsibilities resulting from the agreement.

The standards established in the regulation mentioned above specify the courses to be included in the college programme and the number of hours to be allocated to courses, curricular contents, length of practical placements and the knowledge and skills that students should acquire by the end of the training cycle. The training can be offered both at full-time and part-time programmes.

Education is provided in the form of lectures, practical classes, workshops; some of them are conducted by academic teachers from the supervising HEI. Students are divided into groups of 20 which may be combined in larger ones for lectures.

Practical placements are an important part of training. Students have the obligation to complete them in different types of social assistance institutions during the training cycle and at their last year they should choose one connected with the specialization they plan to focus on.

### 9.2.3 Assessment and certification

Rules of assessment and progression to the next year are determined by internal regulations, however, the **grading scale** of 1 to 6 is generally used (as in school education).

Students receive grades from teachers of individual courses/subjects, both for coursework and end-of-course exams. Till the end of the 3-year cycle they are required to have completed all courses and practical placements included in the curriculum. They also have to submit and defend their diploma thesis which is connected with implementation of a practical social project. Those who have met the requirements are allowed to take a **final/diploma examination** conducted by a board appointed by the director of a given college.

Upon passing the final exam, graduates receive a **dyplom ukończenia kolegium (diploma of college completion)** which confirms **full qualifications in the profession of social worker**.

Till 30 September 2008 the supervision agreement between the college of social work and the higher education institution had to enable interested college students to follow additional courses and take an exam for a first-cycle degree of *licencjat*. The exam was carried out by an examination board established by the Rector of the higher education institution responsible for academic supervision over a given college and the degree is awarded by the HEI. Then, till 30 September 2015 the supervising HEIs could still give such possibility to college students, upon meeting specified conditions, but this option was no longer required by the law.

Since October 2015 the special path for college graduates to acquire first-cycle degree no longer exists, which is one of the reasons why the number of candidates wishing to take up this form of professional training dropped dramatically (from 2170 in 2007 to 240 in 2019).

Diplomas of colleges of social work are officially recognized as **full qualifications at level V** of the **PRK** (since 1 October 2016 this is confirmed with a PRK graphic sign on the diploma). Despite the changes over time, all such diplomas rightfully issued still confirm professional qualifications of social worker.

### 9.3 COLLEGES OF TEACHER TRAINING

In the 1990 a similar system of college education was established to train qualified teachers, with particular focus on teachers of foreign languages who were in high demand at that time (after decades of teaching Russian as the obligatory foreign language in education, schools at all levels started introducing classes of other languages but were lacking well prepared specialists).

Applicants were enrolled on the basis of their maturity certificate and the result obtained in an entrance examination, with the contents of this examination defined by the college.

3-year college programmes were offered in ***kolegium nauczycielskie*** (**teacher training colleges**) and ***nauczycielskie kolegium języków obcych*** (**foreign language teacher training colleges**). They were focused on preparing students for employment at schools, so their curricula combined theoretical knowledge within the school subjects that graduates were going to teach with applied didactic methodologies and practical skills such as class management. Practical placements at school settings were an important component of training. All programmes had to meet the requirements of teacher training standards established in regulations. At **foreign language teacher training colleges** the chosen foreign language was also a language of tuition.

College students participated in lectures and practical classes and had to pass end-of-semester or end-of-year exams in all subjects. To complete their training they had to take a **final/diploma examination** conducted by a board appointed by the director of a given college. Upon passing the exam, graduates received a ***dplom ukończenia kolegium nauczycielskiego*** (**diploma of completion of teacher training college**) or a ***dplom ukończenia nauczycielskiego kolegium języków obcych*** (**diploma of completion of foreign language teacher training college**).

Teacher training colleges and foreign language teacher training colleges concluded supervision agreements with higher education institutions. The supervision agreement between the college and the higher education institution had to enable interested college students to follow additional courses and take an exam for a first-cycle degree (*licencjat*).

Starting from 2013/2014 teacher training colleges and foreign language teacher training colleges were being phased out (on 30 September 2015 all the agreements with HEIs on continuing education towards the degree of *licencjat* lost their validity). Some of the colleges were transformed into HEIs with professional profile, others were incorporated into their supervising universities. The phase-out process was correlated with amendments to teacher training standards.

A ***dplom ukończenia kolegium nauczycielskiego*** (**diploma of completion of teacher training college**) or a ***dplom ukończenia nauczycielskiego kolegium języków obcych*** (**diploma of completion of**

**foreign language teacher training college**) are officially considered full qualifications at **level V** of the PRK.

## 10 HIGHER EDUCATION

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### 10.1 LEGAL BASES

Higher Education Institutions have autonomy of action, within the limits of the law. The key act governing higher education in Poland is the *Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education and Science* (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 85 as amended). It defines the area of authority of the main bodies in the higher education system, sets out the rights and responsibilities of HEIs, lays down general arrangements concerning the establishment and liquidation of HEIs, supervision over HEIs, governance system and internal structure of HEIs, types of degree programmes, international co-operation, qualification requirements and employment conditions for academic staff, rights and duties of, and financial support for, students and doctoral students, and student and doctoral student self-government bodies.

According to the *Act of 4 September 1997 on branches of government administration* (Journal of Laws of 2019, item 945 as amended) the minister competent for higher education and science is responsible for issues regarding supervision and financing of higher education institutions and for scientific activity.

However, both didactic and research activities of certain HEIs, especially those that focus on one specific area of science or programmes of academic training which prepare for specific professions or state services, are highly connected with spheres of responsibility of other ministers or even non-government religious organizations. The *Law on Higher Education and Science* of 2018 regulates also how the responsibility and powers are shared in such cases.

### 10.2 TYPES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The Polish higher education system includes both public and non-public institutions. Each HEI, based on the quality of their scientific research and didactic offer may also be classified as academic (research-oriented) or professional (focused on providing higher education best suited for the job market). Moreover, there is a popular division of HEIs into groups according to the areas of knowledge and training which they focus on.

#### 10.2.1 Public vs non-public higher education institutions

**Public higher education institutions** are those founded by a state authority. They need to be created with a legislative act: a law approved by the Parliament (for universities with academic profile) or a minister's regulation (HEIs with professional profile). New public HEIs may also be established as a result of fusion of two or more existing public HEIs or public HEIs and research institutions.

Public HEIs are entitled for wide range of state financing, which is the main source of its financial assets. They do not charge tuition fees from students of full-time first-, second-, long- or third-cycle programmes carried out in Polish. They may, however, offer paid part-time programmes at all levels or paid degree programmes delivered in a foreign language. For certain services, like validation of learning outcomes, repeating courses due to a student's unsatisfactory academic results or attending courses outside the curriculum the fee may be required also from students of full-time programmes.

At a public HEI the number of students at full-time studies may not be lower than the number of students of part-time studies.

**Non-public higher education institutions** are those created by a private founder – a natural person or a legal person (except for local authorities and state or local government entities with legal personality). Such an institution is established with the act of entry into the register of non-public higher education institutions held by the minister competent for higher education. In order to receive a positive decision on entry the founder has to prove the fulfilment of conditions specified by the law both for themselves and the newly created academic institution. The first entry is valid for 6 years, the next one is prolonged for an indefinite period of time. New non-public HEIs may also be established as a result of fusion of two or more existing non-public HEIs.

Non-public HEIs may receive state financing only for specific elements of their activity but most of their funds come from the tuition fees and fees for other services paid by the students. Certain full-time third-cycle programmes are offered to students for free if the non-public HEI has received for them a subsidy from the state budget.

