

# ***HIGHER EDUCATION IN POLAND***

## ***Implementing the Assumptions of the Bologna Declaration in 2000-2002***

### **Overall condition of higher education in Poland**

The current system of higher education management is based on article 70 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland

#### **Article 70**

1. Everyone shall have the right to education. Education to 18 years of age shall be compulsory. The manner of fulfilment of schooling obligations shall be specified by statute.
2. Education in state schools shall be without payment. Statutes may allow for payments for certain services provided by state higher education institutions.
3. Parents shall have the right to choose schools other than state for their children. Citizens and institutions shall have the right to establish primary and secondary schools and higher education institutions and educational development institutions. The conditions for establishing and operating non-state schools, the participation of public authorities in their financing, as well as the principles of educational supervision of such schools and educational development institutions, shall be specified by statute.
4. Public authorities shall ensure universal and equal access to education for citizens. To this end, they shall establish and support systems for individual financial and organizational assistance to pupils and students. The conditions for providing of such assistance shall be specified by statute.
5. The autonomy of higher education institutions shall be ensured in accordance with principles specified by statute.

and four principle acts: the 1990 Act on Higher Education, the 1990 Act on Titles and Degrees, the 1991 Act on establishing the Committee for Scientific Research and the 1997 Act on Higher Vocational Schools. Apart from having been amended a number a times, the said acts contain references to executive regulations and to bylaws which specify the functioning of higher education institutions.

The legal system has allowed for a far reaching institutional autonomy of the higher education system in relation to higher education institutions and their smaller units, i.e. departments. The law guarantees freedom of proclaiming one's statements and scientific theses. These changes were paralleled by the introduction of competition in gaining budgetary funds for research and for recruiting the best staff.

On the university level, all traditional components of the system have been retained alongside with a thorough transformation of all higher education institutions. The idea behind these changes is to make higher education institutions far more independent and self-governing. In legal terms it can be expressed by:

1. Creating extremely liberal conditions for setting up non-state higher education institutions,
2. Allowing for substantial decisions to be made by competent groups selected in democratic elections held in higher education institutions,

3. Introducing elements of group and individual competition in gaining financial assistance (including research grants),
4. Shifting specific financial decisions to the cost-generating level (higher education institutions),
5. Disseminating information about the principles behind, and the outcome of, decision-making processes.

The authorisation to establish non-state higher education institutions was the most fundamental change, which had a direct impact on the current non-state educational system. In 2002 this system comprised 250 higher education institutions and circa 500,000 students. At present, students of non-state higher education institutions account for 27% of the grand total.

Another considerable change was introduced by the 1990 Act on Higher Education, which allowed charging fees for some educational services. This resulted in the system of paid evening studies (paid courses in minority) and weekend studies (paid courses in majority), and post-graduate studies in state higher education institutions.

In 2002 in Poland there were over 4,000 students for every 100,000 inhabitants, which places our country on the European level.

In the 2001/2002 academic year there were 123 state, and 241 non-state higher education institutions out of the grand total of 364 institutions in Poland (including Academies of the Ministry of National Defence and Academies of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Administration).

It is worth emphasising that the upsurge in the number of students is first and foremost related to the increase in the number of evening and weekend students attending state higher education institutions as well as the development of diversified study systems in non-state higher education institutions.

The number of students attending day courses equalled 754,000, i.e. 44.4% of the grand total. When differentiating between state and non-state higher education institutions, the former had 53.7% day students and the latter 21.1%.

In the 2001/2002 academic year higher education institutions of all types registered 8.5% more students than in the previous year. 8.7% of that number accounted for state higher education institutions (and 9.7% for day studies only).

