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Principles and general objectives of education

The Act on the Education System of 1991 defines education as part of the common welfare of the whole society. Education and upbringing, respecting the Christian system of values, is based on universal ethical principles. Education and upbringing serve the developing of young people's sense of responsibility, admiration of the fatherland and respect for the Polish cultural heritage, while being open, at the same time, to values of European and world's cultures. The objective of the school is to provide each pupil with conditions necessary for his/her development and to prepare him/her for the fulfilment of family responsibilities and civil duties based on the principles of solidarity, democracy, tolerance, justice and freedom. (EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10).

The education system should provide, among other things, a fulfilment of the right of each citizen to learn and the right of children and young people to be educated and cared for; support provided by schools to back up the educational role of the family; the possibility for various entities to establish and run schools and institutions; the adjustment of the contents, methods and organization of education to pupils' psycho-physical abilities, and the possibility to avail oneself of psychological assistance and of special forms of didactic work; the possibility for disabled and maladjusted children and young people to learn at all types of schools and general access to secondary schools. (Siemienska *et al.*, 2010).

The general objective of *Strategy for the Development of Education 2007–2013* is to raise the level of education of the society ensuring at the same time the high quality of education. The Strategy envisages that the education system in Poland will: create conditions for students' development, the full use of their abilities and the attainment of their individual goals; prepare students for active and responsible participation in social, cultural and economic activities at the local, national and global level; counteract exclusion and marginalization of individuals and social groups; be responsive to developments in the field of science, technology and to globalization; and comply with the developments in the labour market in a flexible and prompt way. (Eurydice, 2010).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The education system in the country is governed by the **Act on the System of Education** of 7 September 1991, last amended in August 2011, as well as the relevant rules and regulations.

The 1995 amendment to the Act aimed at strengthening decentralization with simultaneous control and implementation of quality education in the framework of the pedagogical supervision ensured by governmental bodies. It also introduced the notion of core curriculum, which enables the identification of criteria for school-based assessment and examination requirements. The **Act on the Implementation of the**



Education System Reform of 8 January 1999 (and subsequent amendments) provided for the introduction of the new structure of the school system.

The status of the teaching profession was defined in a specific law of 26 January 1982, referred to as the **Teachers' Charter**. The law amending the Teachers' Charter was adopted by the Parliament on 18 February 2000. The Charter was further amended in 2003 and 2008.

Former legislation concerning higher education institutions included: the Law on Higher Education Schools of 12 September 1990; the Law on a Scientific Titles and Scientific Degrees of 1990; and the Law on Higher Vocational Education Schools of 26 June 1997. The **Law on Higher Education** of 27 July 2005, last amended in March 2011, applies to public and private higher education institutions (non-university institutions and universities) and provides a basis for the implementation of the three-cycle structure of degree programmes in line with the Bologna process.

In the past, compulsory schooling covered the eight-year primary education programme. According to the new structure of the education system introduced 1999, primary education (six-year programme) and lower secondary (three-year gymnasium) are compulsory. The new Constitution of the Republic of Poland, adopted on 2 April 1997, extended compulsory education up to the age of 18 years. Article 70 of the Constitution stipulates that everyone shall have the right to education; education in public schools shall be provided free of charge; and public authorities shall ensure universal and equal access to education for citizens. (MONE, 2000). One year of preparatory pre-primary education for 6-year-olds is compulsory since 2004/05. Since September 2009 all 5-year-olds have a statutory right to one year of pre-primary education in a preschool education institution (to be gradually implemented in conjunction with the lowering of the entry age to primary school from 7 to 6 years).

Administration and management of the education system

The **Ministry of National Education** (MONE) coordinates and implements the national educational policy, supervises the activities of provincial authorities, and cooperates with other organizational bodies and units on matters concerning the functioning of the education system. In the past vocational schools were run by other ministries, and they are now under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education. Art schools are under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture (only with respect to artistic subjects), while education provided in correctional institutions is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice. The MONE also determines the core curricula for preschool and general education, as well as specialized education and general vocational education. Moreover, the Ministry also coordinates activities in the field of adult education, particularly through the Department of Vocational and Continuing Education. The MONE cooperates with other ministries in the field of general vocational training, vocational training and in adult education, among others with the ministries of Labour, Science and Higher Education, Economy, Regional Development, Culture and Health.



Since May 2006, the **Ministry of Science and Higher Education** supervises the higher education system. There are also higher education institutions under the responsibility of different ministries, i.e. Health, Culture and National Heritage, National Defence, Home Affairs, and Maritime Economy.

The reform of state administration of January 1999 and the education system reform of September 1999 introduced profound changes in the management and supervision of the system. Local self-governing authorities at the level of municipalities/communes (*gminas*) or districts (*powiats*) are responsible for the establishment, administration and management of certain types of public educational institutions. The powers of the bodies responsible for administration and management are separated from the powers of the bodies responsible for pedagogical supervision.

Municipalities are responsible for the establishment, administration and management of preschools (including special education preschools), primary schools and gymnasia (there were 2,479 municipalities in 2010). **Districts** are responsible for the establishment, administration and management of: special education primary schools and gymnasia; post-gymnasium schools; schools of arts; establishments organizing extra-school and continuing education activities; and psychological and pedagogical guidance and specialist service centres. **Voivodship** (province) self-governments are responsible for the establishment, administration and management of teacher training centres, in-service teacher training centres, educational libraries as well as schools and other educational establishments of regional importance. The country is divided into 16 provinces.

In performing their tasks related to the establishment of the school network, local government units are assisted by the **Kurator**—the education superintendent—and **School Education Councils**. In accordance with the relevant legislation, the superintendent acts as an expert or advisor on matters related to the school network established by local government units. The performance of the established network is regularly monitored and assessed in order to increase efficiency and ensure a more effective use of resources.

Pedagogical supervision mainly aims at: assessing the quality of the performance of educational establishments, taking into account the opinion of students, parents and teachers; providing assistance to teachers and head teachers; and monitoring compliance with current school legislation. Pedagogical supervision is exercised by: the Ministry of National Education—for educational establishments under the ministerial jurisdiction; the Kurator—for educational establishments and in-service teacher training centres located within a given province; and the school **head teacher**, or the **director** of an educational establishment, and other teachers holding managerial positions—for school teachers, including vocational training instructors in vocational schools.