### 10.2.2 Academic vs. professional higher education institutions

From the point of view of their main activity objectives and types of education programmes provided Polish higher education institutions are divided into academic and professionally oriented ones.

**Academic HEIs** are focused on scientific research, including provision of innovative scientific and technological solutions which can be transferred to the economy. The legislation in force includes in this group those HEIs which were classified into the scientific category A+, A or B+ in at least one scientific or art discipline. However, until the parametrization of higher education institutions under the new law is completed (which is expected in 2022), the HEIs keep the profile they have had so far, on the basis of assessment under previous provisions.

Higher education institutions with academic profile (including non-public ones) receive financing from the state for maintenance and development of their research potential and for investments supporting their scientific activity.

Academic HEIs offer first-cycle and second- or long-cycle programmes. They may also provide education at doctoral level. They have autonomy in establishing new programmes of study in the disciplines in which they have obtained high ranks for quality of training and research.

Certain words, like “uniwersytet” (university), “akademia” (academy) or “politechnika” (technical university) may be used as name components only by the HEIs with academic profile, unless the particular HEI used it already in the past when it was considered an academic profile institution.

**Professional HEIs** are those not classified as A+, A or B+ category in any scientific or art discipline. Such institutions focus on didactic activity and offer first-cycle programmes with practical profile. They may also carry out second-cycle or long-cycle programmes with practical profile as well as provide so called specialist education programmes of at least 3 semesters duration at the level equivalent to level V of the PRK. However, they are not entitled to organize doctoral programmes nor award doctoral degrees.

When, as a result of verification, an academic higher education institution loses its classification in the highest scientific categories, it automatically becomes a professional HEI and is obliged to adjust its educational offer to that situation. However, students who are in course of their education, have it guaranteed to be able to complete their current programme according to the existing curriculum. The same is true for students of specialist education programmes, when their HEI receives a scientific category which moves it to the academic group.

A higher education institution which holds an A+, A or B+ category but prefers to focus on didactic activity with practical profile may ask the minister competent for higher education to change its qualification into professional.

### 10.2.3 Classification based on scientific domains and ministerial supervision

The division of supervisory powers over HEIs between ministers and the classification of science and art domains roughly overlap with another popular way of grouping HEIs which is present in the public awareness and used, e.g. in university rankings and publications for secondary schools graduates. Quite a similar classification is applied also for statistical purposes by the Statistics Poland (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny*). It should be emphasized that classifying universities on the basis of scientific domains is based on tradition. The scope of programmes offered by a HEI can be broader than its name would suggest. For example universities of technology kept their historical names but they may (and do) offer courses in other fields of science (e.g. humanities).

**Universities** – officially (according to the article 16.3 of the *Law on Science and Higher Education*) this name can only be used by academic HEIs which hold scientific category A+, A or B+ in at least 6 scientific or art disciplines belonging to at least 3 domains of art or science. However, certain Polish HEIs that do meet this condition do not use the word ‘university’ in their name, preferring to keep the traditional name referring to the HEIs character. The main characteristic of universities is their research drive, quality of scientific projects and broad educational offer. A HEI which is a university according to the formal classification may simultaneously fall into one of the other categories (e.g. agricultural, medical, technical or art studies HEI). Most universities in Poland are public but there are also non-public HEIs which achieved this status.

**Technical HEIs** – their research activity as well as study programmes traditionally belong mainly to engineering and technology domain but they may also offer programmes in all other fields of science. The curricula of their study programmes need to ensure that the students acquire particular set of competences in engineering, defined in the Polish Qualification Framework for higher education. Technical HEIs usually also offer programmes in architecture, composed in compliance with the standard issued by the minister competent for higher education in agreement with the minister competent for building industry, which ensures also their compatibility with EU standards for architects’ professional education and training.

Public technical HEIs are among the higher education institutions with longest traditions in Poland. Some of their higher education programmes as well as research interests are specifically related to the branches of industry present in their close geographical location (e.g. aeronautics, mining, metallurgy). Thanks to expertise of the staff and possession of specialist research equipment certain units of technical universities offer services as certification centres for quality of products or technological processes.

Non-public technical HEIs are not numerous in comparison with other types of non-public higher education institutions; some of them focus on computer science and modern digital technologies.

**HEIs of economics** – this category includes HEIs active mainly in social sciences domain, with particular focus on economics and finance, management and quality studies, sometimes also political science and public administration.

Their higher education programmes are intended for future entrepreneurs as well as people interested in a career in business management, finance, banking, insurance or management of public institutions. Higher education degrees from best HEIs of economics, both public and non-public ones, are still highly appreciated on the job market and studies in those disciplines attract numerous candidates.

**Agricultural HEIs/life sciences universities** – traditionally specialise in research and study programmes in the domain of agricultural sciences but they usually also offer studies in natural sciences and social sciences domains or even technology.

Most of such HEIs provide higher education in veterinary science, preparing for the profession of veterinary surgeon, with training requirements regulated at EU level. It is another field of study offered only in long-cycle programmes which have to comply with educational standards (established with the regulation of the minister competent for higher education in agreement with the minister competent for agriculture). Agricultural/life sciences HEIs may run their own veterinary clinics or cooperate with such clinics for didactic and research purposes. They usually also possess some kind of infrastructure in the country, necessary for research and teaching activity in agricultural and life sciences.

**Pedagogical HEIs** – traditionally the main purpose of their activity has been educating future highly qualified teachers for all types of schools, so they offered higher education programmes in wide range of knowledge domains (especially humanities, social sciences and natural sciences or even art disciplines) with emphasis on competences in teaching. Many former pedagogical schools (especially public) developed their offer or merged with other HEIs and turned into universities. Others focused their didactic and research activity in psychology, pedagogical sciences and special needs students education. Their programmes preparing for teacher profession comply with the relevant standard issued by the minister competent for higher education in agreement with the minister competent for education. Pedagogical HEIs usually offer also post-graduate non-degree studies in teaching competences based on this standard, which allow graduates of other disciplines without didactic preparation to acquire teaching qualifications.

**Academies of physical education** – HEIs which group students and researchers interested in physical culture science or health sciences domains, especially in connection with sport, both professional and as a form of recreation. Such HEIs offer academic programmes which include practical physical training, preparing future sports coaches and sports managers as well as physical education teachers. Many of their students are sports people actively pursuing their careers.

Moreover, physical education HEIs offer higher education in medical sciences such as physiotherapy and health sciences, preparing specialists in fields connected with physical well-being. Most of them also have study programmes in tourism-related fields.

The research activity of physical education HEIs focuses mainly on developing knowledge and practical solutions for professional sport and physical rehabilitation after accidents and diseases.

Such HEIs need to have their own sports infrastructure or access to professional sports facilities.

**Medical universities/academies** – are supervised by the minister competent for health. Their didactic and research activity focuses on the domain of medical and health sciences. The majority of their study programmes prepare for pursuit of regulated professions in the healthcare system (medical doctor, dentist, pharmacist, nurse, midwife, bio-medical analyst, physiotherapist and paramedic). Such studies have to be designed and conducted in line with educational standards established by the regulation of the minister competent for higher education in agreement with the minister competent for health, which ensures their compliance with EU Directives, especially with the provisions establishing minimal training requirements for some professions. In addition, most of such programmes (except for those in nursing, midwifery and studies for paramedics) may be offered only as long-cycle studies. Moreover, admissions to programmes in medicine and dentistry fields are subject to limits established in a ministerial regulation (*numerus clausus*).

