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## HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM IN POLAND 2025–2026: NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR UKRAINIAN INTEGRATION

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*Ongoing reforms in the fields of science and higher education in Poland have been implemented as part of the strategy for scientific excellence, modern higher education, business partnerships, and the social responsibility of science. This process involves three key areas: «Constitution for science», which provides for systemic changes in science and higher education legislatively; innovation for the economy, which strengthens the commercialisation of research and partnerships with business; and social responsibility of science.*

**This article** aims to explore the transformation of Poland's education system in order to use it as a model for the modernisation of Ukrainian higher education. The analysis focuses on how Polish innovations in management and digitisation can be adapted to strengthen Ukraine's human capital and harmonise educational standards in both countries.

The article examines recent legislative initiatives introduced by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education between 2025 and 2026. It particularly focuses on the «Anti-Discrimination Package», the transition to mandatory electronic diplomas, and the «Science4Business» framework. The analysis of these reforms can help to define effective models for the Ukrainian higher education system, especially in terms of European integration, digital transformation, and the protection of academic stakeholders' well-being.

The identified reform initiatives highlight a collective commitment to ensuring and enhancing educational quality. There is a strong emphasis on integrating digital technologies and cultivating competencies essential to success in the European labour market. In particular, the reforms introduced in Poland are especially comprehensive and multifaceted. They focus on key areas, including the internationalisation of education, strengthening the link between scientific research and economic development, developing open online courses for broader access and inclusion, and recognising diplomas across international borders.



*The research methodology for this study will include an examination of key Polish documents outlining the legal framework and defining the strategic direction of European policy in higher education and training.*

**Conclusion.** *Poland is reforming its higher education to boost transparency and digital skills while enhancing its global reputation. These changes serve as a model for Ukraine's recovery and integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).*

**Key words:** *higher education reform, school reforms, anti-discrimination, digital diplomas, European integration, academic integrity.*

## **РЕФОРМА ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ ПОЛЬЩІ 2025–2026: НОВІ МОЖЛИВОСТІ ДЛЯ УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ІНТЕГРАЦІЇ**

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*Актуальні системні трансформації в галузі науки та вищої освіти Польщі було впроваджено в межах стратегії «За наукову досконалість, сучасну вищу освіту, партнерство з бізнесом та соціальну відповідальність науки». Цей процес відбувається за трьома напрямками: «Конституція для науки», що передбачає системні зміни в науці та вищій освіті на законодавчому рівні; інновації для економіки, які посилюють комерціалізацію досліджень та партнерство з бізнесом; соціальна відповідальність науки.*

*Ця стаття має на меті дослідити трансформацію освітньої системи Польщі як модель для модернізації української вищої школи. Аналіз зосереджений на тому, як польські інновації в управлінні та цифровізації можуть бути адаптовані для зміцнення людського капіталу України та гармонізації освітніх стандартів обох країн.*

*У роботі розглядаються нещодавні законодавчі ініціативи, запроваджені Міністерством науки та вищої освіти Польщі протягом 2025–2026 років. Особлива увага приділяється «Антидискримінаційному пакету», переходу на обов'язкові електронні дипломи та програмі «Наука для бізнесу» (Science4Business). У дослідженні визначено масштабовані моделі для системи вищої освіти України, зокрема в розрізі європейської інтеграції, цифрової трансформації та захисту добробуту учасників освітнього процесу.*

*Визначено, що реформаторські ініціативи підкреслюють спільне прагнення до забезпечення та підвищення якості освіти. Заслужує на увагу*

*питання щодо інтеграції цифрових технологій та формуванню компетентностей, які дозволяють випускнику реалізуватися на європейському ринку праці. Зокрема, реформи, запроваджені в Польщі, є надзвичайно комплексними та багатограними. Вони зосереджені на ключових напрямках, серед яких: інтернаціоналізація освіти, зміцнення зв'язку між науковими дослідженнями та економічним розвитком, розроблення відкритих онлайн-курсів для розширення доступу та інклюзивності, а також процес визнання дипломів на міжнародному рівні.*

***Методологія дослідження** передбачає детальний аналіз ключових документів країни, які визначають нормативно-правову базу та окреслюють стратегічні напрями європейської політики у сфері освіти й професійної підготовки на рівні вищої освіти.*

***Висновки.** Польща реформує систему вищої освіти з метою підвищення прозорості та розвитку цифрових навичок, одночасно зміцнюючи свою репутацію на міжнародній арені. Ці зміни слугують моделлю для відновлення України та її інтеграції в Європейський простір вищої освіти*

***Ключові слова:** реформа вищої освіти, шкільні реформи, антидискримінаційні заходи, цифрові дипломи, європейська інтеграція, академічна доброчесність.*

**Relevance of the article.** The strategy for European integration provides a significant impetus for implementing comprehensive, systemic reforms in the Ukrainian education system. The adoption of European standards and frameworks establishes clear benchmarks for quality and structural design and provides a roadmap to help Ukraine build a competitive educational system. This system is intended to integrate with the broader European Education Area, facilitating greater academic and cultural exchange.

