

New version of the Constitution for Science - key solutions

Changes in the university system, university financing, and in obtaining a doctorate are included in the university bill revised after consultations, the so-called Constitution for Science. The bill gives universities greater freedom in using funds; there are new programs for smaller universities.

The bill on higher education and science, the so-called Law 2.0, also known as the Constitution for Science, was presented on January 22 in Warsaw by the Minister of Science and Higher Education, Deputy Prime Minister Jarosław Gowin. The bill contains changes introduced as a result of public and inter-ministerial consultations that started in September 2017.

Important changes in the bill include linking university's possibilities (including the possibility of offering studies with a general academic profile and awarding academic degrees) to the scientific category that the university obtains in the given discipline. Universities (public and non-public) will be divided into academic and professional schools. According to the proposed provisions, university authorities will include a new body in addition to the rector and senate - a university board, the majority of members of which will be persons from outside the institution. Rectors will gain a greater power to shape the university's policy at the expense of collegial bodies, such as the faculty boards.

Major changes will concern PhD students. Universities will be required to establish doctoral colleges and scholarships will be guaranteed for all PhD students. However, doctoral candidates will be required to meet higher standards with regard to the quality of their research and publications.

Another novelty is specialist education. It would allow to obtain a degree a step higher than a high school exit exam, and a step lower than a bachelor's degree.

The Ministry of Science and Higher Education will not remove habilitation, but habilitation will no longer be required to work as a university professor. The regulations will also retain the Belvedere professorship - the title of full professor will be awarded by the President of the Republic of Poland, as before.

The draft Law 2.0 also contains provisions on vetting. A person who worked, served or cooperated with state security agencies between 1944 and 1990, will not be allowed to receive the title of professor. Such a person will not be permitted to become a rector, a member of such bodies as the university board, college of electors or the senate, or perform functions in national higher education and science institutions.

In addition, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education proposes three major programs in the bill - the excellence initiatives. One of the programs is addressed to the best academic universities, the second to regional academic universities, and the third to public vocational schools.

The bill includes a proposed path to science and higher education funding at the level of 1.8 percent GDP in 2025.

The bill does not provide for additional fees for full-time studies at public universities.

DIVISION OF UNIVERSITIES

After the reform, much will depend on the scientific category obtained as a result of evaluation (there will be five categories: A+, A, B+, B, C). Individual scientific disciplines at universities will be subject to evaluation, and not - as previously - organizational units of universities. The classification of fields and disciplines will be based on the OECD model used in Europe.

The bill also provides for the division of universities (public and non-public) into academic and professional ones. An academic university will be a university that conducts scientific activity and at least one of the fields at the university has A+, A or B+ rating. Only academic universities will offer doctoral education in doctoral colleges.

Professional universities will offer education taking into account the needs of their economic and social environment. They will be allowed to offer education with a practical profile.

The bill includes restrictions related to the use of the names "academy", "university of technology", "university". However, a university that no longer meets the applicable requirements does not have to change its old name.

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

According to the proposed provisions, in addition to the rector and the senate (as before), authorities of a public university will also include the university board.

University board may have 7 or 9 members, more than half of whom will be from outside the university. One of the members will be the president of the student government. The remaining members of the board will be elected the university senate. The tasks of the university board will include approving the university's strategy and approving the report on the implementation of this strategy, issuing opinions on the draft statute, supervision of the university's finances and management of the university, election of the rector or nomination of rector candidates.

Rector will be elected by a college of electors or the university board (depending on the statute of the

university). The rector's duties include representing the university, managing it, preparing the draft statute and the university's strategy project, reporting on the implementation of the university's strategy, personnel policy and appointing managers, creating doctoral colleges, financial management of the university.

University senate will continue to be composed of students, doctoral students, academics and other university employees. The university board will enact the statute, the study regulations, issue opinions on the university's strategy project; appoint and dismiss members of the university board; perform evaluation of the functioning of the university, formulate recommendations for the university board and the rector, award doctoral and postdoctoral degrees, determine the programs of studies and education programs in doctoral colleges, determine the methods and procedures for verification of learning results

OFFERING STUDY PROGRAMS

After the reform, the power to offer studies and award degrees will be attributed to universities, not to their organizational units.

Universities with the highest rating (A+ or A) in a given discipline will be permitted to award degrees of a doctor and habilitated doctor. In contrast to the disciplines with lower rating, they will not have to obtain permission to open a new field of study assigned to this discipline. They will also be allowed to create a unified master's program in this field.

If a university has the category B+ in a given discipline, it will only be permitted to award a PhD. It will be allowed to open a new course of study only after obtaining the minister's approval.

Universities with the lowest categories (B or C) will only be allowed to open new courses of study with a practical profile in the given discipline, and only after obtaining the minister's approval. These universities will not be permitted to run doctoral colleges.

Following the consultations, the provision stating that the Minister of Science may refuse to allow to open a new course of study if the minister decides that education in a given field does not match the local socio-economic needs has been removed from the bill.

Assignment of a student to a specific field of study takes place no later than after the first year of study.

The new regulations allow the possibility of confirming learning results. People with professional experience will have an opportunity to shorten the duration of their studies. But this option will only be available in the best disciplines (rated A+, A or B+).

The provisions regarding the possibility of creating university unions have been removed from the bill after consultations. There possibility of forming a university federation remains.

The bill provides for the possibility to offer courses and trainings that allow to obtain the 5th level of qualification according to the Polish Qualification Framework. That means that an university could offer education cycles shorter than first-cycle studies (4 semesters). Graduates would obtain an education degree higher than a high school diploma and lower than a bachelor degree - which is possible in many countries. Until now there was no such possibility in Poland.

