

RANLHE WP 8 - Cultural and Institutional Perspectives

A national report - Poland

Macro level - Policy issues, policy processes

Overall, HEIs are controlled by central government. To be an HEI you have to teach particular programmes by law. Permission has to be obtained from the national ministry to introduce a new degree as universities are not enough autonomous. A student could get a diploma and the Ministry may decide that it isn't valid. Under communism universities were elitist, but after the political changes in the 1990s, new non-state owned universities emerged. The change of the economic and political systems in Poland also included changes in the principles and structure of the entire system.

Major trends, according to Dąbrowa-Szeffler and Jabłeczka-Pryślopska J (2006) included:

- extended autonomy of HEIs in practical terms
- a high rate of growth in student numbers
- commercialization: partial but increasing commercialization of both the tertiary education process and the operation of HEIs
- changes in the structure of tertiary education (ownership structure, types of HEIs, types of programmes and fields of study, diversification of education models)
- an increasingly obvious contradiction between quantitative expansion and the need to maintain quality standards

Before the transition there were about 112 HEIs whereas nowadays are more than 400, with the bigger ones non-state run. Non-state institutions have to be run like an enterprise – they receive no funding from the state and so their students have to pay fees. There are also more Catholic universities now and they receive money from the state. They have more benefits than others non-state HE institutions. There are on-going national discussions in Poland about HE massification and commercialisation. In a recent reform, the Minister of HE wants to change the institutions and divide them into elite and teaching universities. Under this system, non-state ones would not become elite universities.

Recession in Poland – economic contexts

In 2009 Poland was the only EU member state to have registered positive economic growth. "The negative impact of the global crisis phenomena on the macroeconomic situation in Poland was weaker than in most other European Union countries. As a result, Poland was the only member state to have registered economic growth in 2009, though much slower than in previous years (...). After a sharp slowdown in the first half of the

year, growth in industrial production, retail sales, transport and communications services and foreign trade accelerated in the final months of last year.” (GUS, “Report on the Country’s Socio-Economic Situation,” January 28, 2010, p. 3; www.stat.gov.pl) (Bolkowska, Misiak 2010)

Gdansk Institute for Market Economics (IBnGR) projects that economic conditions will be gradually improving in Poland in 2010-2011. The growth rate projected for 2010-2011 should enable Poland to remain one of the fastest growing countries of the European Union, which will coming out of recession very slowly. In 2011 domestic demand will further accelerate and will increase by over 2.0%. The reversal of negative trends in investment will be a key factor behind the increase in domestic demand. The IBnGR projects that investment will rise by 2.5% in 2010 and 5.6% a year later. Investment will be growing first of all thanks to an improvement in sentiment in the corporate sector and high spending on infrastructure projects.(Bolkowska, Misiak 2010)

Recession and its impact on HE

According to a recent European University Association report examining the impact of the recession on higher education, Poland has cut its higher-education budget by up to 5 percent.

However, the Polish government has selected 22 higher-education institutions to receive extra financing for the development of courses deemed to be of strategic importance to the country's social and economic development.

The program is an effort to encourage students to pursue degrees in subjects including information technology, construction engineering, biotechnology, physics, chemistry, and mathematics. The designated institutions are in line to receive a share of more than \$60-million that will be used to increase recruitment, provide remedial courses for first-year students, give students practical training and employment guidance, and encourage student participation at conferences. The institutions eligible for the extra financing are chosen by the Polish Higher Education ministry, but the program, which has been running since 2008, is financed by the European Union. (the Chronicle of Higher Education)

Reforming HE in Poland

Within the current legal framework the issues related to the higher education system are regulated upon the Act of 27 July 2005 on Higher Education and the Act of 14 March 2003 on the Academic Degrees and Academic Title, as well as the Art Degrees and Title.

The proposed legislative changes result from nearly two-year long public consultations. They have been inspired by the necessity to adjust the higher education system to the unprecedented growth of requirements faced by the Polish higher education, as well as

the need to harmonise the domestic system with the solutions implemented within the European Higher Education Area.