At the beginning of 1999, the **Central Examination Board** (CEB) and eight **Regional Examination Boards** (REBs) were established with the task of developing standards for examination requirements (in the case of the CEB) and to administer external examinations and tests (in the case of REBs) at the primary and secondary levels.



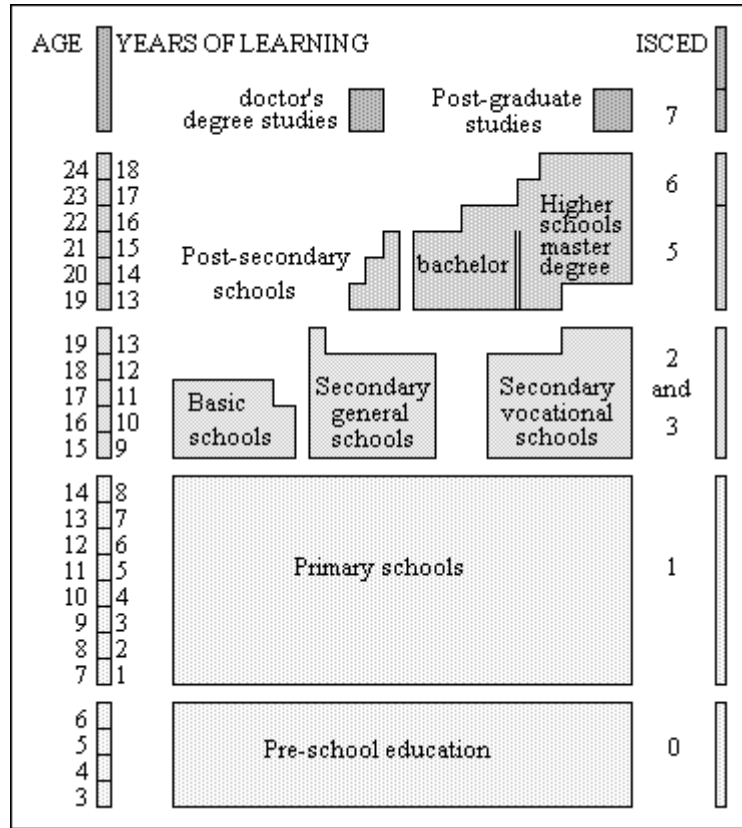
Two bodies have been established with various accreditation-related responsibilities and the task of ensuring the quality of higher education. These are the **General Council of Higher Education** and the **State Accreditation Committee**. The General Council of Higher Education provides its advice and makes proposals in all matters relating to higher education and science, including financing and legislation. The Council is also for the definition of fields of study and the development of standards in education. The State Accreditation Committee was established in January 2002 as an independent national agency. Its main responsibilities include: assessing the quality of education in fields of study, including compliance with the requirements for the provision of degree programmes; reviewing applications for the establishment of higher education institutions; and reviewing applications of higher education institutions for the authorization to provide degree programmes in a given field and at a given level of study. Two other bodies, the **Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools** and the **Conference of Rectors of (Higher) Vocational Schools** have an advisory role on issues regarding higher education.

The organization and functioning of higher education institutions are based on the principles of self-governance and autonomy, these being reflected in the extensive powers of collegiate bodies—the **Senate** and the **Faculty Board**—which are elective and represent all interested parties. The **Rector** and the **Dean** are also elected by the electoral college in accordance with the relevant procedure laid down in the statute of a given higher education institution.

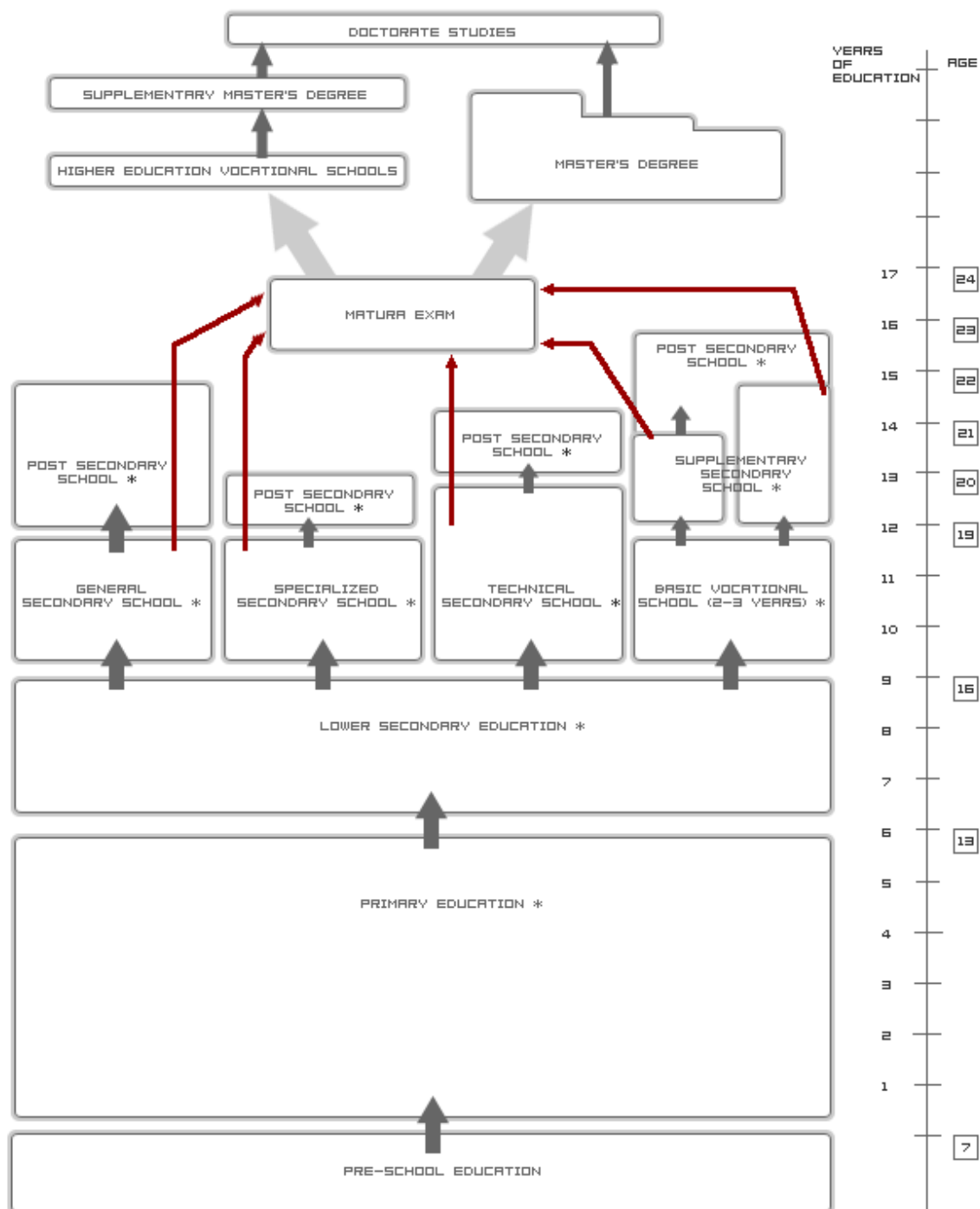


Structure and organization of the education system

Poland: structure of the education system (before the 1999 reform)



Poland: structure of the education system (after the implementation of the education reform)



Source: Website of the Ministry of National Education, July 2007.



