

CONTEXT FOR THE NATIONAL DATA: POLAND

The academy in Poland operates today in a context which, following 1989, has witnessed passage from a central-command economy to a market economy, and from ideological suppression to full academic autonomy. At the same time, Poland has moved from the absence of the private sector in higher education (except for church-funded Catholic institutions) to a boom as part of a boom in overall enrolments. The current legal situation for higher education is generally determined by the law on higher education of 1990 (to be changed in 2004) and by the new law on scientific degrees and the scientific title from 2003.

In the last decade, enrolment rose more than fourfold, from about 400,000 in 1990 to almost 2,000,000 in 2003. The cohort enrolment rate has grown from 12,9 to 43,6 between 1990 and 2001. The state has sharply reduced funding levels for public higher education; reforms have been introduced in the public sector generally. The rapid growth of the private sector is seen by both enrolments and numbers of institutions: the first private institutions were opened in 1990, but already in 1995 their number was 80, and 250 in 2002; An enrolment of 50.000 students in 1994 climbed to more than a half million in 2001. Thus, almost one-third of the student body now attends private higher education.

The vast majority of private institutions (called non-public in Poland) provide courses on a bachelor level (leading to the *licencjat* degree) and specialize in selected fields of economics. Out of 221, only 51 are entitled to provide courses on a MA level (leading to a *magister* degree) and only 2 are entitled to confer doctoral degrees. In contrast, there are 123 public institutions in total and they provide courses leading mainly to an MA degree. By Polish standards, there are 16 universities: 15 public and one private, although only public institutions are using the term. Private institutions operate both in big cities and in small towns; Warsaw, the capital, is the main Polish academic center for both public and private sectors, and other academic centers include Cracow, Lodz, Poznan, Wroclaw, Gdansk and Katowice. All private institutions in Poland charge tuition fees while public higher education is free for regular students, though extramural students, now 56 percent of the public total, must pay fees. Following the Bologna process of the integration of the European higher education systems, Poland is gradually introducing a two-tier system of studies (undergraduate and graduate), a credit transfer system and enhanced quality assurance mechanisms and accreditation procedures.

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