Medical HEIs either run their own hospitals or enter into cooperation agreements with healthcare institutions, which allows them to develop research and carry out practical didactic activity in real-life

conditions. In return, the healthcare institutions can take advantage of the expertise of the HEI's academic staff to support services provided to patients.

Programmes in medicine are also offered by other public or non-public HEIs supervised by the minister responsible for higher education.

**Maritime HEIs** – are supervised by the minister competent for maritime economy and their rector has to hold seafarer's qualification at officer level. They offer higher education programmes in unique fields of study, mainly in technical/engineering domain and social domain, which prepare for a career in merchant and non-military fleet. They include in some of their maritime study programmes the elements of training that meet the requirements of the *International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW Convention)*, which is certified by the minister. They also provide other forms of training courses in maritime disciplines and, upon completion of requirements set out in the law, may become certification centres for seafarers' training. Maritime HEIs may also offer other higher education programmes, not connected with maritime economy.

**HEIs of art studies** – focus their academic activity on the domain of arts (film and theatre, music, fine arts and art conservation). They function under the provisions of the *Law on higher education and science* but are supervised by the minister competent for culture and national heritage. Admission to programmes in most of their fields of study requires not only particular level of knowledge but also proven artistic abilities or skills in the art discipline in question.

**Military HEIs** – are academic institutions and military units at the same time. They are supervised by the minister responsible for defence and headed by rectors-commandants, who are professional soldiers or former soldiers appointed (and dismissed) by this minister. Military HEIs focus on academic programmes in engineering and technology domain and social domain useful for the army. They often specialise in academic and practical training for a particular branch of the military (e.g. the Navy, the Air force, army logistics) and their students are soldiers already during the time of education with a clear view to a military career. Completion of such programmes is connected with obtaining a particular military rank. Military HEIs also offer qualification courses and other lifelong learning programmes, often tailored to specific needs of the army.

However, military HEIs may also offer study programmes for civilian students, often in unique fields of engineering and technology, security studies, crisis management and many others.

**Public/State services HEIs** – offer higher education programmes which ensure qualified human resources for such state services as the police and security agencies, firefighters or prison management. Their supervising minister is either the minister competent for internal affairs (police and firefighting HEIs) or the Minister of Justice (prison service HEI), who appoints the rector-commandant of the institution among the officers of the relevant state service (and has the power to dismiss them).

Some of their higher education programmes are available only to active members of the relevant state services or to candidates approved for the service within strict admission limits (*numerus clausus*), while other are offered to civilian students interested in the field.

**Church HEIs** – operate on the basis of the agreements between the Polish government and a given church (e.g. the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church) or denomination. They are not supervised by the minister responsible for higher education. Their educational and research activity lies mainly or exclusively in the domain of theology.



A specific instance of non-public religious higher education institutions are Higher Theological Seminaries run by the Catholic Church. The agreement between the Polish state and the Holy See stipulates that graduates of such seminaries who have completed 6-year higher education may be awarded the title of *magister* in theology, on the basis of cooperation agreements with church HEIs or public HEIs which offer *magister* studies in theology.

A special instance is the Krajowa Szkoła Administracji Publicznej - KSAP (National School of Public Administration) supervised directly by the Prime Minister. It admits only higher education graduates and provides education programmes which prepare for professional civil service. The graduates have a secured post at one of the government institutions and have to work for the civil service for 5 years after graduation (otherwise they are obliged to repay the cost of the training).

The HEI is also obliged to organize tailor-made courses and trainings for public administration officers at different career stages.

#### 10.2.3.1 Federations

**Federations** are higher education structures that can be formed to ensure close cooperation between different HEIs or HEIs and other research entities. Federations may be formed by two or more public academic HEIs, or a public academic HEI and research institutes, Polish Academy of Sciences institutes or international institutes. Non-public academic HEIs are allowed to form federations only with other non-public academic HEIs. Federations are officially created by the decision of the minister competent for science and higher education entering them to the appropriate register.

Federations provide institutional bases to create synergy in order to reach such objectives as enhancing academic research, providing educational programmes at doctoral level, awarding scientific degrees or degrees in art, commercialisation of research results and know-how or other goals indicated in the statute.

A federation has legal personality and takes over some of the tasks and rights of the institutions which belong to it. It is to be assessed as a whole in terms of quality of scientific activity and may only continue to exist if awarded A+, A or B+ category. It may also carry out economic activity. Each federation is headed by the president and has its own collegial body called an assembly (the detailed division of powers and responsibilities between the authorities is stipulated in its statute).

#### 10.2.3.2 Other institutions

Apart from HEIs and federations there are other institutions which belong to the Polish system of higher education, such as:

- *Polska Akademia Nauk* – PAN (Polish Academy of Sciences);
- PAN scientific institutes;
- research institutes;
- international institutes;
- Łukasiewicz Centre;
- institutes of Łukasiewicz Research Network;
- *Polska Akademia Umiejętności* (Polish Academy of Learning);
- other scientific entities.

The activity and rights of the majority of these the entities are governed by specific laws.

### 10.3 TYPES OF HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

All study programmes have to be provided in a specified **field of study** (*kierunek studiów*), which may lie within one discipline of science or art, or combine knowledge, skills and competences from different disciplines. Each programme has a defined profile and is provided on a particular level (related to the Polish Qualifications Framework - PRK). Another category dimension is the **mode of study**.

#### 10.3.1 Profiles

Programmes with **practical profile** (*profil praktyczny*) are oriented towards development of practical skills to be applied in non-academic working environment, so half of the ECTS credits to be obtained by their students shall be assigned to classes developing such skills. A practical studies curriculum shall include vocational internships lasting at least 6 months in the case of first-cycle and long-cycle studies or 3 months – in the case of second-cycle studies.

Programmes with **academic profile** (*profil ogólnoakademicki*), on the other hand, should equip students with competences necessary for scientific research. Therefore, more than half of the ECTS credits in such programmes have to be assigned to classes related to the scientific activity conducted at the university.

#### 10.3.2 Modes of study

Taking into account the organization and time allocation, study programmes can be divided into the following categories, according to the form in which they are provided:

- **full-time studies**, in which at least half of the ECTS credits covered by the studies curriculum shall be obtained for classes with direct participation of academic teachers or other persons conducting classes; they are attended mainly by young people who have not yet undertaken a full-time job;
- **part-time studies**, in which classes with direct participation of academic teachers or other persons conducting classes may correspond to no less than half of the ECTS credits covered by the studies curriculum. Such studies may only be established if indicated in a resolution of the university's senate. Classes are organized mainly at weekends or evenings, so that they could be attended also by students in full-time employment. Part-time studies may last longer than full-time studies of the same level, field of study and profile.

Classes at full-time studies shall be conducted separately from those at part-time studies.

#### 10.3.3 Use of distance learning methods and techniques

If it is possible and appropriate in a particular field of study, part of the learning outcomes covered by the studies curriculum may be obtained with the use of distance learning methods. However, the number of ECTS credits obtained from activities conducted in this way may not exceed 50% of the total number of credits indicated in the curriculum as the minimum to complete studies. In addition, the infrastructure and software used has to allow for synchronous and asynchronous interaction between students and persons conducting classes and materials need to be available in electronic form. The teachers have to be prepared to use distance learning techniques and methods while students must have undergone appropriate training before the start. Moreover, the possibility of face-to-face contacts between students and persons conducting classes has to be ensured and the final exams or other forms of verification of learning outcomes achievement normally has to take place at the HEI's premises. If the rector gives their consent to organize them outside the HEIs premises, they have to be duly registered and controlled with the use of appropriate digital technologies.