Considering the nearly fivefold growth of the number of students within the last twenty years – increasing the quality of studies and efficiency of the higher education system seems to be a priority. The suggested solutions, modifying the legal environment of operation of the university-level institutions in Poland in an evolutionary way, are to ensure that the Polish higher education and its academic teachers will qualify for a better position in the world. Polish schools should become a suitable environment to scientists from abroad to conduct research, as well as an attractive place to foreign students to acquire knowledge. The last aspect referred to above is even more important when we consider the incoming demographic low.

The first stage of the works aimed at reaching the above objectives has already been completed – on 30 April 2010 the acts of law reforming the system of education financing in Poland were adopted. As nearly 2/3 of the Polish scientists are employed by university-level institutions, it is necessary to expand the reforms with an amendment to the Act on Higher Education and the Act on the Academic Degrees and Academic Title, as well as the Art Degrees and Title. Implementation of the proposed solutions will result in the synergy with the already adopted acts of law reforming the education financing system. Moreover, the proposed changes will ensure introduction of the major requirements of the Bologna Declaration, signed also by Poland.

Summary of proposed changes:

1. Efficient model of higher education management to be achieved by:
 - a) division of higher education schools into the elitist schools that can compete with the best European institutions and are well adjusted to the social and economic development of a particular macro region and the country, and on the other hand, into the vocational schools whose didactic activity is concentrated on satisfying the local and regional needs,
 - b) increasing the autonomy of schools regarding specification and fulfillment of their mission, including shaping the didactic offer and management of the material and non-material resources of the school,
 - c) directing at the task-related financing by promotion of the culture of competitive subsidy acquisition open to the state and non-state schools,
 - d) emphasising the effects of a university-level institution operation, in particular the quality of the conducted scientific research and didactics, as well as connecting the institutions in question with the social and economic environment.

2. Dynamic academic career model to be achieved by:
 - a) simplification of the academic promotion path so that the perspective of reaching subsequent degrees and scientific title would be motivating and supportive to the

academic development,

b) introduction of clear competition procedures regarding academic positions, as well as opening of schools to foreign scientists,

c) improvement of operation of the Central Commission for Degrees and Titles that as a guarantor of the academic promotion rules must enjoy complete trust of the scientific environment.

3. Effective education model to be achieved by:

a) expanding accessibility of studies, especially to poorer persons,

b) ensuring to the most talented students better development conditions in the country,

c) internationalisation of the educational process,

d) emphasising the importance of students, candidates to the doctor's title and bodies representing them. (source: Ministry of Science and HE)

Meso level - policy, cultural and institutional processes

Vignettes of institutions

University of Wrocław (1)

General:

The University of Wrocław has a rich history of more than three centuries. Founded by Leopold I Habsburg the university evolved from a modest school run by Jesuits into one of the biggest academic institutions in Poland. At the beginning of the 19th century the university had five Faculties: philosophy, catholic theology, evangelical theology, law and medicine. Later it was expanded by numerous sections, laboratories and a natural museum, which exists until today. Today the University of Wrocław is the largest university in the region and teaches over 40,000 students and around 1300 doctoral students at 10 Faculties. 9000 students graduate from the University every year.

Structure:

The University offers a broad range of courses taught in Polish and English in over 70 areas of study offered by 10 Faculties: law, administration social sciences, history and pedagogy, philology, physics and astronomy, chemistry, mathematics and computer science, and economics, earth science and environmental biological sciences, and biotechnology, management.

All courses have three stages, according to the Bologna process: a three-year Bachelor program, a two-year Master program (except of Law and Psychology) and an optional 4-year doctoral program. There is also a wide range of continuing education programs.

Teachers:

Total number: 1747

Professors: 28% in tot.

