

THE POLISH EDUCATION SYSTEM IN BRIEF 2017/18



STRUCTURAL REFORM IN 2017

Educational reform in Poland is being implemented since the beginning of 2017. Its main goal is to offer students a solid background of general education required for further personal development and the needs of contemporary labour market. The key elements of the reform are as follows:

- change in the school structure: introduction of a long, 8-year primary school as well as 4-year general and 5-year technical secondary school,
- an obligation for 6-year-olds to attend 1 year of pre-primary education in order to acquire basic skills before they start school at 7 (this education, as it is the case for the school education, is financed from the general subvention from the State budget),
- provision of textbooks free of charge,
- strengthening secondary education – both general and vocational – through the extension of secondary programmes by 1 year,
- introduction of 3-year sectoral VET learning (to obtain a professional qualification) with a possibility to continue education for further 2 years at the second stage of sectoral VET school in order to upgrade qualifications and to prepare for the matriculation exam,
- promotion of dual vocational training in cooperation with the business sector,
- extending the participation of employers in co-financing of vocational education through the establishment of the Fund for Vocational Education Development.

The reform will be implemented between 1 September 2017 and the school year 2022/23. On the 1 September 2017 pupils graduating from year 6 of the primary school became pupils of grade 7.

The new structure includes:

- 8-year primary school,
- 4-year general secondary school,
- 5-year technical secondary school,
- 3-year sectoral VET school (stage I),
- 2-year sectoral VET school (stage II),
- 3-year special school preparing for employment,
- post-secondary school.

The restructuring takes place on the basis of an act of 14 December 2016 “Law on School Education” and an act “Legislation introducing the Act – Law on School Education”

In the following text we refer to two different structures of the school education system (old and new which was initiated in September 2017).

COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Full-time compulsory education lasts for 10 years and comprises the last year of pre-school education, 6 years of primary school education and 3 years of lower secondary school education. Starting 2017 a new structure of school education is being implemented in which full-time compulsory education will last for 9 years (the last year of pre-school education and 8 years of primary school education).

In the Polish education system full-time compulsory education and part-time compulsory education are defined. Full-time compulsory education (obligation to attend primary and lower secondary school – old structure, and primary school – new structure) applies to pupils aged 7-16 years (7-15 in the new structure) while part-time compulsory education (obligation to be in education) concerns pupils aged 16-18 (15-18 in the new structure) and it may take place either in school settings (a student attends an upper secondary school) or in non-school settings (e.g. a student follows vocational training offered by employers).

EDUCATIONAL STAGES

ECEC:

Institutions for children aged 0-3 years

- crèche (*żłobek*),
- kids club (*klub dziecięcy*).

Attending a crèche is not obligatory, crèches are not a part of education system as they are supervised by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy.

Institutions for children aged 3-6 years

- pre-school (*przedszkole*),
- pre-school class in a primary school (*oddział przedszkolny w szkołach podstawowych*),
- pre-school unit (*zespół wychowania przedszkolnego*),
- pre-school centre (*punkt przedszkolny*).

Starting September 2016 pre-schools are optional for 3-, 4- and 5-year-old children and obligatory for 6-year-olds. Every 4- and 5-year-old has an entitlement to a place in a pre-primary setting, and as of September 2017 – every 3-year-old. As of the school year 2016/17 compulsory education in grade 1 of primary school starts at the age of 7. Parents of 6-year-olds have a choice – they can enroll their children in the 1 grade of primary school or keep them in a pre-school institution.

Primary education

Old structure

6-year primary school (szkoła podstawowa) was compulsory for all pupils who are usually aged 6/7-13.

It included two stages:

- grades 1-3 (early school education),
- grades 4-6 where teaching is done by subject.

At the end of primary education pupils took a compulsory external exam, the results of which were used only for information and not for selection purposes.

New structure (single structure education ISCED 1+ISCED 2)

8-year primary school is compulsory for all pupils who are usually aged 6/7-15.