For activities aimed at development of practical skills distance learning techniques and methods may only be used as a secondary support tool.

### 10.3.4 Cycles of study

#### 10.3.4.1 1st cycle studies

**First-cycle studies** in full-time form last 3 to 4 years: the minimum is 6 semesters or 7 semesters if the curriculum contains learning outcomes which allow for acquiring engineering competences. They lead to one of the degrees: *licencjat*, *licencjat pielęgniarstwa*, *licencjat położnictwa* or – where engineering competences were included – *inżynier*, *inżynier architekt*, *inżynier pożarnictwa*.

First-cycle studies are focused on preparing students for future employment in a specific profession or range of professions as well as for continuing education at second-cycle programmes.

The minimum of 180 ECTS credits have to be obtained during each programme. Programmes with professional profile require also completion of at least 6-month-long vocational internships. The completion of first-cycle studies requires also passing the final examination (*egzamin dyplomowy*) and, if the curriculum provides for it, having received a positive opinion on the final thesis (*praca dyplomowa*).

Admission to first-cycle studies is open to holders of maturity certificates confirming positive result of the examination taken at the end of secondary school education. From the year 2022 HEIs will also have the possibility to take into account combined results of the maturity exam and obligatory professional exams taken at the end of professional education. The exam results are the basis for admission. Additional entrance exams may be conducted by HEIs for candidates with foreign certificates, where the grades from the required subjects are not indicated in the certificate. Moreover, entrance exams may be carried out to assess knowledge and/or skills which are not assessed by the maturity exam (e.g. specific aptitudes, artistic skills or physical fitness).

HEIs have to specify in a resolution which subjects are to be taken into account for admission to a particular field of study and programme and which other requirements admissible under the law shall apply to all or specific groups of candidates.

**First-cycle study programmes** are considered **full qualifications at level VI** of the PRK.

#### 10.3.4.2 2nd cycle studies

**Second-cycle studies** in full-time form last 1.5 to 2 years (from 3 to 4 semesters). They lead to the degrees: *magister*, *magister pielęgniarstwa*, *magister położnictwa* or – where engineering competences had to be acquired according to the curriculum – *magister inżynier*, *magister inżynier architekt*, *magister inżynier pożarnictwa*.

They are open to graduates of first-cycle, second-cycle or long-cycle programmes, however, HEIs may lay down additional requirements regarding, for instance, the correspondence between the degree held and the field of study chosen for a second-cycle programme.

Second-cycle studies aim to provide specialist knowledge in a specific field of study, preparing students for work in a specific profession, also in the roles requiring creativity, people and processes coordination and management and finding creative solutions to practical problems. Programmes with academic profile also give tools for dealing with basic research problems and build the awareness of developments in a given field of study in a broader scientific context.

The minimum of 90 ECTS credits have to be obtained during each programme. Studies with professional profile include obligatory vocational internships lasting at least 3 months. The completion

of second-cycle studies requires also passing the final examination (*egzamin dyplomowy*) and preparing a final thesis (*praca dyplomowa*) which is either an independent written work presenting a scientific, artistic or practical problem or a technical or art achievement, showing the student's knowledge in the field relevant to the level and profile of studies, as well as his or her competences in independent analysis and reasoning. The thesis is prepared under supervision of a tutor who has to hold at least a doctoral degree.

**Second-cycle study programmes** are considered full qualifications at **level VII** of the **PRK**.

#### 10.3.4.3 Long-cycle studies (uniform masters)

**Long-cycle studies** in full-time form last 4.5 to 6 years (from 9 to 12 semesters). The admission requirements are the same as for first-cycle programmes. However, the curriculum contains both basic studies and in-depth specialisation as it has to enable students to achieve learning outcomes provided both for first-cycle and second-cycle studies in the given field and profile. The final degrees awarded on completion, are the same as in the case of second-cycle graduates. Programmes providing academic training for certain professions may be concluded with another equivalent degree.

Long-cycle programmes lasting 9 or 10 semesters shall require the workload of minimum 300 ECTS credits, while those which last 11 or 12 semesters – at least 360 ECTS credits. Just as in the case of second-cycle programmes, in order to complete long-cycle studies the student has to meet the requirement of passing the final examination (*egzamin dyplomowy*) and having received a positive opinion on the final thesis (*praca dyplomowa*).

Long-cycle studies are the only kind of programme that can be offered in the field of **medical studies, dentistry, medical analytics, pharmacy, physiotherapy, veterinary medicine, law, canon law, pre-school and early school education, special education**. Except for the law and canon law studies the curricula of such programmes have to be compliant with **educational standards** issued by the minister competent for higher education in agreement with the minister competent for the government branch relevant for the field. Some of the programmes also finish with award of specific degrees equivalent to *magister* and *magister inżynier* degrees, such as: *lekarz* (medical doctor) *lekarz dentysta* (dentist), *lekarz weterynarii* (veterinary physician), *magister farmacji* (master of pharmacy).

Long-cycle programmes may also be offered in architecture (compliant with the relevant education standard and completed with the professional title *magister inżynier architekt* (master of engineering in architecture), as well as in theology, acting, puppet theatre acting, conservation and restoration of works of art, psychology, film and television image production and photography, directing, stage design, graphics, painting, sculpture and in the fields of study within which only candidates for professional soldiers are educated.

**Long-cycle study programmes** are considered full qualifications at **level VII** of the **PRK**.

#### 10.3.4.4 Pre-Bologna programmes

Higher education degrees acquired as a result of programmes organized according to pre-Bologna rules have not been officially classified in the Polish Qualifications Framework. Before and throughout the 1990s they were usually acquired after uniform (long-cycle) studies of at least 4 years duration. The completion of studies and obtaining the degree of *magister* or *magister inżynier* required writing and defending a master thesis. The process of thesis preparation aimed to deepen the knowledge in a specific topic and prove the student's ability to use their competences in solving a basic research or practical life problem within the field of study.

The Act on Higher Education of September 12, 1990 introduced the possibility of implementing a three-stage study model, i.e. *licencjat* or *inżynier* level studies, *magister* or *magister inżynier* level studies, *doctoral* studies and non-degree postgraduate (post-diploma) studies (*studia podyplomowe*).

Since 2002, when new educational standards were established, higher education programmes in more disciplines were already structured according to the Bologna rules as first-cycle and second-cycle studies but long-cycle programmes still prevailed in many fields of study. First-cycle graduates were awarded the degree of *licencjat*, or *inżynier* in technical fields. Then the educational standard of 2007 finally established the legal basis for creating two-step (first- and second-cycle) programmes in almost all fields of study.

Holders of higher education qualifications obtained in the 1990s and in the 2000s before the Bologna process was fully implemented in Poland, still constitute a substantial group on the job market. Many of them are also still active in terms of long life learning and willing to acquire new qualifications through higher education programmes, especially non-degree postgraduate studies. Some of them are also interested in obtaining different types of post-graduate qualifications abroad.

Therefore, it is important to know that both in terms of access to further education in Poland and in terms of the qualifications value on the job market, there is actually no distinction between the pre-Bologna and post-Bologna degrees. The degree of *magister* or *magister inżynier* (or equivalent degrees) obtained on completion of a long-cycle pre-Bologna programme still gives access to doctoral programmes in the same way and under the same conditions as those to be met by holders of second-cycle qualifications obtained under Bologna rules. The same is true also with regard to obtaining professional qualifications or licenses in the regulated professions in which relevant higher education is required.

