

tion centers could be established. At present, ministries of education lack the capacity to license and assess higher education institutions. The sources of financing could be diversified and schools encouraged to raise and manage extra funds. Curriculum specialists and other experts in education could be trained, with student-centered approaches to teaching and curriculum reforms that have been implemented in other countries. The skills of experts in higher education administration could also be strengthened. International organizations might lobby governments to support the growth of private higher education in the region. Without these improvements, it will be hard if not impossible for competitive private higher education of high quality to exist. The contemporary reality is that impressive growth has resulted in private higher education sectors that remain in precarious condition. ■

## Polish Private Higher Education: Expanding Access

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Until 1989, Polish higher education constituted an elite system with very low enrollment rates. The strong involvement of central political institutions in issues of higher education eliminated academic freedom and weakened the standing of Polish higher education institutions. A stagnant economy, the inflexibility of the higher education system, the weak correlation between higher education and employment, and low levels of faculty remuneration in the 1980s discouraged many eligible students from participating in higher education and forced many bright academics to leave the country in search of better job prospects abroad.

### *Reforms and Changes*

The transition period began in 1989. The economic crisis at the start of the 1990s exacerbated the falling industrial production, inflation (approaching 150 percent), and high unemployment rates. In response to the economic downturn, a set of economic reforms were introduced.

Higher education policy was also changed to allow institutions to restructure and adjust to the new economic, social, and political situation. A higher education law passed by Parliament in 1990 provided the basis for far-reaching changes. Major innovative provisions included the devolution of authority from the government to institutions, the introduction of tuition fees, and—crucial to this article—elimination of

barriers of entry to private higher education institutions. These changes led to a substantial expansion of the higher education system in the 1990s, in particular of the private sector.

Indeed, the most radical change was the permission to establish private higher education institutions. Before 1989 there was only one private higher education institution—the Catholic University of Lublin, established in 1918, funded by the Church and the people of Poland. Under the new law, founders could establish nonpublic higher education institutions, once they meet the requirements set by the Ministry of Education, which included issues such as the number of professors, the curriculum, and infrastructure. Since 2001 the minister has requested the approval of a State Accreditation Commission. Private institutions founded under the 1990 higher education act were allowed to offer bachelor's and master's degree programs. In 1997, a vocational higher education schools act was passed by Parliament. New private institutions, established after 1997, are registered as vocational higher education schools and can offer only bachelor's degree programs. In order to apply for master's degrees they have to change their status first and operate under the 1990 higher education act. For this reason, the 145 most recently established private higher education institutions have the status of vocational institutions.

***Private institutions do not receive any direct state support for teaching and research.***

### *Private-Sector Development*

Private institutions charge tuition fees for all their students; the fees are on average between 400 and 600 euros per semester. Private institutions do not receive any direct state support for teaching and research, although the government exempts private higher education institutions from property, sales, and income taxes. Until 2003, the state provided working students or their parents with deductions against state income tax liabilities for fees paid to higher education, but in 2004 this tax deduction was abolished.

Since 2001 full-time students in the private sector have been eligible for state means-tested scholarships. In 2001 about 17,000 students received state scholarships, which amount to about 50 euros a month. However, private-sector students are excluded from merit-based state scholarships. Since 1998 all students enrolled in full-time or part-time studies have been eligible for state-subsidized loans.

Private higher education has rapidly expanded and gained increased acceptance. Private institutions play an important role in meeting the demand for higher education, which increased dramatically in the 1990s, due to demographic factors and the rising importance of higher education for the labor market. The number of private providers rose from 3 in 1990 to 280 in 2004, while student numbers rose from about 6,500 in 1990–1991 to about 510,000 in 2003–2004, while

total higher education enrollments jumped from about 400,000 in 1990–1991 to more than 1,800,000 in 2003–2004.

Private higher education institutions exist throughout Poland, although (in keeping with typical patterns cross-nationally) the most prestigious are concentrated in and around large cities. Of the 280 privates, 137 are located in large cities, 57 of them in Warsaw. However, many private providers situated in small cities significantly increase higher education possibilities for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or from rural areas. Private providers deprived of almost any state support develop mainly “low-cost” study programs (as in most of the region and the world) and attract mostly part-time students. They usually offer programs in business, management, education, and political and computer science. Because of the limited number of professors available, private institutions in the beginning of the 1990s offered mainly bachelor’s programs. However, in recent years they have recruited more and more professors, to offer master’s degrees and meet the requirements to confer Ph.D.s. In 2002 more than 90 institutions were authorized to offer master’s degrees and 4 have Ph.D. tracks. The rest, about 150, offer programs at the bachelor’s level.

**Approximately 75 percent of private institution enrollments are part-time students who usually combine study and work in order to pay for higher education.**

Approximately 75 percent of private institution enrollments are part-time students who usually combine study and work in order to pay for higher education. In addition, research conducted in 2001 indicated that most students in the private sector are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and from rural areas.

### Conclusion

In sum—and this can be a key to private higher education legitimacy—in times of state financial stringency and growing demand for higher education, increasing the accessibility to higher education for low-income students would be hard to achieve without the private higher education sector. Therefore, private institutions are especially valued among older students, who are given the opportunity to raise their educational levels, and among students from lower-income groups and rural areas. On the other hand, the private sector in Poland is still a far cry from having state legitimacy and recognition. Government has chosen to leave the private sector largely to its own devices. There are no direct state appropriations or tax exemptions, and the private sector is not truly incorporated into statewide higher education planning. In sum, while Polish private higher education is substantial in size, the legitimacy of the sector remains a mixed affair.

## Romanian Private Higher Education Institutions: Mission Statements

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This article examines a body of data accessible on-line of some relevance to the discussion about the legitimacy of private higher education institutions. By searching their web pages, one can discover how private higher education institutions perceive themselves, their environment, and their mission.

The research included 23 accredited and 28 licensed institutions, listed with the National Council of Academic Evaluation and Accreditation, that represented the state of the Romanian private sector in January 2004. The focus here is on the mission statements presented in the web pages. Not all institutions have explicit mission statements. Thus in some cases other institutional self-descriptions and declarations of goals have been used.

The content of the mission statements, like the design of the web pages, are used by institutions to offer an image of assurance and reliability. The rhetoric of most of the statements is formal, correct, and somewhat bureaucratic. A few statements are poetic or religious in tone. The mission statements are filled with words that are part of the new official rhetoric, and are filled with academic jargon.

### Vocationalism

Most of the institutions claim vocational and professional missions: “the creation of specialists competitive on a national and international level”; “preparing specialists able . . . to meet the demands of a market economy, integrated into the European political, social, judicial, and cultural context”; “preparing professionals for the Hungarian community that are competitive on an international level, in a Christian spirit”; “preparation of specialists for Western Romania”; etc. Many institutions emphasize the ability of their graduates to fit into national, international, and European markets or even any other employment context and to have the skills demanded by the labor market. Thus, these website mission statements confirm a frequent observation about contemporary private higher education—namely, its job-oriented focus.

While throughout the world vocationalism might be a common feature of higher education, in Central and Eastern Europe this orientation also continues the value system of higher education that prevailed during the communist regimes. During the reforms started in the 1950s, the mission of higher education was vocational and established on a sys-