Pre-school education

Pre-primary education caters to children aged 3-6 years. Preschool education attendance of 6-year-olds is almost universal. Some children attend kindergartens, others preschool classes and preparatory classes (the 'zero grade') in primary school. One year of preparatory pre-primary education is compulsory since 2004/05. Since September 2009 all 5-year-olds have a statutory right to one year of pre-primary education in a preschool education institution (to be implemented in conjunction with the gradual lowering of the entry age to primary school from 7 to 6 years). (Eurydice, 2010).

Primary education

Children start primary education in the year when they turn 7 (exceptionally a year earlier). Compulsory education used to cover the eight-year primary education programme. The structure of the education system has been changed in accordance with the reform launched in 1999 and fully implemented in 2004/05. Primary education now lasts six years divided into two three-year cycles (grades 1-3 or early school education according to the core curriculum of 2008, normally with one classroom teacher and integrated subjects; and grades 4-6 with subject-based teaching), followed by three years of compulsory lower secondary education (gymnasium, covering grades 7 to 9). Since 2002 an internal, standardized compulsory competence test (with no selection purposes) is administered to all pupils completing grade 6. Pupils having successfully completed primary education receive the primary school-leaving certificate. Starting from the school year 2012/13, children are expected to start compulsory education in primary school at age 6. (Eurydice, 2010).

Secondary education

Before 1999, education at the post-primary level was mainly offered by: two- or three-year basic vocational schools; four-year general secondary schools; and four- or five-year vocational secondary education schools. Following the implementation of the educational reform, education at the post-primary level is now offered by: (i) three-year gymnasias, or compulsory schools that provide general education to primary school leavers; (ii) three-year general education lyceum or specialized lyceums (since 2002/03) preparing students for the *matura* examination and higher education; (iii) four-year technical secondary schools preparing students for the *matura* examination; (iv) two- or three-year basic vocational schools preparing for a trade or occupation, or giving access to two-year supplementary lyceums or three-year supplementary technical schools (introduced in September 2004) which prepare students for the *matura* examination. At the end of lower secondary education (gymnasium) students sit an external standardized examination in humanities, science and foreign language (the latter since 2008/09) administered by the Regional Examination Boards. This examination replaced the secondary school entrance examinations; admission to upper secondary school is based on the final assessment of students' performance and the results of the examination. Students who have passed the *matura* examination at the end of upper secondary education have access to higher education. In general education, the *matura* examination consists of two parts, one external (written examination prepared and assessed by the Regional Examination



Boards) and one internal (oral examination assessed by the teachers). Students who have completed upper secondary education without passing the *matura* examination receive a school-leaving certificate and can enrol in postsecondary schools offering programmes lasting one to two and a half years.

Higher education

Tertiary-level teacher training colleges offer three-year programmes leading to the award of a diploma (primary school teachers). Higher education and academic and research institutions offer long-cycle and two-cycle programmes, the latter in accordance with the Bologna scheme, i.e. three-year programmes leading to a bachelor's degree and two-year programmes leading to the award of a master's degree. Higher professional schools offer programmes normally lasting three to four years. The duration of long-cycle programmes leading to a master's degree ranges between four and a half and six years (five years in the case of pharmacy and dentistry; six years in the case of medicine). Doctoral degree programmes normally last three to four years.

The organization of the school year at the primary and secondary levels is determined by the Ministry of National Education and is regulated by a special decree. The Ministry annually issues the school calendar, specifying the dates of the beginning and the end of the school year, school holidays, examination periods and post-primary school entrance examinations. The school year is divided into two semesters and comprises a maximum of 38 working weeks between September and June. In 2008/09 the school year consisted of 180 school days at the primary level; in 2007/08 the number of school days was 191 at the lower secondary level (gymnasium) and 190 in upper secondary schools. (Eurydice, 2010). The university academic year begins in October and normally ends at the end of June. It is divided into two semesters.

The educational process

The Ministry of National Education prepares core curricula for pre-primary, general and vocational education. It also determines framework timetables in public schools, and requirements for curricula to be used in school. Core curricula provide a framework for the reformed system of school education which is based on the principle of school autonomy. Indeed, schools independently decide on the contents of the curricula, their scope and methods for implementing them. These decisions are taken jointly, by a collective body of teachers, after consultations with parents and taking into account pupils' needs, conditions in the school and specific local conditions (tradition, local dialect, etc.).

The core curriculum is designed to ensure the uniformity of the education system by defining its common foundations. It includes a selection of contents and specifies expected achievements. This framework document leaves enough space for teachers to develop more detailed curricula and to undertake activities autonomously. For example, the core curriculum defines the aims and tasks of the school for each of the three educational stages, without predetermining the ways in which they should be achieved. Similarly, framework timetables define only the minimum number of



lessons which should be allocated to individual courses; each school then develops a detailed timetable for a given class.

A teaching programme describes educational objectives, contents to be taught to pupils, ways for achieving these objectives, and pupils' assessment procedures. A list of teaching programmes approved for use is made available to the schools. All teachers and all schools may use them freely: in whole, in part, or adapting them to their needs. A major role in the development of new teaching programmes is played by publishing houses which make available textbooks, handbooks for pupils, guides for teachers and multimedia publications for a given curriculum.

Teachers may also implement their own, independently developed teaching programme if it complies with the core curriculum. Such teaching programmes are adopted on the basis of a joint decision taken by all teachers working in the school. This procedure is intended to ensure the coordination of individual subjects at individual levels. With this formal requirement, teachers are encouraged or even obliged to establish closer and better cooperation.