Also in the general social awareness the pre-Bologna long-cycle studies are seen as equivalent to completion of more modern first-cycle plus second-cycle higher education. This is reflected in the fact that even the names of the degrees currently acquired after the second cycle are exactly the same as those acquired after long-cycle in the pre-Bologna system.

#### 10.3.4.5 Third-cycle studies

The higher education reform of 2018 substantially changed aspects of organisation of third-cycle academic programmes. The new approach was combined with modifications in the procedure of awarding doctoral degrees and adjustment of certain requirements to be fulfilled to obtain it.

Since October 2019 third-cycle educational paths called doctoral studies may only be continued by doctoral students already enrolled in such programmes before that date, while the main route to achieve the degree is education at a doctoral school.

##### 10.3.4.5.1 Doctoral schools

Doctoral schools are organised forms of third-cycle academic training which are no longer connected with a particular unit of a HEI – their status in the structure of the institution shall be determined by the HEIs internal regulations. Each doctoral school is an interdisciplinary enterprise (covering at least 2 scientific disciplines) which can be organised and run by a HEI with academic profile but also by a PAN (Polish Academy of Sciences) institute, research institute or international institute as well as by a federation of such entities or the Centre of Postgraduate Medical Education, provided that they hold at least a B+ scientific category in at least two disciplines. An academic HEI which is active in only one discipline within theology, art or physical culture science and holds at least B+ category in it, may also run a doctoral school in this discipline. Doctoral school education may also be provided in cooperation

with other institutions, especially entrepreneurs or foreign HEIs, whose participation can be reflected directly in the school programme.

During the transition period (1 October 2019 – 30 September 2022), before the evaluation and classification process has been completed, a doctoral school may be opened by an entity entitled to award doctoral degree in at least two disciplines or an academic HEI active in just one discipline within theology, art or physical culture science entitled to award doctoral degrees in it. Doctoral schools may also be organized jointly by such entities, where each of them is entitled to award doctoral degrees in at least one discipline.

Associating the right to open a doctoral school with the quality of the entity's scientific activity confirmed by the scientific category is one of the actions aimed at ensuring quality of third-cycle programmes. Another substantial modification is giving more autonomy and responsibility to entities running doctoral schools in terms of the organization of the education process. Detailed conditions of the programmes as well as rights and obligations concerning actions of doctoral students, supervisors and other persons engaged in this academic training path are to be determined in internal regulations of each doctoral school.

#### 10.3.4.5.1.1.1 Admission

The admission procedure has to be an open competition with results made available to the public. Detailed conditions are established by the senate of a HEI, the council of an institute or the assembly of the federation which runs a doctoral school.

Formally candidates to doctoral schools have to be:

- holders of a professional degree of *magister*, *magister inżynier* or equivalent (obtained as a result of second-cycle or long-cycle studies), or
- in exceptional cases, justified by the highest quality of scientific achievements, graduates of first-cycle studies or a students who completed the third year of long-cycle studies (the decision is to be taken by the entity offering doctoral programme).

#### 10.3.4.5.1.2 Education in doctoral schools

Education in doctoral schools is provided free of charge. Moreover, all doctoral schools students without an academic degree receive a doctoral scholarship for up to 4 years of education (the years spent in different doctoral schools accumulate). The sum amounts to minimum of 37% of the remuneration of a university professor in the first half of the programme and 57% – in its second half (the minimum level of professors' remuneration is established by the minister competent for higher education). Moreover, doctoral students may receive scholarships and funding from other institutions, private funds or local authorities. Disabled doctoral students are entitled to additional funding. Doctoral students also enjoy certain rights typical for employees (social insurance, parental leave, periods of rest). On the other hand, they are entitled to apply for some benefits typical for students (e.g. accommodation in students houses, meals financing).

Doctoral education lasts from 6 to 8 semesters and is based on two components: **educational programme** established for the school and **Personal Research Plan** that provides a clear schedule for each doctoral student's progress in their own scientific work.

The programme of the school has to allow the doctoral candidate to acquire knowledge, skills and competences necessary to prepare the doctoral dissertation and meet other requirements necessary to be awarded a doctoral degree. Specifically, it should ensure achievement of learning outcomes at the level VIII of the PRK. The entity conducting doctoral school has wide autonomy in shaping their



programme or programmes and is also obliged to monitor their results and introduce necessary improvements. It may but does not have to use ECTS credits to describe the workload. If the entity conducting doctoral school loses the right to do it due to poor results of their doctoral programme assessment or evaluation of their scientific activity (falling below B+ category), or if they decide to close down the programme, they have to ensure their doctoral students the possibility of continuation in a different entity or cover the costs of the procedure of obtaining the doctoral degree outside the doctoral school system.

A doctoral programme may include didactic practice (teaching activities or support in teaching activities) of no more than 60 hours a year. Doctoral students may not be simultaneously employed as academic teachers or researchers, unless it is done in the frame of a research grant awarded by Polish and international institutions or a research or didactic programme funded by the EU or from other sources. Doctoral students in the second half of their programme may be employed half-time, otherwise only 40% of their scholarship is provided. Those limitations do not apply to those doctoral students who no longer receive doctoral scholarship.

No later than 3 months after the admission a doctoral student has to find (or be offered) a supervisor for their dissertation. It is also possible to have additional supervisor(s), especially if the programme is provided in cooperation with another entity where some of the research is done. Within 12 months from the start of doctoral programme each student has to present their Personal Research Plan, in which they also establish the deadline of submitting the doctoral dissertation (such deadline may later be postponed for up to 2 years and may also be suspended for the period of parental leaves). Detailed rules concerning the plan, including possible additional requirements, are established in the internal regulations of a doctoral school, for instance, a doctoral student may be excluded from the school due to lack of progress in their research work or poor performance in the educational programme.

In the middle of the doctoral training (after the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> semester) each student has to undergo a mid-programme evaluation assessing the progress in realisation of their Individual Research Plan. The evaluation is conducted by a 3-person committee, with at least one member employed outside the entity (or entities) providing doctoral training. Negative outcome of the evaluation results in striking out from the list of doctoral students. Positive outcome, on the other hand, means increase the doctoral scholarship up to the second-half guaranteed minimum or more (according to rules established by internal regulations of each school).

The objective of education in a doctoral school is preparing a doctoral dissertation which meets all the formal and scientific requirements and fulfilling all other conditions necessary to be awarded the academic degree of **doktor**.

Degree of **doktor** is a **full qualification at level VIII** of the PRK.

#### 10.3.4.5.1.3 Awarding of the degree of doktor

The degree of **doktor** is awarded to a person who:

1) has the professional title of **magister**, **magister inżynier** or a foreign diploma giving the right to apply for doctoral degree in the state in whose higher education system operates the university which issued the diploma; in exceptional cases, the degree may be awarded also to a graduate of first-cycle studies or a student who completed the third year of long-cycle studies with scientific achievements of highest quality;

2) obtained learning outcomes for qualifications at level VIII of the PRK, including knowledge of a modern foreign language at least at B2 level (which is confirmed by a relevant certificate or diploma);



3) is the author of at least:

- 1 scientific article published in a scientific journal or in reviewed materials from an international conference, included in the list held by the minister competent for higher education and science, or
- 1 scientific monograph issued by a publishing house, included in the list held by the minister competent for higher education and science, or a chapter in such a monograph, or
- one significant artistic work;

4) presented and defended his/her doctoral dissertation (which proves the candidate's theoretical knowledge in the discipline as well as their competences in independent scientific research and presents an original solution to a scientific problem, or original application of results of one's own research in the economic or social context, or constitutes an original artistic achievement);

5) met other requirements specified by the entity awarding the degree of **doktor** in its internal regulations.