In 2026, educational reforms are seen as part of large-scale long-term transformation programmes initiated by the governments of various European countries. This ambitious agenda aims to replace historically fragmented educational initiatives with a cohesive, unified approach that addresses students' needs in a constantly changing world.

Educational reform involves deliberate, systematic modifications to the educational system aimed at addressing particular challenges identified through research and stakeholder input. The final goals are to improve learning efficiency, promote student success, and ensure that education is fair, just, and accessible to all.

Each year, a number of reforms are introduced in school systems nationwide across areas such as curricula development, pedagogical approaches, governance structures, and the integration of advanced technology. These reforms are designed not only to address current educational needs but also to anticipate future challenges in a changing environment. Through these efforts, Ukraine aims to raise educational standards and promote a more sustainable and inclusive learning environment for all students.

**Analysis of significant research and publications.** The scientific problem of reforms and innovations in the field of education and learning, as well as the essential characteristics of reforms, has been explored in the works of O. Vozniuk, V. Ohneviuk, V. Kremen, and S. Sysoieva [1]. Ukrainian scholars have investigated various aspects of European policy, including: transformation processes in secondary school education within the context of European integration (O. Lokshyna); the modernization of higher education (V. Andrushchenko); the experience of reforming Ukrainian education: an attempt at scientific reflection (O. Savchenko); reform trends in foreign countries and Ukraine (A. Sbruieva); and trends in the reform of school education in Ukraine during the 20th century (L. Berezivska).

Furthermore, the comparative aspects of European policy and school education transformation are comprehensively addressed in the works of N. Avsheniuk and T. Desyatov, who analyse management strategies within the EU educational landscape. V. Luhovyi extensively covers the theoretical and practical aspects of implementing the Bologna Process in Ukraine. At the same time, L. Danylenko and O. Pometun examine the systemic nature of pedagogical innovations and change management [2].

Leaders of countries with high-performing educational systems strongly believe in the essential role of education in achieving their societal goals. These goals include reducing poverty, promoting greater equity, fostering a well-functioning multicultural society, and ultimately driving economic growth while creating high-quality jobs. Each education system has a long-term vision that outlines how education can support these objectives, and this

vision is widely recognised and accepted both within the education system and beyond.

**Strategic Modernisation of Education in Poland in 2026.** The strategic modernisation of Poland's education system in 2026 marks a significant move from fragmented efforts to a unified, long-term vision. This evolution is defined by a «whole-of-society» approach that connects innovative teaching methods, national security, and the creation of a secure and ethical academic environment.

The contemporary approach to reform is grounded in the «Compass of Tomorrow» (Reform26) concept, which involves updating educational content and implementing advanced information-diagnostic tools [3]. Key shifts include:

Curriculum renewal – introducing subjects such as Civic Education and Health Education, with renewed emphasis on practical competencies and project-based learning.

Diagnostics and support – the launch of digital platforms for the psychological analysis of cognitive and emotional processes among students aged 7 to 19.

Security component – the integration of mandatory modules focused on security and defence within secondary school curricula [3].

In addition to these content-based updates, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education is actively working to build an ethical foundation for the academic community. The new «anti-discrimination package» introduced in January 2026, aims to fight against harassment and establish new Equality standards. Key measures of the package include:

- the introduction of an Academic Ombudsman;
- the requirement for formal equality plans;
- clarifications on anti-nepotism regulations;
- the establishment of a 30 % gender representation quota for university governing bodies.

In response to the changing geopolitical landscape, Poland has incorporated a security dimension into its educational policy. Schools are increasingly seen as centres for civic and patriotic education, with compulsory modules focusing on security, defence, and safety awareness. This is supported by an inclusive «all-hazard» approach. to society resilience, which teaches students to

analyse information critically, maintain digital hygiene, and contribute to a well-functioning, informed, and secure society.

By 2026, the main objective for Polish education is to create an environment where systemic modernisation (Reform26) equips students with the technical skills needed for the future, while an ethical framework (the anti-discrimination package) promotes a culture of respect, safety, and democratic participation. This coordinated approach treats education not just as a service but as the basis to national resilience and sustainable economic and social growth [3].

In 2025, Poland implemented comprehensive educational reforms that included support for small schools, enhanced student awareness of security and defence, and an emphasis on analytical thinking, civic education, patriotism, and healthy lifestyles. Table 1 outlines the key areas of the 2025 reforms in Poland [5].

