Higher education currently includes the following types of programmes:

- **College programmes** (ISCED 5): 3-year programmes, provided by public and non-public colleges of social work (kolegium pracowników służb społecznych), which are classified as tertiary education for international comparisons, but are not recognised as part of higher education in the national legislation.

- **Specialist programmes** (ISCED 5): fee-based programmes of at least 3 semesters, provided by public and non-public higher education institutions. A specialist programme sets out learning outcomes which integrate universal descriptors for first-cycle programmes as defined in the Integrated Qualifications System. It includes classes / activities developing practical skills.

- **First-, second- and long-cycle programmes** (ISCED 6-7), provided by both public and non-public university-type higher education institutions (uczelnia akademicka) and non-university higher education institutions (uczelnia zawodowa), which comply with the following requirements:
  - **First-cycle programmes** leading to a Bachelor’s degree (licencjat or inżynier): 3- to 4-year programmes which lead to a licencjat degree and 3.5- to 4-year programmes which lead to an inżynier degree, depending on the area of study;
  - **Second-cycle programmes** which last 1.5 to 2 years and lead to a Master’s (magister) degree or an equivalent degree, depending on the area of study;
  - **Long-cycle programmes** which last between 4.5 and 6 years and lead to the same Master’s (magister) degree or equivalent degree as awarded upon completion of second-cycle programmes; the areas in which long-cycle programmes may be provided are specified in national legislation.

- **Third-cycle programmes** (ISCED 8): 3- to 4-year doctoral programmes: a right to confer a PhD in a given discipline is granted to HEIs, research institutions or international research institutes with a research category of A+, A or B+.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) and research institutions also offer 1- to 2-year non-degree postgraduate programmes which are open to applicants who hold at least a Bachelor's degree. However, non-degree postgraduate programmes are considered part of adult or continuing education.

Classes in HEIs usually begin on 1 October and finish in June. The academic year is divided into two semesters. In addition to the summer holidays, there are the following breaks: a 1- to 2-week break around Christmas and the Three Kings’ Day (Epiphany); the winter break (in the first half of February) lasting 1-2 weeks, and the Easter break.

Detailed arrangements for the academic year are laid down by individual HEIs.
Specific Legislative Framework

Colleges

Legislation for colleges of social work which are classified as ISCED 5 institutions:

- Regulation of the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy of 15 September 2016 on colleges of social work (Journal of Law of 2016, item 1543);

The Regulation of the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy of 15 September 2016 on colleges of social work lays down detailed arrangements for the establishment, restructuring and liquidation of colleges of social work; organisational and operational arrangements for colleges, including appointment to management positions; arrangements for academic supervision exercised over a given college by an HEI and pedagogical supervision over colleges exercised by the educational authorities; conditions and procedures for issuing, and specimens of, documents provided to college students and graduates, including graphic symbols on college diplomas which identify the level of the Polish Qualifications Framework.

The Regulation of the Minister of Social Policy of 7 April 2005 on the programme requirements for initial training in colleges of social work lays down national standards for programmes to be offered by colleges: duration of programmes, groups of courses (subjects) to be taught, the minimum course load and general curricular contents, the scope and duration of practical placements, and the profile of graduates. The requirements provide the basis for curricula to be developed by colleges.

Higher education

- Article 70 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland
- Act of 30 April 2010 on the National Centre for Research and Development (Journal of Law of 2010 No. 96, item 616)
- Act of 30 April 2010 on the National Science Centre (Journal of Law of 2010 No. 96, item 617)

The Law on Higher Education and Science (LoHES) of 20 July 2018 has consolidated key regulations on higher education and science, integrating arrangements previously covered by the Law on Higher Education and the Acts on research funding, student loans and credits, and the research degrees (doktor and doktor habilitowany) and the professorial title. Most provisions of the LoHES came into force on 1 October 2018, but the process of its implementation will not be completed before 2022. The LoHES applies to both public and non-public HEIs but does not apply to higher education seminaries administered by churches and denominational organisations, except the Catholic University of Lublin, unless stated otherwise in an agreement between the Polish
General objectives

Programmes at the higher education level are offered by colleges of social work (kolegium pracowników służb społecznych) (ISCED 5), higher education institutions (HEIs) (ISCED 6 to 8) and research institutions (only ISCED 8).