Each doctoral dissertation has to be assessed by 3 independent reviewers, holding at least a degree of **doktor habilitowany** (exceptions to this condition can be made for reviewers employed in a foreign higher education or research institution).

The degree is awarded by the HEI's senate (unless the HEI's status entrusts this task to another authority within the HEI) and in other institutions by their scientific council, by means of an administrative decision.

Degree of **doktor** is a **full qualification at level VIII** of the **PRK**.

#### 10.3.4.5.2 Independent doctoral path

The Law on higher education and science allows for awarding doctoral degrees also to candidates who meet all the formal conditions but acquired their knowledge, conducted their research, presented their scientific achievements in publications and prepared their dissertation outside the structure of a doctoral school.

Such candidates first need to turn to a HEI entitled to award doctoral degrees in the relevant discipline with a request to appoint a dissertation supervisor who is supposed to assist in the process and issue their official opinion on the dissertation when it is ready. The awarding entity is also obliged to verify whether the candidate obtained learning outcomes for qualifications at level VIII of the PRK, including the foreign language knowledge requirement. Detailed rules on cooperation with the supervisor and ways of checking whether all necessary conditions are met, are established by each entity in their internal regulations.

Awarding entities have the right to charge independent doctoral candidates with a fee which covers (but does not exceed) the costs of the procedure, especially the remuneration of the supervisor(s) and reviewers engaged in the process (the level of such remuneration is defined in the law).

#### 10.3.5 Non-degree postgraduate (post-diploma) studies (studia podyplomowe)

Non-degree postgraduate (post-diploma) studies are a form of lifelong learning often chosen by practising professionals, even those with a few years of professional experience, which allows them either to specialise in a more narrow field or update their knowledge and skills (e.g. develop competences which were not a part of the academic programme at the time of their first-, second- or long-cycle studies but are useful at the job market). Non-degree postgraduate (post-diploma) studies are also an option for people who decided to modify the track of their professional career, and use the

skills and competences already acquired in a different professional context for which they need additional field knowledge. The learning outcomes determined in the curriculum may take into account some of the secondary characteristics of levels VI-VIII of PRK.

Non-degree postgraduate (post-diploma) studies may be undertaken only by persons who have the full qualification at least at level VI of PRK obtained within the higher education system, i.e. by those who completed at least first-cycle studies.

Non-degree postgraduate studies are a paid form of higher education – both public and non-public entities are entitled to charge students for participation and additional services connected with it.

Completion of a non-degree postgraduate (post-diploma) studies is attested with a **świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych (certificate of completion of non-degree postgraduate (post-diploma) studies)**, the model of which is specified by the entity conducting the studies. The certificate is not an academic qualification and it does not give access to further studies or access to a doctoral school.

**Świadectwo ukończenia studiów podyplomowych (certificate of completion of non-degree postgraduate (post-diploma) studies) is a partial qualification at level 6, 7 or 8 of the PRK.**

#### 10.3.6 Specialist education in HEIs with professional profile (level V of the PRK)

The Law on higher education and science of 2018 is the first attempt to establish a kind of general legal basis for creation of short-cycle programmes at higher education level, corresponding to level V of the PRK.

Such form of higher education, called **specialist education** (*kształcenie specjalistyczne*), has to last at least 3 semesters and lead to obtaining a **full qualification at level V** of the PRK.

The curriculum has to ensure achievement of learning outcomes specific for this level and contain education and training activities aimed at development of practical skills. A person who achieved those outcomes receives a certificate: **świadectwo dyplomowanego specjalisty** (certificate of qualified specialist) or **świadectwo dyplomowanego specjalisty technologa** (certificate of qualified specialist in technology).

It is not possible to offer specialist education programmes preparing to professions in competence of the minister of health for which there exist programmes of professional education within the Polish education system (in secondary or post-secondary schools).

Specialist education programmes may only be provided by professional HEIs. Higher education institutions may charge students for participation in this form of education.

### 10.4 ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS AT FIRST-, SECOND- AND LONG-CYCLE STUDIES

The Law on higher education and science indicates ECTS credits as a measure of student's workload necessary to achieve the learning outcomes described in the curriculum. Each ECTS relates to 25-30 hours of student's work which includes both lectures and classes organised by the institution and necessary individual work (preparation, research, homework, project work etc.) connected with them.

Students achievements are assessed by academic teachers responsible for each course. They may use different methods of checking if the learning outcomes have been achieved. Throughout the semester students may be required to take tests, write essays and papers, prepare presentations, deliver projects (individually or in teams), prepare reports on specific research done (e.g. in laboratory), create art works to the portfolio etc. Many courses finish with an exam taken at the end of semester (or

academic year). Students failing in an exam may take a resit exam, and, if they fail it, an exam conducted by the examination review board.

National regulations do not lay down detailed rules on student assessment nor establish a uniform grading scale for students' achievements. However, each HEI has to specify both in its internal regulations (usually it is a part of its studies regulations – *Regulamin studiów*). The grading system has to be described also in the diploma supplement issued to the student (which is why the supplement is the most relevant and reliable document to learn the rules of assessment applicable in individual cases).

The most widespread grading scale used by Polish HEIs has five positive (passing) grades and one negative (however, without distinction between slightly insufficient and highly insufficient performance). As most HEIs now offer some opportunities for student exchange in Europe and the mobility is rising, for practical reasons it is convenient to have a scale easily convertible to ECTS grading system. HEIs may set out their own conversion tables relating their assessment scale with ECTS grades and, where necessary, also to other systems of grades, especially ones used by HEIs with which they have developed cooperation.

The table below presents the most popular grading scale together with the way in which each grade is usually related to the ECTS grading scale. It is necessary to remember, though, that it only has indicative value: individual cases of marks recognition should be based on the grading system description provided by the awarding HEI (indicated in the diploma supplement or another document issued by the HEI).

Polish numerical grading scale	Polish verbal name corresponding to each numerical grade (with its abbreviation)	Translation of the Polish verbal name for grade	ECTS grading scale	Name and description for ECTS grade
5	bardzo dobry (bdb)	very good	A	EXCELLENT – outstanding performance
4.5 (or 4+)	dobry plus (db+)	better than good	B	VERY GOOD – above the average standard but with some shortcomings
4	dobry (db)	good	C	GOOD – generally sound work with a number of notable shortcomings
3.5 (or 3+)	dostateczny plus (dst+)	better than satisfactory	D	SATISFACTORY – fair but with significant shortcomings
3	dostateczny (dst)	satisfactory	E	SUFFICIENT – performance meets the minimum criteria
2	niedostateczny (ndst)	unsatisfactory	FX/F	FAIL – some more work required before the credit can be awarded; considerable further work required

Some HEIs and academic teachers use also grade 5! (or 5+) to recognise excellent, exceptional performance, however, it depends on the rules set out by the HEI, whether or not such a grade has a higher numerical value than 5.

## 11 QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### 11.1 RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTIONS

The main actors in the processes of quality assurance in higher education are the minister competent for higher education and science and the **Polska Komisja Akredytacyjna – PKA** (Polish Accreditation Committee). Additional institution or bodies contribute to evaluation of specific types of study programmes.

