

# Standards for Teacher Training in Force in Poland and the Educational Practice of Higher Education Institutions

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Our aim will be to present and offer a critical analysis of the standards in teacher training that have been adopted in Poland; the fundamental issues here being:

- an assessment of the legitimacy of new solutions and the way in which they have been introduced;
- the new Ministerial standards, as set against the conditions and concepts underpinning the training would-be teachers are offered at higher teacher-training institutions and universities;
- an assessment of the quality of teacher training as made by school principles and teachers themselves, in line with the standards introduced.

The 1990s and early part of the 21st century have been a period of far-reaching educational reform. The emphasis on the role of academic training has been linked with a marked trend towards the enhanced vocational training of teachers. Particular importance is being attached to training in pedagogy, including both subject-related didactics and the skill to work on the upbringing of pupils. Most countries have introduced standards to confine their institutions' freedom to develop curricula, above all as regards the number of hours and compulsory fields (sometimes subjects). Equally, there are many countries in which higher education institutions are left with the right to develop their own programmes, as well as to select educational content, and the principles that are to underpin examination, and the conferment of the diplomas qualifying people to pursue the given profession.

Reforms in the education of teachers have also entailed new principles by which young teachers starting out in the profession are sent on apprenticeships. European countries display a diversity of mechanisms by which young teachers embarking upon their professional careers are both supported and monitored. Fluid entry into the profession is facilitated by

a phase of the on-the-job acquisition of skills.

A key issue where the quality of a teacher's work is concerned is regular professional development. Most countries apply one form of inducement or another to encourage teachers to engage in a steady training, be this special funding, a performance assessment and promotion or the inclusion of training within working hours.

There are more and more requirements for teachers but their professional status is lower and lower. A basic problem for many European states is the declining attractiveness of the profession of teacher, a situation that now leaves some with such a shortage of trained personnel that the very education system is placed under serious threat. In Poland, the reverse situation applies. The next few years will rather see us trying to face up to a problem of oversupply, on account of the demographic trough and consequent consolidation of the school network.

In fact, the Polish state of affairs in education is very much dependent on the results of the country's political and economic transformation. Simultaneously, the educational needs of young people are growing rapidly. There is an attendant increase in the numbers of those keen to study at the tertiary level.

The Polish legal situation as regards teacher training is rather a complex one. Provisions are to be found in rather general instruments like the Education System Act 1991 (with subsequent amendments), the 1982 Teachers' Charter (also with later amendments) and such executive Regulations as those on "the guidelines for general education" (dating from 2003), on "teacher training standards" (from 2004), on promotions within the teaching profession (2004) and on "the detailed qualifications required of teachers ..." (2002).

In 1997, the Council on Teacher Training to Poland's Minister of National Education set out on a mission to reform teacher training. The work begun concerned:

- standards as regards the preparation of teachers in pedagogy,
- standards as regards dual-specialisation training,
- the devising of framework plans and specialist guidelines for teacher-training colleges

(with these at the same time being a starting point for the devising of teacher-training standards in higher education also).

The aim of the new legal solutions (in the view of the legislators) was to prepare such teachers as will be competent specialists in their fields, accomplished in didactics and pedagogy and capable of caring for - and contributing to - the upbringing of pupils of varying needs; as well as organizers of social activities in class and school, all in effective cooperation with the local community.

The new legal regulations were also to create the kind of motivational mechanism that would encourage teachers to "invest in themselves", through the raising of qualifications, supplementation of knowledge and augmentation of skills, with the more experienced supporting young teachers just starting out in their professional life.

The principles involved were changed in haste, without adequate consultations within higher-educational circles, and with no heed being paid to the criticism experts were voicing. Where activity is of this kind, even good ideas stand hardly any chance of being implemented successfully. The Regulation came into force on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2004, superseding the previous ones that had only been in effect for a year.

The Regulation sets out the general requirements, range of competences and obligations laid before future teachers of a group of subjects, as well as the attendant programme minima in terms of hours of teaching. In accordance with it, teacher training may be engaged in by higher schools, within the framework of an academic specialisation pursued through higher vocational studies, unified studies for a Master's degree, supplementary studies at Master's level (following vocational training) and postgraduate studies.