Ph. D.'s: 52 % in tot.
M.A.: 19 % in tot.
Foreign Languages teachers: 1 % in tot.
Ration teacher/ student: 22,7

Drop out issues:

To estimate a drop – out rate one cohort of student (2004-2006) was followed at their first, second and third year. Number of all students was presented to enable realistic comparison between different institutions (other case studies).

Numbers of students:

All students in 2004 – 41447
First year students 2004 – 8428
All students in 2005 – 39701
First year students 2005 – 8218
Second year students 2005 - 6701
All students in 2006 – 39061
Second year students 2006 –6382
Third year students 2006- 6583

Close to 20 % of drop-out on the first year of study, which seems to be a critical year for the students. Later on rate of drop out is minimal when compare to second year number of students.

Discipline chosen:

Pedagogy – soft applied

Popular discipline to study (perceived as 'easy to study'), inclusive, with strong practical connections (pedagogical educational professions) and with medium status among other social sciences, been able to attract the numerous body student, even in time of financial crisis. in general, pedagogy is one of the most popular choice in Poland (both state and non state HEI). Habitus of state and non-state universities are similar, because of the relatively short period of sudden growth of HE institution the new generation of academic teachers (with different habitus) is still in the process of shaping. In Polish reality it means that many of the academic teachers is employed in more then one institution.

In all disciplines in HE in Poland it is externally prescribed and expected to sustain balance between professional orientation (teaching students) and research and development orientation. It is formalised by law of education and refers to all academic teachers. One of the idea of the HE reform is to make a distinction between massive, teaching universities and more elite, R&D universities. If such legal change will happened, the identity of the institution (teaching or R& D university) will be more profiled.

University of Lower Silesia (2)

General:

The University of Lower Silesia (known as Dolnośląska Szkoła Wyższa or DSW, in Polish) was founded in 1997 by the Association for the Advancement of Education, ULS is a non-profit private education and research institution with a strong commitment to public service in the city and the region, and to forging research links on the national and international level. ULS is one of the best-known private Polish universities in the area of education, and is steadily expanding its offerings in the social sciences and humanities.

In addition to high-quality students, the school has attracted accomplished academic researchers and professors of education and the social sciences who have helped build the sterling academic reputation of the school – since 2010 ULS is one of the 4 non-state HE institution in country with full academic tracks (M.A, PH. D., habilitation in Pedagogy discipline). ULS currently offers degree programs in education, international relations, journalism, philosophy, cultural studies, cultural anthropology and recently – hard applied science (cartography and geodesy). The integral part of ULS is the academic publishing house which participate in sharing research work among scientific community in Poland and Europe.

Faculties:

ULS is comprised of three faculties, the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Social Sciences and Media Studies, which grant first- and second-cycle, and doctoral degrees, and the Faculty of Technical Sciences. Another unit is interdepartmental International Institute for the Study of Culture and Education, which sponsors international research and teaching programs.

Drop out issues:

To estimate a drop – out rate one cohort of student (2004-2006) was followed at their first, second and third year. Number of all students was presented to enable realistic comparison between different institutions (other case studies).

Numbers of students:

All students in 2004 – 6793

First year students 2004 – 2530

All students in 2005 – 7224

First year students 2005 – 2959

Second year students 2005 – 2375

All students in 2006 – 7887

Second year students 2006 – 2743

Third year students 2006 – 1298

The highest drop-out considers third year students, according to the data only half of the whole original number remains as a third- year students.

Teachers:

Total number: 183

Professors: 34 % in tot.

Ph. D.'s: 37 % in tot.

M.A.: 27 % in tot.

Foreign Languages teachers: .2 % in tot.