Larger numbers of secondary school graduates and an increasing percentage of those interested in higher education are the two factors that contribute to a graduate rise in the number of first-year students as well as young people aged 19-24 undertaking further education. This phenomenon has been observed over the recent years and it is reflected in the gross enrolment rate. In the 1990/1991 academic year it read 13.1% whereas in the 2001/2002 academic year it was 43.7%. This example demonstrates that over the last decade the enrolment rate in higher education more than tripled. Taking into account highly developed countries however, Polish post-secondary educational system is still poor. To give a few examples, in Canada 88% of young people reach the post-secondary level of education, 81% in the USA, 80% in Australia, 63% in New Zealand and 62% in Norway. These data fail to be accurate in comparison due to brief, one- or two-year long courses which are very popular in the enumerated countries.

Over the last decade Poland progressed from the stage of “elite” higher education to its “mass” stage. This is an unquestionable success despite weak points that are still found in some higher education institutions and their departments. Never before were Poles so well educated, never was higher education such a direct determinant of increased work opportunities and wages exceeding the average. The key challenge for the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be to upkeep the dynamic growth of, and a constant quality improvement of, the educational system.

## **Cooperation within the European Higher Education Area**

In the field of higher education, the European Integration focuses on harmonising educational systems in the so-called Bologna Process (Declaration of European Education Ministers, including the Polish one). Its principle objectives are the following:

- Creating conditions for student and academic teacher mobility,
- Adjusting the educational system to labour market requirements, in particular by increasing the number of graduates finding jobs,
- Improving the shape and the competitive position of the higher education system in Europe.

Among others, these objectives will be realised by:

- Introducing a system of easily legible and comparable degrees,
- Developing two-stage studies further,
- Popularising the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS),
- Lifting obstacles which limit student and academic teacher mobility,
- Promoting Europe-related topics.

The above-mentioned activities are undertaken chiefly by autonomous higher education institutions, while the Minister's role is to support them by means of:

- Introducing changes in legislature,
- Launching an information and promotion campaign,
- Applying mechanisms stimulating an active approach on the part of academic circles.

Although there is no regulation by the European Union, it is of vital importance to introduce a system of joint degrees with foreign higher education institutions.

A degree 'legibility' will help to easily define the level and profile of a person's education. Diploma Supplement is the basic mechanism operating here. In addition, a system of known degrees is implemented (ex. Bachelor and Master), alongside with defining a graduate's qualifications (Dublin Descriptors), and also his/her general knowledge and skills (Tuning Educational Structures).

Recognition of academic qualifications is regulated by the 1997 Lisbon Convention. An important task is to strengthen the efficiency and timing with regard to recognition of education, training or employment of Poles in European states.

Transnational education means studying in a country different than the seat of a higher education institution which in turn means approval of joint or affiliated institutions and joint curricula. Some regulations here are provided by the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (UNESCO and the Council of Europe).

### **Activities undertaken to implement the assumptions of the Bologna Declaration include:**

- working out the principles of issuing Diploma Supplement. The document in question will contain full information on the profile of studies covered and also academic and vocational qualifications acquired.
- working out and applying the credit system. Polish credit transfer system is being designed on the basis of ECTS commonly applied in Europe. Its goal is to simplify procedures of comparing education completed by students in their course of studies.
- improving the education quality. Since 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2002 there have been activities going on to create a unified national system for accrediting higher education institutions. The

National Accreditation Commission has already started controlling the level of education in several institutions.

- adjusting the standards of education to qualification requirements which are binding for professions regulated in the EU member states. This is supposed to guarantee that people studying in Poland will gain qualifications fully comparable to those gained in the EU member states, and thus will be able to find employment in any EU country.

- further developing of two-stage study system, very popular in the EU member states; they are vocational studies ending in vocational Bachelor's degree and additional Master's studies which follow the first stage.

- increasing the student mobility. Polish higher education institutions have taken an active part in European students and academic teachers exchange schemes. In the 1998/1999 academic year only 46 institutions participated in the ERASMUS component of the SOCRATES Programme (with circa 700 academic teachers and circa 1,500 students) while in the 2000/2001 academic year the number of participating institutions rose to 100 (with over 1,500 academic teachers and circa 4,700 students).

- Programmes for lecturing in foreign languages are developed and introduced in many higher education institutions.