STUDENTS

Admission to a university will be based on the high school exit exam results, but the university will be allowed to organise an admission exam (with its score constituting up 50% of all points in the recruitment process).

During recruitment, universities will have to disclose the full list and amounts of the fees the student must pay.

The previously proposed (in the version from September 2017) provision stating that part-time studies should be longer than full-time studies has been removed. However, universities will have the freedom to decide whether to extend the duration of the former.

The project assumes that 50% discounts on public transport fares will be preserved. There should be no changes to the possibilities offered by the financial aid system.

DOCTORAL STUDENTS

After the reform, there will be two paths to obtain a doctorate: doctoral college and extramural doctorate. In doctoral colleges, each doctoral student will receive a scholarship and the schools will not have an extramural form.

The doctoral scholarship (granted for a maximum of 4 years) will be initially at least 55% average wage (according to data for 2017, it would be approx. PLN 2,500). After the student receives a positive mid-term evaluation, it would be increased to at least 85 percent average wage (according to data for 2017, it would be approx. PLN 3800 gross). Negative mid-term evaluation would result in the removal from the list of doctoral students.

Three reviewers from outside the institution will be required for a doctoral dissertation defence.

A peer reviewed scientific monograph (or at least a chapter in a monograph) or publication in a recognizable journal (from the minister's list) will be required to obtain a doctoral degree. These requirements are stricter compared to those set out in the current law.

ACADEMIC EMPLOYEES

The bill lists four different positions of academic teachers: a professor (a person with the title of professor), a university professor (a doctor with achievements), an assistant professor (a person with a PhD degree) and an assistant (a person with a master's degree).

Three career paths are planned: didactic, research, research and didactic path.

The basic place of work of an academic teacher is the university in which he or she is employed full-time. According to the bill, an academic teacher may only have one basic place of work.

The annual number of teaching hours is up to 360 teaching hours (45 minutes per hour) for the teaching staff, and up to 240 teaching hours for research and teaching staff.

The Ministry of Science wants to allow the employment of persons with doctoral degree (and with academic or didactic achievements) as professors at universities. A great lecturer will have an opportunity to become a university professor even if that lecturer does not have habilitation. Restrictions with regard to deadline for habilitation will also disappear from the new law (currently 8 years).

HABILITATION

The degree of doctor and habilitated doctor will be awarded by the university senate (or another body designated in the university statute) or, in the case of institutes, the scientific council. The title of professor - as before - will be conferred by the President of the Republic of Poland.

The Central Commission for Academic Degrees and Titles - which processed habilitation and professorship applications - will be replaced by the Council of Scientific Excellence.

To obtain a habilitation, a person will be required to have a doctoral degree and significant academic or artistic achievements, as well as demonstrate scientific activity in more than one university or scientific institution, in particular a foreign one.

An easier path to habilitation will open for those who have led prestigious international research grants (especially ERC grant winners).

PROFESSORSHIP

Professorship - according to the bill - can be awarded to a person with a remarkable academic achievement, who demonstrates significant scientific or artistic activity in an international cooperation setting. Another condition is to have led grant research teams (this requirement does not apply to professors in the field of art).

The title of professor may be obtained by a person with habilitation. In exceptional cases, the Ministry of Science wants to allow a doctor without a habilitation to obtain the title of professor.

According to the bill, the final court decision on submission of a false vetting statement by a professor results the title revocation.

FINANCING

The higher education and science financing model will also change. Funds for maintaining the teaching potential (education of students, maintenance, professional development of the staff), and research potential (including research activity, purchase of equipment or infrastructure below PLN 500,000, doctoral studies, commercialisation) will be granted in the form of subsidies. This means that the money will not be arbitrarily divided into separate funds. Universities will have greater flexibility in deciding what their funds will be spent on. Funds not spent in a given year will be retained for the following year.

The new subsidy will be given to universities and not - as before - to their organizational units (for example faculties).

The bill provides for the annual minimum state budget expenditure on science and higher education. In 2019 it will be 1.2 percent GDP, and it is expected to grow by 0.1% per year until 2025, when it will reach 1.8 percent GDP.

EVALUATION

The evaluation of the quality of scientific activities will be conducted every four years by the Science Evaluation Committee (until now - the Committee for the Evaluation of Scientific Units).

During the evaluation, a scientific achievement may only be demonstrated once - in the evaluation of a single

discipline - and only with the authorization of the author of the achievement.

The evaluation of the quality of education will be carried out by the Polish Accreditation Committee. The result of this evaluation can be either positive or negative.

INITIATIVE OF EXCELLENCE PROGRAMMES

The best academic colleges will have the opportunity to compete for additional funding in the programme "Initiative of Excellence: Research University". This programme is addressed to universities that are active in at least 6 disciplines, do not have a B or C rating, and have the best rating (A or A+) in half of their disciplines. Running a doctoral college without a negative program evaluation is also a requirement. Top 10 universities can acquire at least an additional 10% subsidy. The other universities that meet the requirements of the competition acquire an additional 2%.

The second competition - "Regional Initiative of Excellence" - will be addressed to academic universities that do not meet the above requirements. However, they must have a scientific category A+, A or B+ and run a doctoral college. Poland will be divided into regions, in which competitions will be announced. A maximum of three disciplines will be selected in each region. In this program, the successful universities can gain an additional two percent subsidy.

The third competition - "Didactic initiative of excellence" - will be addressed to public professional universities. Funds can be awarded to as many as 15 universities. The evaluation will take into account the assessment of education by the Polish Accreditation Committee and the results of graduate career monitoring.

Jarosław Gowin hopes that the government will adopt the bill in mid-February. The minister also plans to organize a public hearing of the bill. The Ministry of Science wants the law to take effect from October 1, 2018 (PAP)

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