Ration teacher/ student: 41

Discipline chosen:

Pedagogy – soft applied

At ULS Faculty of Pedagogy was the original core of the University, it is the bigger unit with the highest number of students and teachers. Popular discipline to study (perceived as 'easy to study'), inclusive, with strong practical connections (pedagogical educational professions) and with medium status among other social sciences, been able to attract the numerous body student, even in time of financial crisis. In general, pedagogy is one of the most popular choice in Poland (both state and non state HEI). Habitus of state and non-state universities are similar, because of the relatively short period of sudden growth of HE institution the new generation of academic teachers (with different habitus) is still in the process of shaping. In Polish reality it means that many of the academic teachers is employed in more them one institution.

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University of Technology (3)

General:

Wrocław University of Technology was founded in 1945. The group of 27 professors from University and Technical University in Lvov arrived to Wrocław and in the destroyed buildings of Technische Hochschule Breslau started Polish academic society. They brought here the academic tradition of Lvov University of Technology and Jan Kazimierz University .

Its mission is to chart development and new directions of science and technology. Wrocław University of Technology offers five-year Master of Science programmes, four-year Bachelor of Science. Bachelor graduates can continue their studies on two-year Complementary Master of Science programmes.

Structure:

There are 11 Faculties: Faculty of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Computer Science and

Management, Faculty of Chemistry, Faculty of Electronics, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Faculty of Environmental Engineering, Faculty of Fundamental Problems of Technology, Faculty of Geoengineering, Mining and Geology, Faculty of Microsystem Electronics and Photonics, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Mechanical and Power Engineering

Drop out issues:

All students in 2004 – 32.173

First year students 2004 – 8.774 (100%)

All students in 2005 – 32.312

First year students 2005 – 8148

Second year students 2005 6.747 (76%)

All students in 2006 – 32.821

Second year students 2006 – 8030

Third year students 2006- 5.854 (66%)

Drop – out rate is relatively high, 23 % of the students is not able to get through the first year of study, from second to third year drop-out rate is still present, but decreasing. Number of third-year students is a 66% of the first – year population.

Teachers:

Total number: 1872

Professors: 21% in tot.

Ph. D.'s: 59 % in tot.

M.A.: 19 % in tot.

Foreign Languages teachers: 1 % in tot.

Ration teacher/ student: 17,3

Discipline chosen:

Computer Science at the Faculty of Computer Science and Management is a hard applied discipline. The Faculty of Computer Science and Management inaugurated its activity on 1 September 1968 as the Engineering-Economic Faculty. It was the first faculty of this educational profile in Poland. It has functioned under its current name since 1972. After numerous transformations now there are two institutes: the Institute of Informatics and the Institute of Organisation and Management. The scientific-research concentrates in these two institutes.

The Faculty takes advantage of its favorable geographical location which attracts foreign companies and participates in the process of modeling the future of Lower Silesia. Under the auspices of the Wrocław Municipal Office they made an attempt to convince teachers that the use of the e-learning platform is beneficial and worked on making the e-learning concept more common. The Faculty of Computer Science and Management is the education place for specialists of two courses of study. They are seen as a potentially

promising at the labour market in Poland. Because of the diagnosed disproportion in Poland between graduates of humanities and social sciences and hard sciences a numerous of supporting programmes and beneficial systems have been developed. It guarantees more money from the state budget changing the status of the discipline.

The Faculty offers bachelor, engineer, master courses and doctoral studies. There is also an offer of postgraduate courses. In reply to the market need new specializations which are taught in English have been introduced. In computer science these are engineer courses – Computer Science and two master courses – Computer Engineering and Information Technologies. Within the management course we also offer two courses in English –BIS, Business Information Systems and Business Management.