It includes two stages:

- grades 1-3 (early school education),
- grades 4-8 where teaching is done by subject.

Lower secondary education

Old structure

3-year *gimnazjum* (lower secondary school) for students aged 13-16 is another stage of compulsory education. At the end of it pupils take a compulsory external exam and its results influence admission to upper secondary schools.

New structure

Starting in 2017 the 3-year *gimnazjum* (lower secondary school) will be phased out. Pupils graduating from the 6^t grade of primary school become pupils of grade 7 in a new 8-year primary school. The compulsory external exam will take place in grade 8 of primary school and its results will influence admission to secondary schools.

Upper secondary education

Although this stage of education is not compulsory (or in fact compulsory part time up to the age of 18) vast majority of students continues education in upper secondary schools.

There are three types of upper secondary schools :

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

Pupils attend upper secondary schools at the age of 16-19 (16-20 years in case of the technical upper secondary school).

New structure (starting in 2019/20 to be completed in 2023/24)

The new reformed structure of upper secondary education envisages the following types of schools:

- 4-year general secondary school,
- 5-year technical secondary school,
- 3-year sectoral VET school (stage I),
- 2-year sectoral VET school (stage II).

Students of vocational schools – basic vocational schools and technical upper secondary schools – may take exams confirming vocational qualifications in a given occupation during the course of study or upon completion of school to receive a diploma confirming their vocational qualifications.

Graduates of general upper secondary schools and technical upper secondary schools may take the external upper secondary school leaving examination (*egzamin maturalny*) to obtain the Matura certificate, which gives access to higher education.

Post-secondary non-tertiary education

Post-secondary education is considered to be a part of secondary education. Post-secondary schools (*szkoła policealna*) are intended for graduates of general upper secondary schools who wish to obtain a diploma confirming their vocational qualifications.

The schools offer courses lasting from 1 to 2.5 years. The students of post-secondary schools and students of basic vocational schools and technical upper secondary schools take vocational exams of the same type.

Post-secondary schools will continue their functioning within the new structure of school education.

HIGHER EDUCATION

There are two types of Higher Education Institutions:

- university-type (*uczelnia akademicka*),
- non-university-type (*uczelnia zawodowa*).

They both offer first- and second-cycle programmes as well as long-cycle Master's degree programmes while only university-type HEIs can offer third-cycle programmes (doctoral studies) and are authorized to award doctoral degrees.

Studies are organized in the form of full-time (*studia stacjonarne*) or part-time (*studia niestacjonarne*) programmes.

First-cycle programmes lead to two types of degrees:

- *licencjat* (equivalent of Bachelor's degree) – 3-4 year programmes,
- *inżynier* (equivalent of Bachelor's degree) – 3.5-4 year programmes.

Holders of the Bachelor's degree can enter second-cycle programmes, which take 1.5-2 years depending on the area of study.

Only several fields of study offer long-cycle Master's degree programmes that last for 4-6 years. First-cycle, second-cycle and long-cycle Master's programmes end with a diploma examination and students who have passed it are granted a relevant degree.

The Master's degree (*magister* or its equivalent) entitles its holder to practice a given profession and provides access to third-cycle studies. They are organised in HEIs or research and development institutions other than HEIs and last for 3-4 years.

Colleges of social work

These institutions operate in the framework of school education system (not the higher education system) offering education at tertiary level (short-cycle higher education).

ADULT EDUCATION

Adult education is open to adults who wish to complete school education on primary and secondary level or acquire new vocational qualifications and skills for professional or personal reasons.

It is organised, in school- and non-school settings, by:

- continuing education institutions,
- practical training institutions,
- in-service training centres,
- HEIs as non-degree postgraduate programmes.

Training is offered also to the unemployed and to certain categories of people searching for a job.

Further information may be found on the websites:

- [Ministry of National Education](#),
- [Ministry of Science and Higher Education](#),
- [Central Statistical Office](#) (statistical data).