### **Mobility of Polish students (November 2002)**

In 1990 Polish students have begun to visit higher education institutions of EU member states. This date marks Poland and Hungary's entry into the TEMPUS Programme whose aim is to serve as a non-return EU help destined for higher education systems in countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Apart from student travels, realised individually in the first two years and within the Joint European Projects later on, Polish higher education institutions could profit from partnership with foreign ones by preparing for a more active and efficient participation in the SOCRATES educational programme, currently under way. This preparation was twofold. It regarded the subject matter (finding new content and didactic methodology) and the organisation (improving the management of a given higher education institution and work quality of its administrative staff).

The participation of Polish higher education institutions in the TEMPUS Programme resulted also in a gradual implementation of credit transfer systems based on the ECTS, a more flexible system of studies, and also construction of research systems and quality education systems.

In the whole period of the TEMPUS Programme circa 13,000 students were granted scholarships to foreign higher education institutions in various EU member states.

One must not overlook the significance of student exchange carried out within the CEEPUS initiative realised simultaneously with the TEMPUS Programme.

In March 1998 Poland became a full-fledged participant of the SOCRATES Programme, which in turn allowed for a modification of possibilities created by the TEMPUS Programme. The outcome was an intensification of operations within TEMPUS leading to modernisation of management systems used in institutions and also introduction of training systems open for state and local governments' administrative staff.

Student mobility and initiatives directed to improve educational offer were smoothly taken over by the SOCRATES/ Erasmus Programme, i.e. the SOCRATES component addressed specifically to the higher education sector.

From the very beginning of Poland's participation in the SOCRATES/ Erasmus Programme as many as 12,253 students have already completed part of their studies in a partner foreign higher education institution:

in 1998/1999.....1,426  
in 1999/2000.....2,813  
in 2000/2001.....3,691  
in 2001/2002.....4,323

To illustrate the participation of all Polish higher education institutions (HEI for short) in the SOCRATES/ Erasmus Programme, let us quote the following statistics:

**A. General statistical data regarding the SOCRATES/ Erasmus Programme**

	Academic year 1998/1999	Academic year 1999/2000	Academic year 2000/2001	Academic year 2001/2002	Academic year 2002/2003
Number of HEI with Institutional Contracts	46	74	98	99	120
Number of HEI with student exchange programmes	40	72	90	96	118
Number of HEI with academic teachers going to foreign HEI	38	66	82	94	111
Number of HEI with activities to introduce ECTS	22	37	52	53	70
Number of Intensified Courses coordinated by Polish HEI	0	1	4	3	3
Number of Intensified Courses with Polish HEI as partners	9	25	33	37	53
Number of Curriculum Development projects coordinated by Polish HEI	1	2	2	0	0
Number of Curriculum Development projects with Polish HEI as partners	5	11	14	31	28
Number of students planning to go to foreign HEI	1,524	3,193	5,046	6,430	7,747
Number of students already gone to foreign HEI	1,426	2,813	3,691	4,323	-
Number of academic teachers planning to go to foreign HEI	673	1,212	1,751	2,174	2,587
Number of academic teachers already gone to foreign HEI	356	614	678	799	-

**B. Number of students in Europe going to foreign HEI through the SOCRATES/ Erasmus**

Country	Symbol	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001
Austria	AT	2,711	2,952	3,024
Belgium	BE	4,466	4,404	4,427
Denmark	DK	1,751	1,764	1,750
Finland	FI	3,441	3,486	3,286
France	FR	16,351	16,824	16,825
Greece	GR	1,765	1,910	1,868
Spain	ES	14,381	16,297	17,158
Netherlands	NL	4,332	4,418	4,162