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Staff interviews' analyses - lecturers

Awareness of differentiation in students body:

Lecturers are meeting both traditional and non-traditional students in all disciplines. Time perspective is presenting a following changes within the student's body: (1) Growth of all student numbers with tendency to increasing numbers of part time students and more non traditional students among full time students. (2) Among part time students there is a growing number of young people who for economic reasons decide not to take a full time courses. Economy in this contexts means at least three mechanisms:

- a) need for financial resources because of lack of it in a family – students are working during the week days and studying at the weekends
- b) 'opportunity costs' – they value an education, but they want to be first at the labour market to provide a vocational professional careers (computer sciences students) to compete at the labour market with those educated but without work experiences, and
- c) to keep and secure the employment they have by fulfilling employers demand for diploma (pedagogy students often start from practice and than decide to get a degree and continue careers in the field)

From my students' tales emerges a specific pattern: many of them are women after the maternity leaves, who decided to have a baby just after the graduation, than they did not work and at some point they have decided to do something with their lives. Very often a kindergarten was a place where is relatively easy to get a job for a women, and when they've succeed they wanted to stay and here comes

education as a condition to keep the job. (Female, ULS, mature)

Most of them (students) are open-minded, creative young people, full of ideas and having interesting idea, often in addition to studying pedagogy they study the second discipline (...) Increasingly, it happens that not only part time students work, but also the regular students take a part time job.(Female, UWr, Young).

In general, rapid growth of students' number lead to a differentiation of the student body in territorial, social class, family education and other areas. Polish society is a rather homogenic group when it comes to ethnicity and religion, so the issues of multiculturalism in HE are not present. However, there are difference in social and cultural capital of new, massive student body which is a phenomena lecturers and researchers are trying to understand. This type of students (*fish out of water*) requires more careful facilitation not only in terms of knowledge, but institutional, organizational culture, how to function and 'survive' at the university. For the lecturers and their teaching practices it involves a lot of challenges

What I'm trying to do is arouse their pedagogical knowledge which they have deep inside and connect with their everyday life knowledge based on being a human. I have a scheme of teaching, just a general draft which is constant and it let me to relate to their experience in family, as a citizens, political experience, family provider experience and professional experience (...). This areas of experience I perceive as a foundations, base and my first classes are always about finding this foundations in my students and help them to emerge. It is not about make them realise, rather verbalise this fields, cause that is a base for pedagogical knowledge – our experience as a human being. (Male, ULS, mature)

At first we are setting the ground rules about grades and they agree and when it comes to the end of the semester – they forget what we were talking about. I've had a student once who have told me that he can not have a low grade cause his grandson will laugh at him....Or this primary school teachers... they almost force me to give each and one of them good grade and doesn't bother with any exams. When I finally did oral exam, some of them almost faint and this exam was not difficult, but for them it was sort of cultural shock- teachers with 30 years of experience have to learn and take an exams! And who teach them? Much younger person! What can he possibly knows? (Male, ULS, young)

Awareness of access, retention and non-completion:

Typical academic teacher in Poland does not have a general awareness of access, retention and non-completion. There is nothing in his/her practice that may required this kind of knowledge. Individual lecturer may only be aware of retention level for the course he/ she is teaching, but students' action and decision are perceived as his/her own

choices, to be at the HE means to be self directed learner. There was no personalized views on this problems in empirical data

Generally, there are {at the university} two groups of students. 1. Students who wish to learn, gain knowledge 2. Students who wish to complete the education of a formal document (Male, UWr, mature)

Approach to the students:

In mass HE system in Poland groups of students are quite big (30 and more persons in conversatory/ seminar group, 150 – 300 person per lecture). This numbers making individual ways of working with students difficult, but while research seminars the work is more personalized. However there are examples of individual, innovative work with students in individual cases, but they are not strictly connected with institutional/ discipline culture, they are rooted in professional identity of the individual lecturers. Lecturers are claiming that the differences between different types of students (traditional, non- traditional, part time, full time, hard soft/ sciences).