Studies that have a teaching specialisation should prepare those taking them up for the comprehensive implementation of tasks existing in schools, as regards didactics, the upbringing of pupils and general care. Preparation encompassing elements of both psychology and pedagogy is to allow for these last two functions to be served, in order that pupils' multifaceted development can be supported, while the teaching process is more fully geared to the needs of the individual. A teacher should also know how to organize social activity in class, school-wide, and within the local community, as well as being able to work with other teachers, parents and local people. In turn, a knowledge of the didactics of a given subject and of the application of ICT in teaching, are seen as the key to effective lessons, as well as to the stimulation of cognitive interests in pupils and support for their intellectual development. Thanks to his or her preparation in didactics, a teacher should be in a position to study and evaluate the attainments of pupils and his/her own activity.

One of the most important changes that the Regulation ushers in is an obligation that 3-year higher vocational studies be pursued in two teaching specialisations – a leading (major) one and another supplementary to it. This contrasts with the unified and supplementary studies at Master's level that can - as before - involve a single teaching specialisation, or else two (major and supplementary) as above. In seeking to encourage higher schools to bring in – in the space of just a couple of days – the kind of licenciate studies that would meet these requirements, the Ministry made special grants available.

## Programme standards

The Regulation lays down programme standards, proposing several types (elements) of teacher training obligatory for institutions in higher education.

Subject-related training is implemented in line with the teaching standards in such different areas as chemistry or history with a view to substantive preparation being achieved through the student's acquisition of knowledge and skills relevant to the teaching in that given subject

Teacher training offers preparation for work in didactics, upbringing and general mentoring. This takes in classes in psychology, pedagogy and subject didactics. In the case of both higher vocational studies and unified studies leading to a Master's degree, the teacher training also takes in supplementary subjects studied over no fewer than 60 hours, of which at least 30 must be designated for voice production classes. Teacher training must continue over at least four semesters and be run in connection with subject-related training and a pedagogical practice. That said, the preparation as regards psychology should precede that in pedagogy, this combining with knowledge on the subject to form the basis for training as regards subject didactics. The magnitude of the teacher training should be of no fewer than:

360	hours in the case of higher vocational studies,
420	hours in the case of unified Master's-degree studies with two specialisations,
330	hours in the case of unified Master's-degree studies with one specialisation,
75	hours in the case of supplementary studies leading to a Master's degree with two specialisations,
60	hours in the case of supplementary Master's degree studies with a single specialisation.

The pedagogical practice, which aim is the acquisition and development of practical skills by way of actual classes with pupils, as well as the gaining of an understanding of the ways in which schools and other institutions are organized and operate. The practice should be a part of all of the types of study with a teaching specialisation, the scale involving not less than:

180	hours in the case of higher vocational studies,
210	hours in the case of unified Master's-degree studies with two specialisations,
150	hours in the case of unified Master's-degree studies with one specialisation,
45	hours in the case of supplementary studies leading to a Master's degree with two specialisations,
30	hours in the case of supplementary studies leading to a Master's degree with one specialisation.

The Regulation sets out, not only the general objectives of pedagogical practice, the places and ways in which they are to be organised and the obligations in regard to their documentation, but also the forms of activity of the student during the practice and the obligations of the higher school organising it.

Training in information and communications technologies, the aim being to prepare future teachers to use ICT and employ it in teaching. The Regulation indicates the scope of knowledge and skills that should be encompassed.

Training in a foreign language, the aim being to provide for a future teacher's acquisition of advanced-level knowledge, with the required levels of familiarity being:

- the equivalent of B2 in the case of graduates in tertiary vocational studies
- B2+ in the case of graduates with Master's degrees

(who should also have the specialist terminology in their particular field of study at their disposal).

The Ministry did not confine itself to a general determination of what the standards were trying to achieve, plus the setting of quantitative (time) requirements for the different types of teacher training.

Besides precise requirements in regard to, for example, the structure of studies, required groups of subjects and minimum amounts of time for their implementation, as well as the objectives and content of the training on particular courses, the Regulation also includes less well-defined provisions on required skills, and especially a graduate's profile.