**The supervisory powers of the minister competent for higher education and science** over higher education institutions include monitoring the compliance of actions of HEIs and their authorities with the law in force and appropriate spending of public funds. The minister is entitled to require information and explanations regarding specific actions and to execute controls. With regard to HEIs supervised by other ministers such responsibilities and rights belong to the minister in question and in the case of theological HEIs also to religious authorities of the relevant church or denomination.

The minister's approving decision is necessary to create a non-public HEI and to open a new study programme in particular field and level, unless the HEI has been granted a scientific category high enough to gain curricular autonomy in the discipline(s) to which the field belongs.

When there are doubts whether a HEI still fulfils the conditions of quality education the minister may order evaluation of a study programme by the Polish Accreditation Committee and may withdraw the permission. In case of serious transgressions the minister can even put a HEI into liquidation or, in case of public HEIs, at least force the institution to implement an improvement plan.

Moreover, the Law on higher education and science of 2018 defines situations in which the minister can impose financial penalties on a HEI, together with the maximum amount of such penalty.

**Polska Komisja Akredytacyjna (PKA)** is an independent institution whose mission is to ensure compliance with quality standards in higher education, reflecting the European and global best practices, and to support public and non-public universities in the process of enhancing the quality of education and developing quality culture. It consists of up to 90 members appointed by the minister responsible for higher education from among candidates holding at least a doctoral degree proposed by higher education institutions and academic representative bodies, including students' representation, national academic associations and employers' organisations. The committee is composed in such a way as to ensure availability of higher education experts in all domains of science and art. Its tasks include conducting programme accreditation procedures, and providing advice to the minister regarding the permissions to establish new non-public HEIs and new study programmes in the HEIs with no curricular autonomy. The experts work on the basis of criteria established by the law and concretized in the internal documents of the committee.

Polska Komisja Akredytacyjna actively participates in international initiatives in the area of higher education. In 2008 it was registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) and since 2009 it has been a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

## 11.2 QUALITY EVALUATION PROCESSES

The state system of assuring quality in higher education is based on the following processes:

- **initial evaluation of the institution**

It is **mandatory** for new **non-public HEIs** to receive approval of the minister competent for higher education and science before starting operation. The ministry verifies mainly good standing conditions regarding the founder (if they are a natural person) or the founder and its official representatives (if a HEI is to be founded by an institution or body) and compliance with other formal requirements.

The minister also consults with the **Polska Komisja Akredytacyjna** which assesses the level of preparation of the new institution to provide high quality education, taking into account organisational arrangements and facilities as well as programmes (see *initial evaluation of the programme* below); it issues its opinion in the [opinion-giving procedure](#) within 2 months.

If all formal conditions are met the minister enters the new non-public HEI into the appropriate register – otherwise the permission is not given. The first permission to operate, issued to a new HEI simultaneously with approval of its study programmes, is valid for 6 years. Before expiry of that period the non-public HEI has to apply for renewal, which is granted for indefinite period of time if all conditions regarding operation and quality of academic training are still met.

- **initial evaluation of the programme**

Both for public and non-public HEIs, opening a study programme in a given field, level and profile requires permission of the minister competent for science and higher education, unless the HEI is classified as A+, A or B+ category in the discipline to which the field belongs or has earlier been distinguished for excellent quality of education in this discipline.

After the HEI has applied for the permit, the minister consults the PKA, whose experts, within the frames of the [opinion-giving procedure](#), verify whether the HEI fulfils conditions for the provision of degree programmes, as stipulated in the Law on Higher Education and Science and the regulations based on this Law. Their opinion constitutes a basis for the final decision.

In the case of HEIs supervised by other ministers, the relevant minister's opinion is also requested. With regard to studies in medicine, medicine and dentistry, and pharmacy it is also necessary to consult the Minister of health, while studies in the field of nursing or midwifery require, as a first step, obtaining an accreditation of a specific body – Krajowa Rada Akredytacyjna Szkół Pielęgniarek i Położnych – KRASzPiP (the National Accreditation Council for Schools of Nursing and Midwifery).

Having ascertained that the new programme meets the requirements of the law and there are no obstacles resulting from the HEI's non-compliance with information obligations in the past or lack of good standing, the minister responsible for science and higher education grants the permit to open the new programme. All newly established programmes are subject to periodic accreditation as scheduled by PKA.

The minister may also refuse to issue the permit without seeking the opinion from PKA, if as of the day of submission of the application, education in a given field of study does not meet socio-economic needs.

The permit, obtained through the same procedure, is required for opening a study programme in a given field outside the HEI's seat. In addition, when a Polish HEI plans to open a study programme abroad, it is necessary to obtain a positive opinion of the minister competent for foreign affairs.

- **programme evaluation**

The Law on higher education and science of 2018 defines the procedure for periodic evaluation of quality of higher education programmes at first-, second- and long-cycle level. It is conducted by PKA, usually according to its schedule, but may also be carried out on the HEI's own initiative. The evaluation is also conducted, as soon as possible, at the request of the minister competent for science and higher education (usually as a result of some worrying signals).

The main criteria taken into account are the following:

- 1) structuring of the study programme curriculum of and its compliance with the educational standard;
- 2) effective execution of the curriculum;
- 3) admission criteria and verification of achievement of learning outcomes, including at the stage of final exam;
- 4) level of competences and experience of the staff involved in teaching;
- 5) adjustment of the infrastructure used in the education process to the learning needs and objectives;
- 6) relations with the socio-economic environment;
- 7) the level of internationalisation of studies;
- 8) quality of support for students in the process of learning;
- 9) availability and quality of information about the studies;
- 10) the methods for education quality improvement and their effectiveness.

More information on the process itself is available at the PKA website subpage devoted to [programme evaluation procedure](#).

The evaluation closes with issue of the PKA's official opinion – positive or negative – which has to be made available to the public at the website of the committee as well as the website of the HEI that was subject to assessment. Positive opinion is valid for 6 years – after this period the procedure has to be repeated.

If a HEI creates obstacles to the evaluation team or takes actions which make assessment impossible, the committee issues a negative opinion. It has to be stressed that if a HEI creates obstacles or takes actions which make programme assessment impossible minister responsible for higher education may, by way of an administrative decision, order liquidation of a non-public HEI.

In the case of a negative outcome of evaluation minister responsible for higher education may withdraw the permit to provide a given study programme. The programme has to be closed down with the end of the academic semester or, if less than 3 months are left to this date, with the end of the following semester.

If the HEI does not agree with the evaluation result, it can request PKA to re-examine the case, which involves participation of the appeal section of the committee.

- **complex evaluation**

The Law on higher education and science of 2018 established also an additional quality assessment procedure designed to evaluate the overall quality enhancing strategy and actions of a HEI. The underlying provisions enter into force on 1 October 2020.

The [complex evaluation procedure](#) is to be conducted by PKA, at the request of a HEI which has received only positive opinions during programme evaluation of its courses (or, in future, a HEI which has previously undergone a complex evaluation procedure with positive outcome).

It is to be focused on effectiveness of the HEI's internal quality assurance and quality improvement mechanisms in all domains in which it offers programmes of study.

The outcome may be either:

- a positive opinion of the PKA (valid for a period from 3 to 8 years, depending on PKA's decision, during which the HEI does not have to undergo programme evaluations, unless they are ordered by the minister competent for higher education and science; in addition, PKA may indicate the disciplines in which the HEI especially distinguishes for excellent quality of education;
- a refusal to issue a positive opinion – in this case the HEI may not ask the PKA for next complex evaluation earlier than in 5 years' time (unless the committee specifies a shorter period).