Ireland	IRL	1,504	1,689	1,648
Luxemburg	LU	82	87	126
Germany	DE	14,693	15,715	15,872
Portugal	PT	2,179	2,472	2,555
Sweden	SE	3,321	3,087	2,726
Great Britain	UK	9,994	10,056	8,875
Italy	IT	10,875	12,421	13,253
Island	IS	147	138	134
Liechtenstein	LI	2	3	18
Norway	NO	1,101	1,107	1,007
Bulgaria	BG	0	134	398
Cyprus	CY	35	42	
Czech Republic	CZ	879	1,249	2,001
Estonia	EE	0	183	255
Lithuania	LT	0	361	624
Latvia	LV	0	166	182
Malta	MT			92
Poland	PL	1,426	2,813	3,691
Romania	RO	1,250	1,699	1,899
Slovakia	SK	59	380	505
Slovenia	SI	0	170	227
Hungary	HU	856	1,627	2,001
Total		97,601	107,654	110,589

**C. Number of Polish students going to HEI in specific EU member states through the SOCRATES/ Erasmus**

	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002
Germany	500	972	1,190	1,393
France	168	334	529	624
Great Britain	151	227	281	262
Netherlands	139	218	207	243
Belgium	124	162	218	230
Italy	71	160	252	304
Spain	63	165	245	319
Finland	44	135	174	188
Denmark	82	158	159	197
Sweden	32	97	143	192
Portugal	22	61	119	152
Greece	5	56	77	96
Austria	22	46	61	73
Ireland	3	22	35	50
Luxemburg	0	0	1	0
Total	1,426	2,813	3,691	4,323

**D. Number of Polish students going to foreign HEI through the SOCRATES/ Erasmus – by educational profile**

	<b>1998/1999 Number of students</b>	<b>1999/2000 Number of students</b>	<b>2000/2001 Number of students</b>	<b>2001/2002 Number of students</b>
Agricultural Sciences	41	66	115	117
Architecture, Urban and Regional Planning	39	110	126	176
Art and Design	35	96	100	143
Business Studies and Management Sciences	215	586	808	902
Education, Teacher Training	14	68	81	118
Engineering, Technology	271	449	508	678
Geography, Geology	28	86	108	126
Humanities	32	78	126	125
Languages and Philological Sciences	205	316	446	454
Law	118	127	241	269
Mathematics, Informatics	31	67	111	117
Medical Sciences	53	96	116	151
Natural Sciences	173	235	249	278
Social Sciences	169	391	507	590
Communication and Information Sciences	2	22	25	42
Other Areas of Study	0	20	24	37
	1,426	2,813	3,691	4,323

**E. Students from the EU member states coming to Poland**

		<b>1998/1999</b>	<b>1999/2000</b>	<b>2000-2001</b>	<b>Total</b>
Austria	AT	1	7	9	17
Belgium	BE	22	26	27	75
Denmark	DK	6	5	11	22
Finland	FI	14	30	42	86
France	FR	41	92	98	231
Greece	GR	0	8	8	16
Spain	ES	12	30	78	120
Netherlands	NL	16	21	27	64
Ireland	IRL	0	4	0	4
Luxemburg	LUX	0	1	0	1
Germany	DE	51	119	153	323
Portugal	PT	5	22	39	66
Sweden	SE	7	24	21	52
Great Britain	UK	34	44	31	109
Italy	IT	11	33	70	114
Total		220	466	614	1,300

**F. Number of Polish academic teachers going to HEI in specific EU member states through the SOCRATES/ Erasmus**

	<b>Number of teachers 2000/2001</b>	<b>Number of teachers 2001/2002</b>
Germany	215	248
France	103	109
Great Britain	58	70
Italy	52	50
Spain	44	69
Finland	38	33
Belgium	34	41
Greece	25	29
Portugal	25	42
Netherlands	24	34
Denmark	22	19
Sweden	18	25
Austria	14	22
Ireland	6	8
Luxemburg	0	0
Total	678	799

Higher education institutions constantly enlarge the possibilities to participate in the SOCRATES/ Erasmus and this is paralleled by a rising interest in the programme presented by students. Over the four years of Poland's participation in the SOCRATES/ Erasmus the number of participating students equalled those who took part in the TEMPUS, even though the latter, operating in Poland for the past ten years, offered much higher scholarships.