Preparation for the profession of teacher is thus anticipated to lead to the acquisition of competence in:

- didactics;
- upbringing and social issues;
- creativity, which (the Regulation says) is to be manifested in a capacity for self-training, innovation, and the avoidance of routine through adaptability, mobility and flexibility;
- praxeology, as manifested in effective planning, implementation, organisation, monitoring and assessment of educational processes;
- communication;
- information and the media, as manifested in the capacity to make use of ICT;
- language, as manifested in familiarity with at least one foreign language to advanced level.

Standards formulated in this way came under fire in higher-education circles, and especially among the universities, as absolute leaders among the institutions training teachers. The controversy surrounded the extent to which the state could limit what had previously been the autonomy of teacher-training institutions when it came to decisions about curricula. Further negative feeling was aroused by the way in which the changes were brought in, and by the absence of any funding for the introduction of the expanded teacher-training programmes. The formulation of subject content by way of headings only was regarded as a pointless solution. Since these remain little more than generalities, they do not offer any real help to the authors of training programmes.

In 2004, the Ministry of National Education and Sport commissioned research into the quality of teacher training in Poland. The work was done at the universities involved in teacher training, as well as among school heads and teachers already working in the profession. After general analysis of educational offer in all higher vocational schools and universities providing teacher education, the 12 of them had been randomly chosen to precise studies encompassing interviews with educators responsible for teacher education (24 people) and the analysis of curricula. Moreover, opinions of randomly chosen 600 school-teachers and 120 headmasters were gathered with the questionnaires.

The studies make it abundantly clear that there are many reservations about the training in question, in both of the aforementioned circles. Teachers and principles voice criticism of both some elements of the educational practice in tertiary education and the new legal solutions the Ministry has introduced. The work done in the higher education institutions has brought to light a less-than-favourable picture of the preparation that future teachers will gain. The inadequacies in

teacher-training referred to most often have been as follows:

1. The teacher-training standards (including those that are most sensible and justified from the substantive point of view) are not being met by all higher education institutions.
2. The programmes of teacher training in place in the various universities vary considerably in terms of both content and demands made of students. While many of the institutions in tertiary education have drawn up interesting, modern programmes with a well-thought-out structure and much of the most up-to-date knowledge encompassed, and while many supplement this with a wealth of current literature from famous authors, some of the programmes studied are in need of major adjustment and augmentation. The most frequent errors are: an excessive focus on one group of issues at the expense of others, a lack of internal cohesion, and a poor, and at times outdated, choice of literature. Many teacher-training programmes lack linkage between theory and practice.
3. The means of organisation and quality of practice in the course of teacher-training studies are most often unsatisfactory. It is very rare for the higher level institutions to do what the law requires and sign agreements with schools as regards practice. Only in a few units is there any precise laying down of the obligations of the trainee's teacher-mentor at the school and of the employee of the higher education establishment. Practices are often completed in an "unreliable" manner, with students obtaining a vanishingly small amount of support. The assessments of programmes of studies by graduates now in the profession point to major shortfalls in respect of training content that is important to a teacher's work. Studies first and foremost ensure substantive knowledge in the discipline being taught, only dealing to a lesser extent with knowledge of methods of teaching, and skills in regard to the choice of didactic means and curricula. Most working teachers had no chance during their academic studies to acquire a wider knowledge in such areas as pupil assessment, the integration of knowledge from the studied subject with related ones, means of motivating pupils to study and the principles upon which the Polish educational system operates. 2/3 learnt nothing of the opportunities for basing the teaching process more closely around the individual, the selection of handbooks and school curricula, the ways of disciplining pupils, the recognition of pupils' diverse educational needs, methods of self-assessment and the organisation of social life in the class and wider school.

Bearing in mind the Europe-wide trends in education and the results the research has yielded, it would be worth considering a series of modifications to the existing system of teacher training, including several solutions so far untried in Poland:

The simple formulation of standards is work of an administrative nature that has only a limited impact on the real quality of teacher education. It would certainly be worth considering an amendment of the regulations in force, not only as regards training standards, but also in respect of the principles under which candidates for the teaching profession become qualified and are introduced into professional life.