Instruction is conducted in the Polish language, with the exception of schools for ethnic minorities (with both Polish and the mother tongue as medium of instruction for bilingual pupils, and the mother tongue only for certain minorities). Schools can provide education in the language of a given minority (except for the Polish language and literature, and history). This concerns, first of all, the Belarus, German and Ukrainian minorities. It is also possible to establish bilingual schools (Polish language and that of a given minority).

New concepts have been introduced into the curriculum, encouraging innovative activities often undertaken in Polish schools for many years. Among these concepts are: 'integrated teaching', 'subject blocks', 'educational paths' (or cross-curricular themes, i.e. contents which may be covered in various subjects or subject blocks). Another term consistently used in official documents is 'educational activities', which gives schools the possibility of organizing their work in various ways, going beyond the traditional division of the teaching time into lessons.

The amended Act on the School Education System abolished the provision whereby the state was required to provide pupils with textbooks. The Act also established a mechanism for admission of textbooks to be used in school. The Ministry of National Education keeps a register of recommended textbooks; this list is usually published four times a year. To include a book in the ministerial list, the publisher should submit to the Ministry four favourable reviews (three reviews covering the contents of the book and one assessing its language). Textbooks may be reviewed by authorized experts who are nominated by the Ministry. (MONE, 2001).

Pre-primary education

Pre-primary education caters to children aged 3-6 years. In some specific cases it is possible to admit children of 2.5 years of age upon the school head's approval. Children aged less than 3 years may attend nurseries supervised by the Ministry of Health. Preschool education attendance of 6-year-olds is almost universal. Some children attend kindergartens, others preschool classes and preparatory classes (the



‘zero grade’) in primary school. One year of preparatory pre-primary education is compulsory since 2004/05. Since September 2009 all 5-year-olds have a statutory right to one year of pre-primary education in a preschool education institution (to be implemented in conjunction with the gradual lowering of the entry age to primary school from 7 to 6 years). (Eurydice, 2010).

Local self-governments (municipalities/communes) are responsible for establishing preschools, repairs and investments, administrative and financial services, provision of teaching aids and equipment necessary for teaching, the appointment of headmasters (on a competition basis), and for review of the yearly organizational timetables on the basis of the education superintendent (*Kurator*) opinion.

In accordance with the Ministry of National Education (MONE) Regulation of 23 December 2008 on the core curriculum for preschool and general education in particular types of schools, the main aims of preschool education are:

- supporting children in the development of their talents and shaping of intellectual skills necessary for coping with everyday life and further education;
- building a system of values including directing children towards better recognition of good and evil;
- shaping of emotional resistance;
- developing social skills;
- creating the conditions for playing and learning of children with different physical and intellectual abilities in one group;
- caring for children’s health and their physical development;
- building children’s knowledge about the world, development of ability to present their own reflections in an understandable way;
- introducing the children into the world of aesthetic values and development of self expression through music, drama and visual art;
- shaping a sense of belonging in a community, a family, peer group, and national community;
- providing better educational chances to children through supporting their curiosity, activity and independence and the skills and knowledge relevant to undertaking school education. (Eurydice, 2010).

The *Core curriculum for preschool education in kindergartens and preschool sections in primary schools* was first introduced in February 2002. Activities for teachers and children were organized around four main educational areas: acquisition of knowledge and understanding of oneself and the world; acquisition of skills through activities; finding one’s place in the peer group and community; construction of the system of values. (Polish Eurydice Unit, 2005).

The new core curriculum for preschool education of 2008 constitutes the basis for the preparation of preschool curricula by an individual teacher, a team of teachers or other authors, on the basis of which teachers organize their activities with children. Kindergartens, preschool classes and institutions offering other forms of preschool education are obliged to follow a curriculum based on the core curriculum. The selected curriculum has to be approved by the preschool head upon the favourable



opinion of the pedagogical council and the parents' council. The conditions and procedures for approval of preschool curricula by the MONE for use in preschools, preschool classes and other forms of preschool education have been defined in the MONE Regulation of 8 June 2009. (Eurydice, 2010).

Educational provision in most preschool institutions is organized on the basis of the age of children (i.e. classes for 3-, 4-, 5- and 6-year-olds). In rural areas preschools have on average two (6-year-olds and other children) or one class only. The number of children in one class cannot exceed 25 excepting integration and special preschools and special preschool classes where the limits are lower. Usually two teachers working in shifts take care of one class. They can either work with one age group or accompany the children during the whole four-year period in the preschool institution (depending on the system, tradition, or the headmaster's decision). The new core curriculum of 2008 recommends the following time allocation for preschool education and care provision: one fifth of the total time should be devoted to play; one fifth to outdoor activities; one fifth to educational activities; and the remaining two fifths should be spent on care and organizational matters. Preschools and preschool classes in schools should provide a minimum of five hours of preschool provision per day, although most preschool institutions work around nine hours a day and are open five days a week. The duration of activities depends on the age of children: for the 5- to 6-year-olds it is around 30 minutes. For younger children (3 to 4 years of age) the duration of activities is around 15 minutes. Upon their parents' consent children can also attend additional fee-paying activities such as foreign language classes. In preschool centres classes take place on particular days of the week, and in preschool clubs classes are offered everyday. The minimum opening time preschool centres and clubs is three hours a day and 12 hours per week. (*Ibid.*).

There are no official recommendations or guidelines with respect to teaching methods. Normally, the work with children is based on the spontaneous child's activity. Playing and activities stimulating development are the most common methods. Some preschool institutions follow or adapt methods related to certain methodological theories, e.g. Montessori playgroups. In the case of 6-year-olds enrolled in preschool institutions, kindergarten teachers introduce tasks related to elementary reading skills. Global methods are used in the teaching of reading, among them Glen Doman's method and the model of Natural Language Learning (based on the experience of New Zealand educators). However, the most popular approach is the analytic-synthetic-visual method. There are no formal rigid principles for evaluating or monitoring of preschool children. In public preschools teachers continuously monitor the progress of children. A child completing preschool education does not receive any document including an assessment of his/her knowledge and skills. The new core curriculum defines an obligation for teachers to assess the child's readiness for undertaking school education (preschool diagnosis). This assessment takes place at the beginning of the school year preceding the child's enrolment in grade 1. (*Ibid.*).

Preschool teachers are mostly female (around 99% of teachers at this level) and are either graduates from three-year programmes at teacher training colleges, or graduates from pedagogical academies and teacher education faculties at universities (five-year master's degree programmes). (Polish Eurydice Unit, 2008).