PKA may base their programme evaluation or complex evaluation statement on an assessment, accreditation or certificate issued by a quality assurance agency registered in EQAR or one with which PKA has concluded an agreement on recognition of evaluation outcomes. The committee may also take into account the outcomes of evaluations conducted by other national or international quality assessment bodies.

### 11.3 FOREIGN HEIs WHICH WANT TO ESTABLISH THEMSELVES IN POLAND

A foreign higher education institution which wants to create an associate HEI or a branch on the territory of Poland is obliged to obtain an operation permit from the minister competent for higher education and science, which is issued after consultation with the minister competent for foreign affairs and PKA. Such higher education institution also has to prove that it holds an accreditation of an education quality assessment agency recognised by the state of its main seat or an agency registered in EQAR.

### 11.4 EVALUATION OF DOCTORAL SCHOOLS

The Law on higher education and science of 2018 introduced a comprehensive external quality assessment system for doctoral academic programmes. At least once in 6 years each doctoral schools have to undergo evaluation of Komisja Ewaluacji Nauki – KEN (Scientific Assessment Committee) – the same body which is responsible for evaluation of scientific achievements and awarding scientific categories to higher education and research institutions. For this purpose the KEN appoints a group of experts with significant achievements in science or art domains, including at least one employed by a HEI or research institution abroad and one representative of doctoral students.

The evaluations are to be conducted for the first time at least 5 years after the start of a doctoral programme, unless the minister competent for science and higher education requests it earlier.

The general criteria to be taken into account are the following:

- 1) relevance of the education programme and Personal Research Plans to the learning outcomes that need to be achieved at the level VIII of the PRK (Polish Qualifications Framework) and their actual execution;
- 2) the methods of verifying achievement of learning outcomes specific for level VIII of the PRK;
- 3) qualifications of teaching staff and researchers engaged in provision of education in a doctoral school;
- 4) quality of the admission process;



- 5) quality of the scientific or artistic supervision and support for students in their research activity;
- 6) diligence and reliability of the mid-programme evaluation;
- 7) internationalisation;
- 8) effectiveness in education of doctoral students.

In terms of the procedure, the first phase is preparation of self-evaluation report in Polish and English by the institution which offers the doctoral programme. Then the team of evaluators verifies its value during a site visit. The report of the team is the basis for the KEN's final resolution with a positive or a negative opinion on the programme. The assessed institution has 30 days to submit their critical comments on the outcome. This results in re-examination of the issues which were subject to protest by a different group of evaluators. The final resolution on the evaluation outcome (which has to refer also to the critical comments) is communicated to the minister competent for science and higher education, and, in specific cases, to other ministers supervising the institution which offers the doctoral programme in question.

## 12 FURTHER ACADEMIC CAREER

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### 12.1 THE DEGREE OF DOKTOR HABILITOWANY

#### 12.1.1 Conditions and procedure

A holder of doctoral degree who continues their academic activity in scientific research or art and has achieved results that constitute a significant contribution to the development of a scientific or art discipline may apply for the academic degree of **doktor habilitowany**, which is seen as next step in scientific career. The proof of such achievements may be publications of their research outcomes. They should take the form of at least one scientific monography or a cycle of scientific articles regarding a particular area of research, published, respectively, by a publishing house or one of scientific journals listed in the register held by the minister competent for higher education and science. The evidence of such achievements may also be specific projects, constructions, technological solutions or artworks. The important achievement in question may also be a part of a larger research or art project but it is necessary that the candidate's individual contribution could be clearly defined. Moreover, the candidate must be engaged in significant research or art activity in more than one HEI, research institution or cultural institution, including activity abroad.

According to the procedure set out in the Law on higher education and science of 2018, the applications for post-doctoral degree are sent to the Rada Doskonałości Naukowej - RDN (Scientific Excellence Council) which monitors the process. The council directs the application to a higher education or research institution chosen by the applicant and authorized to award the degree, which then appoints a committee consisting of qualified researchers (chosen partly by the HEI and partly by the Council). The committee's task is reviewing the candidate's scientific achievements and deciding whether they are sufficient to meet the degree requirements. The committee may also organize an official discussion with the candidate on their achievements (*kolokwium habilitacyjne*).

Based on the decision of the committee, the authorized higher education or research institution (its senate or scientific council, respectively) awards the degree of **doktor habilitowany** in a particular domain and discipline or officially refuses to do it, providing relevant justification. The decision is considered an administrative decision under the Polish law and, as such, is subject to appeal.

### 12.1.2 Awarding the rights equivalent to those of holders of *doktor habilitowany* (post-doctoral degree)

A person who obtained a doctoral degree in Poland or abroad may acquire rights equivalent to the rights resulting from holding the degree of *doktor habilitowany* (post-doctoral degree) in a given discipline, if during work in another country for at least 5 years he/she was managing research teams independently and has significant scientific achievements. Moreover, the candidate has to be employed in an entity authorized to award the degree of *doktor habilitowany* in relevant discipline holding and at hold the function of university professor or institute professor at a PAN (Polish Academy of Sciences) institute or research institute, or the professor at an international institute.

Such a decision is taken by the rector of a higher education institution or the director of a PAN institute, research institute or international institute in which the candidate is employed, provided that the institution is authorized to award post-doctoral degrees in the discipline in question. The decision has to be approved by RDN (Scientific Excellence Council), on the basis of a description of the candidate's professional career and list of achievements. The approval may be expressed by silent consent. A negative decision of the RDN may be appealed against to the administrative court.

## 12.2 AWARDING THE TITLE OF PROFESOR (PROFESSOR)

The highest distinction in the Polish system of higher education and science is being awarded the academic title of **profesor** by the President of the Republic of Poland.

The title may be awarded to holders of post-doctoral degree with outstanding scientific achievements reached in Poland or abroad who:

- have participated in works of research teams financed with funds from national and international competitions, or
- have experience of fellowships in research institutions, including foreign ones, or
- have conducted research or development works in the higher education or research institutions, including foreign ones.

In art domain the title may be awarded to a holder of post-doctoral degree with outstanding achievements in one or more art disciplines.

Exceptionally, the title may also be conferred to a holder of the degree of **doktor** if it can be justified with the quality of their achievements in science or art.

According to the procedure set out in the Law on higher education and science of 2018, the process leading to the award of the title starts upon the candidate's request submitted to Scientific Excellence Council (RDN). The council appoints 5 reviewers (chosen randomly from a pool of authorized scientists specialized in the relevant disciplines) who, having assessed the candidate's achievements against the criteria established by the law, issue their official opinion. The opinion is the basis for the RDN's official decision to submit the request for awarding of the title to the President or refuse to do it. The title is awarded by the President during an official ceremony.

The Polish academic title of **profesor** should not be confused with the function of university professor (**profesor uczelniany**) which is not a title or degree but a position in a higher education or research institution. The position may be occupied by a person holding, as minimum, a doctoral degree with meaningful didactic, professional, scientific or art achievements.

### Sources and resources:

This description of the Polish education system is based on the provisions of the Polish law introduced till the end of March 2020 (including regulations in force at that time and those already repealed regarding pre-reform solutions). The contents were created with the use of official information materials and studies in Polish and English, published online by Polish and international institutions. They may become a source of further research for interested readers.

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