The desired modifications which are the conclusions of the research results and evaluation of central reforms of teacher education are:

1. An end to the compulsory completion of studies in two specialised teaching areas (subjects) in the course of

higher studies to bachelor level, and, as in the case of unified Master's degree studies, a decision regarding preparation for an additional specialisation to be left to students themselves, assuming that this is connected with the taking up of additional classes.

2. A proposal that universities prepare programmes of study for teachers, for 5 years in the case of those in classes 1-3 (or 0-3) and 4-6, allowing teachers to receive preparation in several linked subjects. The institutions in question could also devise longer (5,6-year) programmes of training in several related fields
3. A rewording of legal instruments with a view to requirements of an unclear, ambiguous, generalised or unverifiable nature being removed, especially in respect of the recruitment of students and the stages to the evaluation process in tertiary education (and most especially where the requirements as regards a graduate's profile and psychological disposition are concerned)
4. Further work on the way in which teacher education is organised. A good organisational solution would seem to be the pedagogy centre or study course in the higher educational establishment that coordinates and integrates teacher training, most especially where this takes place in many faculties. A "centre" need not necessarily be a separate unit.
5. Selection of students, not only at the entrance exam stage, but also as recruitment to teacher training takes place. Higher education institutions should take account of the students' academic attainments to date, to ensure that they have the best possible chances of becoming teachers.
6. An increase in requirements as regards qualifications. Emulating most other European countries, Poland should require a Master's degree of teachers, at least from junior high school level upwards, with a gradual introduction of this requirement for primary-school teachers as well.
7. Changes in teacher-training programmes. There is a need to update knowledge as regards both subjects studied and the psycho-pedagogical approach, as well as to select training staff appropriately, in order that high standards of training can be assured. Care needs to be taken to ensure clear linkage between substantive teaching in the given subject and subject didactics. It would be worth increasing the minimum standards as regards numbers of hours spent studying psychology and pedagogy, subject didactics and applied aspects, in order that teachers might be better equipped methodologically and in their role in the upbringing of children.
8. Changes in the organisation of practice. It would seem necessary for practice to continue for a greater number of hours, and be more varied, as well as for there to be better enforcement of provisions in educational law requiring contracts to be concluded between higher education institutions and their departments, and the schools in which students have their practices. The contracts in question should be worded unambiguously when it comes to the defined tasks and obligations of the two parties. Trainees should have the best (nominated) teachers as mentors, and should be remunerated for their supervisory work.

At national level, it would be worth considering the following far-reaching solutions:

1. A limitation on numbers of student-candidates seeking to become teachers through training at higher education institutions, by making reference to the demand for teachers while simultaneously increasing considerably

the sums available for training (via the introduction of an independent path by which to support teacher training financially). The Minister of National Education and Sport would sign contracts with the higher education institutions once programmes of teacher training had been reviewed, and the personnel base and capacity assessed (there would be some kind of licensing or accreditation for teacher training). Each establishment would also set a limit on the number of course entrants it was able to assess. It is obviously imperative that a long-term employment policy for teachers should be devised, on the basis of socio-demographic indicators.

2. Two stages to the achievement of teaching qualifications. Obtainment of an academic title would grant the teacher a first level of qualification entitling him/her to take up a placement at a school. However, full qualifications would only be gained after successful completion of the apprenticeship stage. Following the practice in a number of countries, the placement should be assigned a higher status, with those embarking upon their teaching being under the scrutiny of a mentor, but also being required to meet obligations that differ little in principle from those assumed by contract teachers.
3. Changes in the system by which professional development for teachers is funded. Supplementary refresher courses could be offered to working teachers by way of free or very cheap grants (as is the case to a limited extent already), these being funded by the authorities or other institutions.
4. Stabilisation of the law on education. While reform necessitates further amendments to the law, Polish schools and the teachers working in them are in some need of a period of stabilisation, if they are to face up calmly to the tasks assigned to them in education.
5. Serious treatment of the apprenticeship as a phase in the on-the-job acquisition of skills. Trainees should be given a broader range of tasks to perform that is more similar to those given to other teachers, albeit of course with careful monitoring of the effects. There also need to be criteria for the evaluation of the apprenticeship that are different to those in place hitherto, inasmuch as that they are based around substantive, rather than bureaucratic, elements.

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