**Activities undertaken to facilitate studies in foreign higher education institutions**

**Principles of student mobility** worked out through the SOCRATES/ Erasmus Programme are first and foremost focused on the student's good interest and highly facilitate his/her studies in higher education institutions of the EU member states.

The scholarship offer is prepared by the student's mother institution. One- or two-term courses in the Erasmus Programme can be attended exclusively on the basis of **bilateral agreements** between the two institutions. The agreements in question specify the number of students to take part in the programme, their educational profile and timing of the course. It is the student's mother institution that solicits a place for him in a foreign higher education institution in one of the EU member states, not the student him/herself. The student must merit his/her place among the candidates going to foreign institutions and s(he) does so by giving evidence of his/her substantial knowledge and language skills.

One- or two-term studies in a partner EU institution do not permit the prolongation of the student's local studies. **Mutual academic recognition** is the fundamental principle operating in the SOCRATES/ Erasmus student exchange scheme. Studies in a partner higher education institution **are organised in accordance with the Learning Agreement**, settled before the



studies begin. The Agreement is signed by the three parties interested, namely the mother higher education institution, the target higher education institutions and finally the student him/herself. It provides a detailed description of classes the student is to attend in the partner institution. By **completing** the programme specified in the Agreement, the student is **guaranteed to receive full and automatic promotion from the studies in the target institution**, which will be recognised as equivalent to the analogous period of studies in the mother institution. Furthermore, promotion accredited for specific subjects (or their equivalents) as well as grades received by the student will be copied to his/her student book (after 'translating' the grades to the local system of grading). Studies in a partner higher education institution through the SOCRATES/ Erasmus Programme **oblige the student to participate in classes on regular basis**, as settled upon in the Agreement, and to fulfil all requirements of promotion (projects, tests, examinations) applied in the partner institution. In other words, in the time span of one or two terms (s)he becomes a regular full-fledged student of the target foreign institution. Following the end of studies, the student is handed a document called **Transcript of Records**, which contains all information pertaining to classes completed, subjects passed, ECTS points accredited for each subject/course and grades received. The grades are calculated in two ways, in the system of grading used in the country of studies and also in the ECTS. The Transcript of Records contains information necessary for the mother institution to give the **promotion** from the relevant term(s) and to enter into the student book all subjects passed and grades received.

The SOCRATES/ Erasmus Programme assumes that the person participating in the exchange scheme **does not cease to be the student of the mother institution**, while at the same time (s)he **enjoys all rights and privileges assigned to the student of the partner institution** during all the time of his/her stay there. Since (s)he does not cease to be the student of the mother institution, the student is **entitled to keep receiving all scholarships from the mother institution (scientific, social or other)**, that (s)he had gained prior to the departure.

Apart from their involvement in student exchange schemes, higher education institutions undertake a whole range of activities directed at their entry into the common **European Higher Education Area**. The activities in question are directly connected with implementing decisions of the Bologna Declaration and they include:

- Efforts to introduce **credit systems based on ECTS**. Not only does the credit system facilitate the student's promotion after his/her studies in a partner institution, but it also helps to render the curriculum more orderly and flexible and to adopt the curriculum to the student's individual needs. Thus (s)he can choose its modified version to fulfil minimum of requirements (obligatory subjects) and to spend the remaining time on developing his/her personal interests (optional subjects). Launching credit system compatible with the ECTS will prompt a fuller understanding of the Polish higher education system and in doing so, it will promote Poland as a good target country for foreign students. Many Polish higher education institutions have already begun operating on the ECTS when joining first the TEMPUS projects, then the SOCRATES/ Erasmus Programme. In the 2002/03 academic year 70 Polish higher education institutions profit from a grant that was given by the SOCRATES/ Erasmus Programme for introduction of the ECTS;
- Efforts to **modify** the institutions' **educational structure** to the '3 + 2 + 3' model, i.e. Bachelor's studies (engineering), then Master's studies, and finally Doctorate studies. Even though there are no special projects to finance the activities related to modification of the educational structure, higher education institutions get new contacts through various initiatives of the SOCRATES/ Erasmus Programme. These