In 1999, approximately 50% of children who benefited from preschool education in villages (compared to 8% in urban areas) attended the one-year preparatory course teaching reading skills and basic mathematics in primary schools. (MONE, 1999). In 2004/05 there were 17,299 preschool institutions (including kindergartens and preschool classes in primary schools), and the total enrolment was 831,923 children (age group 3-6 years). In 2008/09 the enrolment ratio of children aged 3-6 years was estimated at 63.1%, and at 94.5% in the case of 6-year-olds. In 2007/08, a total of 2,595 children with special educational needs were enrolled in special preschool institutions. (Eurydice, 2010).

The Central Statistical Office reports that in 2010/11 there were 19,090 preschool institutions (of which 8,406 in urban areas and 10,684 in rural areas), including 8,808 preschools (of which 2,901 in rural areas), 9,048 preschool classes in primary schools, and 1,234 preschool centres/clubs. The total enrolment was 1,059,300 children (of whom 733,200 in rural areas); a total of 816,900 children were enrolled in preschools and 219,700 children were in preschool classes in primary schools. The total number of (full-time equivalent) teachers was 73,400, of whom 52,900 in urban areas. (CSO, 2011).

Primary education

As mentioned, compulsory education used to cover the eight-year primary education programme. The structure of the education system has been changed in accordance with the reform launched in 1999 and fully implemented in 2004/05. Primary education now lasts six years divided into two three-year stages (grades 1-3 or early school education according to the new core curriculum of 2008, normally with one classroom teacher and integrated subjects; and grades 4-6 with subject-based teaching), followed by three years of compulsory lower secondary education (gymnasium, covering grades 7 to 9). Since 2002 an internal, standardized compulsory competence test (with no selection purposes) is administered to all pupils completing grade 6. Pupils having successfully completed primary education receive the primary school-leaving certificate. Starting from the school year 2012/13, children are expected to start compulsory education in primary school at age 6. (Eurydice, 2010).

The new six-year primary education programme does not provide any vocational qualifications and only opens the door to further education. Therefore, primary school equips learners with the foundation for continuing their education. According to the core curriculum of 2002, the general objectives of primary education are to:

- develop the ability of self-expression, reading and writing, the ability to solve arithmetic problems, the ability to use simple tools, and to develop habits of social life;
- develop aesthetic and moral sensitivity of children and their creative abilities;
- develop the ability of distinguishing the real world from the imaginary world, historical persons from invented characters;
- develop the awareness of one's self, family, social, cultural, technological and natural environment;



- strengthen the sense of cultural, historical, ethnic and national identity;
- ensure care for and development of children in a friendly, safe and healthy environment, emphasizing ties with the family;
- take into account individual needs and to ensure equal opportunities. (MONE, 2008).

Starting from September 2009 a new core curriculum is being introduced based on the Regulation by the Ministry of National Education of 23 December 2008 on Core curricula for preschool and general education in particular types of schools. The new core curriculum, which focuses on learning outcomes and the acquisition of key competencies, is expected to be fully implemented (i.e. up to grade 6) by 2014/15. According to the new core curriculum, pupils enrolled in primary school are expected to: acquire a basic set of information/knowledge on facts, theories and practice related in particular to topics and phenomena close to their experience; acquire skills related to the use of knowledge and information in carrying out tasks and solving problems; develop attitudes related to efficient and responsible functioning in the contemporary world. Core curricula have to be implemented by all schools, but teachers are free to follow one of the selected curricula from the list approved by the Ministry or prepared by the teacher or a team of teachers as well as to use diverse textbooks selected from a list approved by the Ministry. (Eurydice, 2010).

In the first cycle (grades 1 to 3), called early school education according to the new core curriculum of 2008, the educational process is designed to ensure a smooth transition from preschool to school education and it is organized on an integrated basis. Early school education aims to support the intellectual, emotional, social, ethical, physical and aesthetic development of children. The second cycle covers grades 4-6, and the teaching-learning process at this stage is arranged in subjects listed in the outline timetable (Polish language, history and civics, modern foreign language, mathematics, natural sciences, music, art, technology, computer sciences, physical education, and religion or ethics). In addition to separate subjects, the following 'educational paths' (or cross-curricular themes) are also considered: health education; ecological education; reading and media education; and education for society (education for family life; cultural heritage of the region; patriotic and civic education). (*Ibid.*).

The table below shows the lesson framework timetable of primary education:

Poland. Primary education (as reformed in 2002): lesson framework timetable

Subject	Total number of weekly periods in each cycle	
	First cycle (grades 1–3)	Second cycle (grades 4–6)
Integrated subjects	54	–
Religion or ethics	6	6
Polish language	–	16
History and civics	–	4
Modern foreign language	–	8
Mathematics	–	12
Natural sciences	–	9
Music (can be combined with Art)	–	2
Art	–	2
Technology	–	2
Computer sciences	–	2
Physical education	–	9 + 3
Lessons to be allocated by the school head	12 (*)	9
Lessons with class tutor	–	3
Total weekly periods in each cycle (minimum)	72	87

Source: Eurydice, 2010. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes. (*) Starting from September 2008, six periods are to be devoted to foreign language teaching (i.e. two periods per week in each grade). In grades 1-3, there should be a maximum of 23 compulsory periods per week, and in grades 4-6 a maximum of 28 periods per week (including religion/ethics and additional classes).

Primary (and general) education based on the same core curriculum as general education schools is also provided by art schools (music, fine arts and ballet). Art schools specializing in music have a three-tier structure, i.e. six-year first degree schools (also providing primary education), six-year second degree schools (also providing lower and general upper secondary education), and academies of music offering five-year programmes. General schools of fine arts (six-year programme) and upper secondary schools of plastic arts (four-year programme) offer both general and artistic education. These schools provide education in the profession of visual artist and general education, at the lower and upper secondary general school level and the upper secondary general school level, respectively. Academies of fine arts offer five-year programmes. General ballet schools offer nine-year programmes and also provide general education (second cycle of primary education, lower and upper secondary). Admission to art schools is based on the results of a competition-based entrance examination. (MONE, 2008).