The 2018 Law on Higher Education and Science (LoHES) is based on the following principles:

- It is the responsibility of public authorities to provide best possible conditions for the freedom of scientific research and artistic creation, freedom of teaching and autonomy of the academic community.
- Every scholar takes responsibility for the quality and reliability of the research conducted and for the education of the young generation.
- HEIs and other research institutions carry out a mission of special importance to the state and nation: they make a crucial contribution to the innovativeness of the economy and contribute to the development of culture and the development of moral standards for public life.
- In this context, the mission of higher education and science is to provide education and conduct research of highest quality, shape civic attitudes and contribute to societal development and the creation of an innovation-based economy.

The main tasks of university-type HEIs include:

- providing first-, second- and long-cycle programmes;
- providing non-degree postgraduate programmes and other types of training;
- conducting research activities, delivering research services and transferring knowledge and technology to the economy;
- training doctoral students;
- training and promoting university staff;
- providing conditions for full participation of people with disabilities in higher education;
- educating students to develop their sense of responsibility for the Polish state and national tradition, and for fostering the principles of democracy and respecting human rights;
- providing conditions for the development of students’ physical culture;
- disseminating and multiplying achievements of science and culture, incl. collecting and sharing library, information and archive resources, and undertaking activities which benefit local and regional communities.

The range of basic tasks of non-university HEIs is similar, except that it does not include research activities (and, consequently, research services and technology transfer) and the training of doctoral students. Instead, it includes the provision of specialist programmes.

The primary aim of research institutions other than HEIs is to conduct research and development activities, but many institutions also train prospective research staff by providing doctoral programmes.

Specific aims of college programmes, first-, second- and long-cycle programmes, and third-cycle (doctoral) programmes are discussed below.
College programmes

College programmes (ISCED 5) prepare students for employment. Colleges of social work train prospective social workers and may also offer in-service training courses in the areas of welfare and social work.

First-, second- and long-cycle programmes

First-, second- and long-cycle programmes are provided by both university-type HEIs (uczelnia akademicka) and non-university HEIs (uczelnia zawodowa). First-cycle programmes (leading to a Bachelor’s degree; licencjat or inżynier) aim to provide knowledge and skills in a specific area of study, preparing students for work in a specific profession. Graduates of first-cycle programmes have access to second-cycle programmes. Second-cycle and long-cycle programmes, both leading to a Master’s degree (magister) aim to provide specialist knowledge in a specific area, preparing students for creative work in a specific profession. The completion of second-cycle and long-cycle programmes provides access to third-cycle (doctoral) programmes.

Currently, the main aims of the education policy for first- and second-cycle programmes are to:

1. reduce the extent of mass participation in higher education by promoting appropriate student to academic staff ratios;
2. push forward internationalisation through adequate financial incentives (the algorithm for the distribution of State-budget subsidies for HEIs) and institutional arrangements (the establishment of the National Agency for Academic Exchange);
3. intensify activities encouraging quality enhancement (funding streams);
4. ensure closer linkage between the programmes offered and labour market needs.

Third-cycle (doctoral) programmes

A doctoral degree (doktor) (referred to as a research degree as opposed to the licencjat / inżynier and magister degrees) in a discipline can be awarded only by an HEI, an institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a research institute or an international institute (an international research institute established in Poland by a separate Act of Parliament) which has the A+, A or B+ research rating in the discipline concerned. (Ratings are awarded based on an external evaluation of the quality of research.)

Doctoral (third-cycle) programmes, which are offered by doctoral schools within university-type HEIs and research institutions, aim to provide advanced knowledge in a specific field or discipline of science, and prepare students for independent research and creative activity and for gaining a doctoral degree. Thus, they prepare students for the procedure leading to the award of a doctoral degree. However, the completion of a doctoral programme is not a precondition for the award of the degree. Doctoral degree holders may continue their research career to obtain a post-doctoral degree (doktor habilitowany) and subsequently a professorial title (profesor).