- contacts enable them to be updated by observing the current situation in partner institutions and by following models used abroad.
- **Joint effort in designing curricula** hand in hand with international consortia and application of solutions found in each and every higher education institution involved in the project. These efforts result in a certain harmonisation of the teaching content and methodology, and lifts considerable curriculum differences, which slow down student mobility or render it impossible altogether. The most desirable model for such joint efforts is the establishing of studies which end in a common diploma, issued by two or more higher education institutions involved in a joint initiative. Even though there are more and more projects with Polish institutions as partners (less than 10 back in 1998/1999 to over 80 in 2002/2003), the overall Polish participation in multilateral projects needs to be improved. It is true that coordination of multilateral projects entails extra organisational and administrative work, but partnership in such projects gives the opportunity to take part in finding innovative solutions and applying them in the local environment. For this reason, every higher education institution should strive to select a project of interest to its staff and consequently to apply for the right to participate.
  - Participation of Polish academic teachers in the **Erasmus Topic Networks** has similar advantages and it seems that Polish teachers understand it more nowadays. Among partners of the Topic Networks functioning in the 1998/1999 academic year, Polish higher education institutions hardly appeared, whereas in the current year Polish institutions were mentioned as the Network partners over 100 times.

### **International cooperation between higher education institutions**

For many years Polish institutions have demonstrated their rising interest in international cooperation. Existing possibilities to complete part of one's studies abroad (ex. through the SOCRATES/ Erasmus Programme, bilateral agreements etc.) have largely developed contacts between Polish and foreign higher education institutions.

Academic teacher exchange schemes and participation of Polish researchers and scientists are also of high importance.

The experience gained clearly demonstrates that Polish institutions are very active on the international level. Both state and non-state institutions postulate the enhancement of the cooperation and attach a lot of importance to developing inter-institutional contacts on European level. The postulates include:

- Larger promotion of student and academic teacher mobility, which would facilitate foreign internships and recognition of the period of studies abroad in the overall period of studies. It is vital to lift administrative and financial obstacles that hinder mobility (visas, tuition fees, students' social rights etc.)
- Set-up of a data base regarding European higher education institutions and providing transparent information on legal framework, course types and mutual recognition of higher education in specific countries.
- Encouraging both teaching and lecturing in foreign languages in Polish institutions.

Some higher education institutions have also suggested to tighten cooperation with foreign partners by approximating study systems in parallel departments, working out joint curricula and joint degree.

It is also important to find common principles regulating cooperation between specific types of institutions.

### **Two-stage study system**

There are 102 fields of studies including 6, which are exclusively Master's studies. Using a slight oversimplification, one can say that roughly 96 fields can be modified to vocational and supplementary Master's studies. This means that 94% of fields of studies in Poland are organised in a two-stage study system.

### **European Credit Transfer System**

A credit transfer system based on the European model is well known in Polish higher education institutions. It is applied in 68% (43/63) of state institutions and 35% (22/63) non-state ones.

27% (17/63) state institutions apply it in all profiles.

ECTS is used by most state institutions specialising in arts, business and health profiles. It is worth pointing out that the ECTS is approved of by almost 100% universities and technical universities.

With regard to non-state institutions, the system is mainly chosen by those specialising in business, banking and linguistic profiles.

### **Diploma Supplement**

The initiative to create an additional document for students was first put forward by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the UN (UNESCO/CEPES). The structure of the document was worked out by experts from the above-listed organisations, and was a result of prior European pilot programme (Poland was represented by University of Mining and Metallurgy in Cracow – Akademia Górniczo-Hutnicza w Krakowie). An attachment, which is only valid when accompanied by diploma (i.e. has no legal status on its own), is to supply objective and thorough information on the studies type, content and status. The Diploma Supplement is to serve another purpose, namely to facilitate international recognition of completed education, acquired qualifications, both vocational and academic, and finally free movement of people on national and international level. The document can be issued for any type of education completed in a higher education institution, including vocational degrees and scientific titles as well as specific periods of education which led to their accomplishment.