Internal evaluation is carried out by school teachers on the basis of requirements defined in relation to the curricula implemented in the given school. This type of evaluation aims at assessing the educational attainments of pupils and focuses on the support to the pupil's development. Pupils are assessed separately in each subject. Evaluation depends entirely on the teacher of the given subject. The results of the assessment carried out during a school year are taken into account in the



end-of-year evaluation. Assessment is divided into partial, periodical (semester) and annual assessment. In grades 1-3 the assessment is descriptive and applies to educational attainments and behaviour separately. In grade 4-6, a six-point scale of marks is used (6 being excellent, 5 very good, 4 good, 3 satisfactory, 2 acceptable, and 1 unsatisfactory). In grades 1-3 pupils are promoted automatically if their achievements are assessed positively; repetition of the year at this level is exceptional, and must be justified by psychologists and accepted by parents. From grade 4 onwards, pupils are promoted to a higher grade if they have yearly marks higher than “unsatisfactory” for all compulsory subjects. In the case of one unsatisfactory mark a pupil must pass an exam to be promoted to the higher grade. In 2006 pupils repeating a class accounted for less than 1% of all pupils.

Since 2002, a compulsory standardized test assessing the level of competence achieved by pupils is administered in the final year of the primary school. The test aims at the assessment of skills defined in the national standards and divided into five areas, i.e. reading, writing, reasoning, use of information, and practical application of knowledge. Normally all pupils pass this test, as the results are used for information purposes only and it does not give basis for any selection or ranking of pupils. Every pupil who graduated from the primary school has to be admitted in the gymnasium in his/her school area. (Eurydice, 2010).

In 2007/08, the gross enrolment ratio at the primary level (age group 7-12) was estimated at 98.2% and the net enrolment ratio at 96.8%. (*Ibid.*). The Central Statistical Office reports that in 2010/11 there were 13,922 primary schools with a total enrolment of some 2,191,700 children; the total number of (full-time equivalent) teachers was about 176,300. In addition, in the same year a total of 61,211 children with special educational needs were enrolled at the primary level, of whom 24,459 children in special education schools. (CSO, 2011).

Secondary education

Following the implementation of the educational reform, education at the post-primary level is now offered by: (i) three-year gymnasia, or compulsory schools that provide general education to primary school leavers; (ii) three-year general education lyceums or specialized lyceums (since 2002/03) preparing students for the *matura* examination and higher education; (iii) four-year technical secondary schools preparing students for the *matura* examination; (iv) two- or three-year basic vocational schools preparing for a trade or occupation, or giving access to two-year supplementary lyceums or three-year supplementary technical schools (introduced in September 2004) which prepare students for the *matura* examination. Students who have completed upper secondary education without passing the *matura* examination receive a school-leaving certificate and can enrol in postsecondary schools offering programmes lasting one to two and a half years; graduates receive a diploma specifying their vocational qualifications.

The main objectives of secondary education depend on the type of school. General secondary schools prepare young people for further education at a higher level (universities, colleges and other tertiary-level institutions). Technical secondary schools provide students with general secondary education and a secondary vocational qualification. The *matura* certificate also entitles holders to apply for admission to



higher education institutions. Basic vocational schools prepare qualified workers. In secondary general schools the head teacher sets, in agreement with the school council, educational profiles containing leading subjects which are then taught with added emphasis.

Gymnasium (lower secondary) education aims to introduce students into the world of science, support their personal development, support them in their independent work, help them to take decisions regarding their future education and prepare them for active participation in social activities. The main objectives of general upper secondary education are to:

- teach students to formulate their opinions in speech and in writing with the proper use of various techniques;
- help students to acquire sound knowledge at the level allowing them to continue their studies or find a job;
- help students to understand relevant information;
- help students to develop the ability to observe particular relations (causality, as well as function, time and space-based relations);
- support students in the development of an analytical and synthetic thinking;
- enable students to use practical information and knowledge in an integral way leading to the better understanding of the world, people and oneself;
- teach students about the national cultural heritage in the context of the European and world culture. (MONE, 2008).

The tables below show the lesson framework timetables of the gymnasium (lower secondary) and general upper secondary education (lyceum):

Poland. Lower secondary education (gymnasium, as reformed in 2002): lesson framework timetable

Subject	Total number of weekly periods (over grades 7–9)
Polish language	14
History	6
Civic education	3
Modern foreign language	9
Mathematics	12
Physics and astronomy	4
Chemistry	4
Biology	4
Geography	4
Fine arts, music	3
Technology	2
Computer studies	2
Physical education	9 + 3
Religion or ethics	6
Lessons with class tutor	3
Lessons to be decided by the school head	6
Total weekly periods (minimum)	94

Source: Eurydice, 2010. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes. In grades 7-9, there should be a maximum of 31 periods per week (including religion/ethics and additional classes).

**Poland. General upper secondary education (lyceum, as reformed in 2002):
lesson framework timetable**

Subject	Total number of weekly periods (over grades 10-12)
Polish language	14
First and second foreign language	15
History	5
Civic education	2
Culture studies	1
Mathematics	9
Physics and astronomy	3
Chemistry	3
Biology	3
Geography	3
Introduction to management	2
Information technology	2
Physical education	9
Defense training	2
Lessons with class tutor	3
Lessons for additional subjects envisaged in the curriculum	10
<i>Sub-total (including two additional periods to be allocated to physics and astronomy, chemistry and biology)</i>	<i>88</i>
Religion or ethics (non compulsory)	6
Lessons to be decided by the school head	4
Total weekly periods (minimum)	98

Source: Eurydice, 2010. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes. In grades 10-12, there should be a maximum of 35 periods per week (including religion/ethics and additional classes).

The new core curriculum for general education (2008) has been introduced in the first year of the gymnasium in September 2009. In addition to the compulsory subjects, the core curriculum of 2002 also includes the following ‘educational paths’ (or cross-curricular themes): philosophical education; reading and media education; health education; ecological education; cultural heritage of the region; civil defense; European education; and Polish culture in the context of Mediterranean civilization. Subject teachers are expected to include these contents in the curricula. (Eurydice, 2010).

In the gymnasium students are assessed separately in each subject by the teachers using the same six-point scale of marks used at the primary level and also receive marks for their behaviour. The results of the assessment carried out during the year are taken into account in the end-of-year evaluation. At the end of lower secondary education students sit an external standardized examination in humanities, science and foreign language (the latter since 2008/09) administered by the Regional Examination Boards.

