

The reform of science and higher education in Poland (INTRODUCTION)

- Given the fact that the current Law on Higher Education of 2005 has been amended several times and is no longer lucid, a growing number of people were of the opinion that systemic changes could not be made by simply amending the old law. In this situation there emerged the idea of creating a completely new legal order in science and higher education in Poland. However, to make the law a foundation on which our science could start to catch up with leading countries of Europe, **students would be able to study at Polish universities comparable to the best European higher education institutions**, which would function for at least several decades, a decision was made to draft this law in the process of **the widest possible consultation with the academic community, paying close attention to solutions adopted in other countries. This is the concept behind Law 2.0.**
- The starting point for a dialogue on the new law on higher education was a competition in which three expert teams independently prepared reform concepts. At the same time, the Ministry organized a series of conferences devoted to the problems of Polish science and higher education. Approximately 7 thousand people took part in the debates on the new law at universities.



Main areas of the reform:



1. THE AUTONOMY AND STRUCTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Representatives of external stakeholders will have a say in electing the rector, which will enable more effective management and closer cooperation of the HEI with its socio-economic environment. A **university council** (also referred to as a university or governing board) will be a novel organ within the HEI, meant to create new opportunities for running the HEI in a more professional way and open it up to wider collaboration with its socio-economic environment. More than 50% of the council's members, including its chair, will come from outside the HEI community. The key competences: adopting the HEI's strategy, presenting opinions about the HEI's draft statute, supervising the management of the HEI, including in financial matters, naming candidates for the post of the rector, presenting opinions about the HEI's annual budget and its execution report.

2. THE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- The rules governing the division of universities into academic and vocational institutions will be modified. The condition for qualifying a university as an academic institution will eventually be the B+ category in at least one discipline (B+ is also a requirement for the right to grant PhD degrees). An HEI that fulfils this condition will have an opportunity to remain in the group of vocational schools.
- The draft law provides for separate financing for a competition called "Initiative for excellence - research university", which aims to select research universities in a functional manner.
- A "Regional Initiative of Excellence" competition will be launched, aiming to strengthen the significance of research universities in selected disciplines.
- The draft law envisages the introduction, in addition to university unions, of the possibility to set up a federated university by public academic universities together with other public universities, research institutes of PAN (Polish Academy of Sciences) and other research institutes, including international scientific institutes. Selected university core tasks may be transferred to the federation level.



3. FUNDING

- The current multitude of funding streams, each with its spending restrictions, will be integrated so that HEIs benefit from more flexibility and potential synergies.

- Public HEIs will be able to obtain a subsidy in fewer than 10 separate streams. Importantly, this does not imply reduced funding; instead, the change will allow HEIs to manage their internal funding flows more efficiently.
- Funding requests will now be submitted by HEIs rather than their faculties. The same competence will be exercised by the research institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences and other research institutes, including international scientific institutes.

4. QUALITY AND RELEVANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- Abolishing minimum staffing requirements to run courses and replacing them with at least 75% (for the general education profile) or 50% (for the practical profile) of classes taught by the academic staff employed in a given institution as their primary place of work.
- Introducing simpler regulations of joint courses in collaboration with foreign universities, for example to define some requirements (e.g. requirements for academic teachers conducting classes) in the contract.
- Modifying the regulations on practical-profile studies, which will have to include 6 months of practical training in undergraduate and unified master's studies.
- Introduction of the obligation to publish reviews of theses.
- Modifying the principles of education quality assessment. So-called "comprehensive assessment" is proposed which will verify the effectiveness of measures taken by the HEIs to improve the quality of education.
- Strengthening the teaching position in the academic career path.



5. DOCTORAL TRAINING

A new model of teaching doctoral students. This model will allow candidates to choose from between two modes:

- ✓ teaching in doctoral schools, which will replace doctoral studies and discontinue part-time studies,
- ✓ extramural studies.
- a HEI will be able to establish a doctoral school for at least two scientific disciplines in which that HEI has at least category B+, earned under the standard evaluation of the quality of research. The same conditions will apply to doctoral schools set up by the research institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences and other research institutes, including international scientific institutes, as well as doctoral schools established jointly by these institutes.
- The quality of doctoral theses will be improved through:
 - ✓ interdisciplinarity of research.
 - ✓ a universal scholarship system for doctoral students.
 - ✓ mid-term assessment, involving external reviewers, of the progress made toward completing the doctoral thesis; its positive outcome will clear the candidate to continue studies and be a condition for receiving a higher scholarship.
 - ✓ engaging a third reviewer from outside the institution hosting the doctoral student.
 - ✓ making doctoral schools subject to evaluation by the Council for Scientific Excellence.
 - ✓ verifying candidates' foreign language C1 proficiency by requiring them to provide an appropriate certificate.

6. ACADEMIC CAREER

New career pathways.

- academic teachers will fall into three categories:
 - ✓ teaching staff – teaching students and doctoral students as well as partaking in organizational work at HEIs,
 - ✓ research staff – conducting scientific research and partaking in organizational work at a HEI,
 - ✓ research-and-teaching staff – conducting scientific research, teaching students and doctoral students as well as partaking in organizational work at HEI.
- unfortunately, the teaching pathway has always been perceived as less prestigious than the research one. This has weakened the motivation of academic teachers to excel at their teaching competences. The draft reform creates a career pathway for outstanding teaching staff that will be on a par with the research pathway. In addition, HEIs will be able to launch their own pathways of an academic career. The title of professor will continue to be awarded by the President of the Republic of Poland. Requests in this regard will be considered by the Council for Scientific Excellence.



7. PRINCIPLES OF ASSESSING RESEARCH QUALITY

- The object of research quality assessment from the time of the assessment in 2021 will no longer be scientific units according to the Law on the Principles of Financing Science, but HEIs, research institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences, international scientific institutes or other research institutes in the disciplines in which they conduct research. In the case of academic universities and institutes, the assessment will be mandatory, while for vocational universities and other institutions conducting independent and continuous research, the assessment will be optional..



- The standard of research and development will be assessed taking into account two new elements aimed at promoting scientific publications significant at the international level as defined in a Ministry of Science and Higher Education regulation: a list of scientific journals included in indexed international journal data banks with the highest circulation and a list of scientific publishing houses publishing reviewed scientific monographs.

Challenges

The National Congress of Science went beyond the scope of opening the process of consultation over proposed regulations. This law opens a wide field for experimenting and comparing which solutions will prove to be the most effective. Nevertheless, we have encountered several challenges, including:

- a problem in achieving consensus within the academic community - conflicting interests and points of view of young versus experienced academic staff,
- resistance to change within the academic community,
- including in the reform designing/drafting process the interests of the socio-economic environment,
- relevance of teaching curricula to labour market needs.