The Polish equivalent of ENIC (European Network Information Centre for Academic Recognition and Mobility) is Biuro Uznawalności Wykształcenia i Wymiany Międzynarodowej, which started promoting the Diploma Supplement in Polish higher education institution as early as in 2000.

The 2000/2001 academic year saw the initiation of a pilot project, which attracted the participation of 69 institutions. The objective of the project was to specify terms and conditions for the introduction of the new document in Poland as well as the issue of the first Supplements.

To meet the project requirements, a special electronic form of the Supplement was set up in Polish and English (structurally identical with the model version designed by the task group that had been appointed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES).

Participants of the pilot project held regular meetings in Warsaw (November 2000, March 2001, June 2001, November 2001).

Report made after the pilot project completion can be found on the Internet at [www.buwiwm.edu.pl](http://www.buwiwm.edu.pl).

The Ministry of National Education and Sport evaluated the results of the project highly. Having recognised the necessity to have an additional document, containing full data on the type of completed studies and acquired qualifications (academic and vocational), the Ministry has further decided to introduce the Diploma Supplement to all higher education institutions. The relevant legal act is passing through the final stage of the legislature procedure. It is assumed that the act will enter into force in the 2003/2004 academic year. The obligatory issue of Diploma together with the Supplement is foreseen in the 2004/2005 academic year. Until then, higher education institution will be issuing the Supplement on a graduate's request.

Public opinion poll carried out showed that practically all Polish higher education institutions are planning to adopt the Diploma Supplement. 40% (51/126) of all institutions declare themselves ready to adopt it, circa 33% (21/63) of which are state institutions and circa 48% are non-state ones.

### **Education quality**

The most important task faced by academic circles and the Ministry of National Education and Sport already at the beginning of the political and social transition period, was to secure proper education quality. Liberated from the centrally planned system of enrolment, state higher education institutions introduced a policy of keeping their doors wide open and started controlling the number of first-year students themselves. Moreover, 1992 saw the beginning of a dynamic growth in the sector of non-state institutions. The outcome of these changes was a rise in the enrolment rates from 12% to 40,8%. This in turn called for an urgent need to introduce internal systems of education quality supervision and profile-related accreditation systems. Higher education institutions were free from any legal sanctions and could choose the scope of their operations autonomously. According to the 1990 Act on Higher Education, certain functions in education quality assessment were fulfilled by the Supreme Council of Higher Education (Rada Główna Szkolnictwa Wyższego), an independently elected academic body. Among others, the Council had the authority to define staff requirements necessary for an institution to organise studies in a given educational profile, to settle the profile directory, to specify minimal curricula, and finally to describe conditions for issuing certificates of higher education. In addition to that, the Council could approve or reject applications to establish new higher education institutions. In case of non-state institutions, it considered applications to set up a new educational profile and to shift the education level from vocational to Master's. Apart from the activities listed above, the Council carried out pilot assessments of education quality in a few selected departments.

The process of quality assessment is threefold. It comprises the stage of the self-assessment, the stage of onsite visit by a group of experts and the stage of final reporting. The acts on higher education and higher vocational schools that were in force so far, were changed by the Polish Parliament (Sejm) in July 2001. In accordance with the new act, the National Accreditation Commission (Państwowa Komisja Akredytacyjna) initiated its operation on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2002. The Commission controls the entire civil educational system, both state and non-state, including higher vocational schools.

The Commission is made up of 70 members appointed by the Minister of National Education and Sport and selected from candidates presented by the Supreme Council of Higher Education and senates of higher education institutions. Candidates for members of the Commission can also be named by scientific, vocational and artistic associations as well as organisations of employers.

The National Accreditation Commission proclaims opinions, which at a later stage serve as the basis for the Minister's final decisions to grant, suspend or withdraw authorisation for managing higher education institutions. Other tasks of the Commission include passing judgements on applications to set up a new institution, an affiliated institution or a department located away from the main seat.

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