The lyceum offers a three-year programme providing general education for gymnasium graduates. It offers general education based on the core curriculum, and covering around 80% of the total teaching time; and specialized (academic or vocational) education covering the remaining 20% of the teaching time. Lyceums prepare students in one specialized academic section and in four specialized vocational sections: engineering and technology, agriculture and environment, the social sector and services, and culture and the arts. The assessment of students' achievements follows the same criteria applied in the gymnasium. Students having completed the lyceum and having successfully passed the *matura* examination can access higher education. Lyceum students who do not intend to continue their education at the higher education level are given the possibility of acquiring general vocational knowledge and specific vocational qualifications.

All types of upper secondary schools (general, specialized and technical) follow the compulsory core curricula defined for the basic level of teaching by the Ministry of National Education. In addition, as in the case of the gymnasium, the core curriculum of 2002 also includes the following or cross-curricular themes: reading and media education; ecological education; European education; philosophical education; health education; cultural heritage of the region; and preparation for family life. Subject teachers are expected to include these contents in the curricula. (Eurydice, 2010).

Vocational schools are two-year schools for gymnasium graduates. Their main task is to prepare students for a trade and occupation. In vocational schools, 35% of the teaching time is allocated to general education in order to enable graduates to participate as responsible citizens in various areas of social life, and to provide them with the basis for possible further study. The remaining 65% of the teaching time is allocated to vocational education. Specializations are closely linked with the needs on the local labour market and with employer expectations.

Two-year supplementary lyceums or three-year supplementary technical schools (introduced in September 2004) offer vocational school graduates the possibility of supplementing their education up to the secondary level and prepare them for the *matura* examination. These lyceums and schools offer day, evening and distance education courses. The scope of education in supplementary lyceums is determined by the core curriculum.

In 2004/05 the new system of external standardized general examinations was implemented in upper secondary schools. The new *matura* examination, which gives students access to higher education is made up of two parts, one written (prepared and assessed by external examination commissions) and the other oral (prepared and assessed by school teachers). In May 2005 all students sat for the first time the national examination. In 2006/07, 228,769 students graduating from the lyceum sat the *matura* and 95.8% received the certificate; in the case of technical schools and specialized lyceums, about 150,000 students sat the examination and 64.3% received the certificate. (Eurydice, 2010).

The Central Statistical Office reports that in 2010/11 there were 7,278 gymnasia with a total enrolment of about 1,261,400 students. The number of vocational schools was 2,191 and the total enrolment was about 234,700 students.



Concerning upper secondary education, in the same year there were 2,447 lyceums with an enrolment of about 634,400 students; 438 specialized lyceums with about 34,300 students enrolled; 2,319 technical schools with 561,400 students enrolled; and 2,941 postsecondary schools with a total enrolment of some 298,800 students. The number of (full-time equivalent) teachers was about 109,400 in gymnasias, 17,200 in vocational schools, 50,300 in lyceums, 2,900 in specialized lyceums, 49,700 in technical schools; and 7,900 in postsecondary schools. In addition, in 2010/11 a total of 53,956 students with special educational needs were enrolled in gymnasias, of whom 29,733 students in special education gymnasias. At the upper secondary level, 5,195 students were enrolled in lyceums (of whom 2,168 in special education lyceums/centres; 859 students in specialized lyceums (of whom 412 in special education institutions/centres); 1,994 students in technical schools (of whom 798 in special education institutions/centres); and 536 students were enrolled in postsecondary schools (of whom 345 in special education schools/centres). (CSO, 2011).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The system of the evaluation of students' learning achievement designed by the Ministry of National Education is just an element of a broader concept of comprehensive evaluation of the performance of students and teachers. The ministerial proposal focuses on the external measurement that is exercised once a year in the final grades of various stages of schooling. The general outlines of the central authority concerning the evaluation system bring attention to both the external assessment and the internal one in which significant responsibility is left to the school and the teachers. The evaluation, regardless of the environment in which it occurs, should be treated as an instrument for managing and controlling the learning process, and not as a tool for selection. Students' attitudes, skills and ways of understanding the world will become more and more frequent subjects of assessment than the traditional factual knowledge. (MONE, 2000).

Poland participated in the OECD/PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) for the first time in the year 2000. In 2003, in tests checking text understanding skills Polish students did better (497 points) than in 2000 (479), slightly above the OECD average (494 points). In mathematical thinking they received 490 points, slightly below the OECD average (500 points). They did not do very well in tests involving independent, analytical or creative thinking. In natural sciences they scored 498 points (against an OECD average of 500 points). The poorest score (487 points) was reported in scientific thinking (OECD average: 500 points).

In 2006, Polish students scored well in reading compared with the OECD average (492 points), while the result for Poland was 508 points. For the first time Polish pupils scored better than the OECD average and the difference is statistically significant. In the same year, Poland students received a 495 point score in mathematics, the same as the average result for the OECD countries (498 points). The scientific thinking level of Polish pupils (498 points) is close to the OECD average (499 points). (MONE, 2008).

In the 2006 PISA test, Poland belonged to the small group of countries which improved their results (by 11 points) in tasks related to reading and understanding of texts in humanities (508 points in comparison with the OECD average of 492). The average score in mathematics by lower secondary school students has increased by five points since 2003. At the same time the respective average score for OECD countries has gone down by two points. When comparing the scores achieved by Polish students in scientific thinking in 2003 and in 2006, there was no significant improvement. (EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10).

Teaching staff

Teachers must have a higher education qualification. Pre-primary and primary education teachers are graduates from first- or second-cycle programmes (three-year bachelor's or five-year master's/magister degree programmes) or from teacher training colleges and foreign language teacher training colleges offering three-year diploma programmes. Lower secondary education teachers are graduates from first- or second-cycle programmes (three or five years). Upper secondary teachers normally graduate from second-cycle programmes. For those who graduate with no teaching specialization it is possible to acquire teaching qualifications through postgraduate studies or in-service training. Higher education degree/diploma holders account for about 97.3% of teaching staff. (MONE, 2008; Eurydice, 2010).

The general and specific requirements, the graduate profile and contents of the teacher training curriculum are defined in the Regulation of the Ministry of National Education and Sport of the 7 September 2004 on the teacher training standards and the Regulation of the Ministry of National Education of 30 June 2006 on the teacher training standards in colleges. According to the new teacher training standards for higher education institutions (first and second cycle programmes, as well as magister degree and postgraduate programmes) and colleges, apart from the subject related and pedagogical training (psychology, pedagogy and teaching techniques) the teacher has to learn how to use ICT and acquire good command of at least one foreign language. Furthermore, the teachers are trained in two specialties, i.e. the main subject and an additional subject. In addition, teachers shall have the ability to: cooperate with students and other teachers, students' families and the local community in the implementation of educational tasks; undertake educational tasks beyond the scope of the given subject; create plans for their own activities and to undertake activities promoting effective and good pedagogical practices; manage their own professional and personal development and to undertake in-service training; and apply the rules of law related to the education system and the teacher professional status. (*Ibid.*).