Main difference between those who have had a break and the young ones is potential of life experience and one can see it during the classes, for example “social policy” course – their professional - and life experience is huge here, cause when we discuss such issues like taxes or unemployment they are able to talk about their own reality based on their experience, it is much real to them than to those who only have heard about unemployment form his/her distant uncle or aunt stories. They don't have academic skills, so they participate in a different way, using their background, their activity is rather rarely based on papers and articles which I've given them, but it is interesting for me to observe how they perceive what reality bring them.. (Male, ULS, young)

I try to be a partner rather a teacher who is always ready to cooperate and open to the proposal to the students. I am trying to create a friendly atmosphere at the lectures, to express their thoughts, opinions and suggestions. I try to also remember what a teacher I - when I was a student - I wanted to have and why I went to class only to selected teachers. (Female, UWr., young)

Perception of a student (non-traditional, traditional):

A concept of a good students' according to the lecturers contains:

- a) being reflective, critical, self aware
- b) being engaged in study (working hard)
- c) understanding the nature of the discipline studied

“A good student” is curious what he/she has been studied; asking questions to find out more; willingly goes back to the texts suggested as optional..(Male, UT,

mature)

A good student is one that is open to our proposals but is still critical. A lot of reading and discussion provoking others to negotiate, positioning, offers his reading, and is not afraid to experiment (Female, ULS, mature)

The concept of 'successful learner' in HE was seen by interviewee as a very subjective and depend mostly on the personal contexts of the expectation. They were more able to indicate the factors of non-completing and dropping out.

The personal aspects, problems and issues of students life are recognized by the lecturer mostly in the situations when this aspects become an obvious barriers in learning, in those situations students are revealing such facts. They may sometimes share their personal agenda while discussing in the classroom (it happens with those lecturers who use students experiences as a learning resource). Third opportunity for getting to know students' problems better is to researching their learning within a qualitative approach.

Drop-out:

Reasons for drop out:

- 1) one reason that is not related to the time (first, second third year) is a sudden, critical event in student's life
- 2) learning difficulties, disappointment with the chosen discipline, decreasing motivation are common reasons for dropping out at the early stages
- 3) non completion is often explained in the context of not getting the required competences and abilities to write the final thesis which at B.A level is a condition to graduate

Dropout at any level may be caused also by institutional barriers and not friendly enough administration (non- academic staff). This trend (based on students interviews) is stronger at state HEI, where the more traditional type of work culture is sustained. It is connected with economical aspects – both state and non state institutions are depending on money that comes from students (directly – as a fee, indirectly – support from the state budget) but the level of security for the institution in case of lacking students is radically different at the state and non- state institutions.

4) Lecturers can offer an individual tutoring and support if the institution provides an administrative, legal framework for returnees (flexibility of learning paths)

5) There is no separate systems for supporting drop out groups, but each students is allowed to take advantage of existing system of support such as:

- Students' affairs dean
- flexibility of learning and re- trials of the exams
- formal re-engaging in the education
- psychological and vocational counselling
- scholarship systems for the students

Construction a learner identity of non-traditional students:

There is no official, recognized systems of support for non-traditional students at the institutional levels but there are individual attempts to make a difference. One of the example can be a individual curriculum of study designed to meet individual needs.

Lecturers are supporting students socialisation by:

- scientific clubs and societies for students
- Students bulletins
- Workshops, fieldtrips, seminars, open lectures
- Engaging students in national and international research projects
- Engaging students in actions for the benefit of local communities and knowledge popularisation

Some lecturer supports the non-traditional student in their own way:

My students often hear from me that they need to believe in yourselves, cause they are not in any kind worst from those successful learners, but they need to read a lot, analyze and deconstruct their practices, not to believe in everything you hear, but be critical towards new thoughts and thinking itself. I think I'm demanding, but I allow students to work in their own rhythm, dates are not as important as a quality of the path their walking by my side. I'm not letting go easily and do not let them or myself to be superficial, less is better than more if its deep enough. I want them to understand what are we doing and why. I want them to decide what they can 'take with them'. I don't think that everything (each knowledge) is for everybody, but I believe in an individual rhythm. We all grow and develop as a result of the path we are walking. Sometimes we may not see everything that is happening as we pass by, but we can always go back and pick up, someday. It may also never happened, but this is a personal choice. Not everything is for everybody. (Female, mature, ULS)