The training of teachers in higher education institutions is mostly provided within fields of study which prepare specialists for various professions. Within a field of study students may either choose a teacher's specialization and acquire teacher's qualifications as part of their studies or graduate without a specialization and acquire teacher's qualifications through postgraduate programmes or qualification courses. The Ministry of National Education (MONE) determines the qualifications required and the minimum number of hours to be spent on pedagogical preparation. According to the regulations issued by the MONE, pedagogical preparation must comprise: a minimum of 510 hours in the three-year programmes preparing to teach two subjects (330 hours of theoretical preparation and 180 hours of practical placement in a



school); a minimum of 480 hours in the five-year programmes preparing to teach one subject (one major specialization; 330 hours of theoretical preparation and 150 hours of practical placement in a school); and a minimum of 600 hours in the five-year programmes preparing to teach two subjects (major and minor specializations: 390 hours of theoretical preparation and 210 hours of practical placement in a school). In the case of three-year colleges preparing for teaching of two subjects programmes must include at least 540 hours of pedagogical training (360 hours of theory and 180 hours of practical training), while in three-year foreign language teacher training colleges programmes must include 510 hours of pedagogical training (360 hours of theory and 150 hours of practical training).

According to the Teachers' Charter (last amended in 2008), a person who has completed either a higher education programme with appropriate pedagogical preparation or a programme in a teacher training establishment (now colleges, in the past teacher training institutes, pedagogical technical studies and teacher education lyceums) can enter the teaching profession. Any person graduating from a higher education institution with pedagogical preparation or a college graduate is as such recognized as a qualified teacher within the specialization he/she has completed. A teacher starting his/her first ever job has to spend a one-year probation period in order to obtain a promotion degree of contract teacher, and another period lasting two years and nine months leading to a promotion degree of appointed teacher. The amended Teachers' Charter of 2000 establishes four categories in the teaching career: trainee teacher, contract teacher, appointed teacher, and chartered teacher. Chartered teachers with an outstanding record may also be awarded the title of honorary school education professor. A teacher can be promoted to a given category if he/she: holds required qualifications; has completed a practical placement which ended with a positive assessment of his/her achievements (the placement is based on the individual skill development programme); has been accepted by the selection committee or, in the case of the contracted teachers, has passed the examination held by an examination board. (*Ibid.*).

According to the Teachers' Charter, the working time of the teacher may not exceed 40 hours per week. This workload includes the minimum teaching load which ranges from 15 to 30 hours depending on the post. The minimum teaching load for the basic group of teachers (in all types of schools) is 18 hours per week. At the teacher's request, his/her weekly workload may now comprise up to 27 hours per week, with any increase in the workload implying a proportionally higher salary. The amended Teachers' Charter of 2008 specifies that, apart from the teaching hours defined in the legislation, primary school and gymnasium teachers are obliged to undertake education and care duties in day care units or teach classes defined as hours left to the discretion of the school head (amounting to two hours a week). Teachers employed in post-gymnasium schools (including special education schools) are obliged to undertake one additional hour a week in the framework of classes defined as hours left to the discretion of the school head. Starting from September 2009, in addition to obligatory teaching hours teachers are obliged to teach additional hours devoted to activities increasing educational opportunities of pupils, development of their talents and skills, and in the case of primary schools and gymnasia also day care activities.

The level of teacher's basic salary depends on the professional promotion grade, qualifications and the scope of obligatory teaching hours. The level of bonuses



depends on the length of service, the quality of teaching, additional obligations or tasks, position held and difficult or hazardous employment conditions. Before 2008 the average remuneration of a trainee teacher equaled 82% of a basic salary defined for state employees, which is defined annually in a budgetary act. Beginning 2009 on the basis of an amendment to the Teachers' Charter the average remuneration of teachers equals 100% (for trainee teacher), 111% (for contract teacher), 144% (for appointed teacher) and 184% (for chartered teacher) of a basic amount defined yearly in the budgetary act. This solution leads to a substantial increase of salaries of trainee and contract teachers, and to lesser extent, of the other teachers.

In-service teacher training is not compulsory; however, it is indispensable for professional development and career progression. In-service training is provided as complementary education and as staff development. Complementary education covers the courses of study which lead to a higher level of education or additional qualifications, and staff development covers the forms of refreshment, which enrich the working techniques of teachers within the qualifications they already have. The financing of complementary education and staff development is guaranteed in the Teachers' Charter, which provides that the school running bodies allocate for this purpose an amount equal to 1% of the planned expenditure on teachers' salaries. Complementary education courses are provided by higher education institutions and colleges as evening, extramural and part-time studies. Teachers choose the field of study or specialization depending on the level of education already achieved and their individual needs. Higher education institutions provide complementary education and staff development courses independently, within the sphere of their autonomy. The National In-Service Teacher Training Centre, functioning within the school education sector, provides staff development courses for the whole country, often together with foreign institutions or within the framework of international educational programmes. The Regional Centres of Teaching Methodology, run by the respective regional self-government authorities, provide staff development courses and, though on a limited scale, complementary education courses within specializations which are in short supply in a given region. (*Ibid.*).

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Web resources

Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange:
<http://www.buwiwm.edu.pl/> [In Polish and English. Last checked: February 2012.]

Central Examination Board: <http://www.cke.edu.pl/> [In Polish; some information in English. Last checked: February 2012.]

Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools: <http://www.krasp.org.pl/> [In Polish and English. Last checked: February 2012.]

Ministry of National Education: <http://www.men.gov.pl/> [In Polish; some information in English. Last checked: February 2012.]

Ministry of Science and Higher Education: <http://www.nauka.gov.pl/> [In Polish and English. Last checked: February 2012.]



Polish Educational Portal: <http://www.interklasa.pl/portal/index/strony> [In Polish. Last checked: February 2012.]

State Accreditation Committee: <http://www.pka.edu.pl/> [In Polish and English. Last checked: February 2012.]

University Accreditation Commission: <http://www.uka.amu.edu.pl/> [In Polish and English. Last checked: February 2012.]

For more detailed and updated information consult EURYDICE, the information network on national education systems and policies in Europe:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links_htm