Table 1 – Reforms and innovations

<b>REFORMS AND INNOVATIONS</b>
<p><b>Key reforms in 2025:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p>• <b>Curriculum Reform and the «Compass of Tomorrow» system (Reform26)</b> introduces a new core curriculum, including two new subjects: Civic Education and Health Education. The physical education curriculum is being revised to focus on the development of motor skills, motivation, and overall health, while integrating more essential competencies and emphasising practical and project-based learning. Furthermore, there is a shift toward descriptive assessment, constructive feedback, and competency development. In secondary schools, a mandatory training module is being introduced, featuring exercises similar to those used in the selection process for military and other security services.</p> </li> <li> <p>• <b>Implementation of New Information and Diagnostic Tools:</b> the launch of a new educational information platform offering free electronic tools for teachers, specialists, and parents. Key tools include screening for preschool children; assessment of student functioning in school (ages 7–19); and specialised tools for psychologists to analyse cognitive processes and students' emotional and social functioning.</p> </li> <li> <p>• <b>Support for Inclusivity and Mental Health:</b> the «Friendly school» program (2025–2027) aims to ensure equal educational opportunities, with a particular focus on students from Ukraine.</p> </li> </ul>

- **Changes in legislation regarding student rights and teacher work organisation:** establishment of the Student Rights Ombudsman (at both the national and voivodeship/regional levels), codification of a statutory catalogue of student rights and responsibilities, and unification of the list of disciplinary measures. Strengthening of regulations regarding unexcused absences.
- **Support for small schools and safety:** providing support for the operation of small primary schools (up to 70 students), particularly in rural areas, through grants for construction, adaptation, or equipment. The proposed changes allow for adapting primary education to demographic shifts and repurposing unused building spaces as social or cultural centres for the local community.
- **«Education with the Military»:** continuation of the program aimed at increasing students' awareness in the field of security and defence, as well as developing first aid skills and crisis management behaviour.
- **State policy priorities (2025/2026):** emphasise analytical thinking (STEM), civic education and patriotism, healthy lifestyles, violence prevention, mental health, digital hygiene, and the promotion of vocational education.

The period of 2025–2026 reflects a transition from foundational strategic planning and policy creation (2025) to legislative implementation and deepening structural reforms (2026) (Table 2) [5].

Table 2 – Features of reforms in 2025 and 2026

Feature	2025 Focus on Framework and Strategy	2026 Prioritise Legislation and Oversight
<b>Core direction</b>	Strategic planning, programme launches, and establishing advisory bodies.	Codifying protections, conducting systemic audits, and expanding institutional frameworks of democracy.
<b>Primary goal</b>	Developing the infrastructure for a modern, inclusive, and innovative ecosystem.	Ensuring legal compliance, safety, and equality through binding measures and regulations.
<b>Key mechanism</b>	Calls for proposals, pilot projects, and expert consultations.	Legislative amendments and permanent monitoring entities

A clear evolution over time can be seen when comparing equality and anti-discrimination efforts in the Polish higher education system, especially between the initiatives of 2025 and those that followed in 2026. In 2025, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education primarily concentrated on diagnosis, research, and advisory activities. During this phase, key organisations, such as the Council on Women in Higher Education and Science, along with a special task force to combat mobbing, were established to identify systemic barriers, analyse existing legislative gaps, and collect empirical data on the experiences of students and staff. This phase was vital for building a basic understanding of mental health and equity issues within the academic environment.

By 2026, the strategy shifted from conducting research to formally codifying these findings into binding regulations and laws. The introduction of the «Anti-Discrimination Package» signifies a shift from advisory or pilot initiatives to concrete legal measures mandates. The current legislative approach includes the creation of an academic ombudsman position, the introduction of compulsory training on combating mobbing, and a requirement for universities to publish official plans to promote equality. While 2025 identifies the scope of the issue, 2026 concentrates on implementing effective preventive measures. measures that ensure transparency and accountability throughout the academic community [3].

The higher education and science landscape in Poland is experiencing a strategic shift, moving from an initial stage of diagnostic research and framework development in 2025 to a phase of legislative enactment and structural oversight in 2026.

**Diagnosis and strategic design.** In 2025, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education focused on establishing the structure for a more inclusive, digital, and innovation-centred academic system. Key efforts included drafting the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education until 2035, which used SWOT analysis to identify the need to improve the link between science and business.

During this period, the Ministry implemented several pilot programs and advisory bodies, such as the Council for Women in Higher Education and Science and the Team to Counteract

Mobbing, whose task was to identify systemic barriers. Digitalisation was also a main area of focus: the introduction of an electronic diploma system and the expansion of the NAVOICA platform to support digital and environmental transformation in education were announced. In addition, significant funds were allocated to the Didactic Excellence and Science4Business programmes [4].

**The 2026 shift: legislative action and systemic oversight.** In 2026, the focus shifted from planning to formalising these initiatives into binding legislation. The primary highlight is the «Anti-discrimination Package», which translates the 2025 recommendations into concrete legal obligations, including the introduction of an Academic Ombudsman, compulsory anti-mobbing training, and standardised equality plans [7].

This year also marks the start of the operation of digital systems proposed in 2025, namely the introduction of a diploma repository and the transition to mandatory electronic diplomas. In addition, 2026 sees a move towards expanding institutional democracy, with plans to implement a comprehensive package of measures to increase student and staff participation in university governance.

**Conclusion.** Poland is reforming its higher education system to improve its integrity, digital capabilities and international reputation. This reform focuses on four key areas: social and ethical changes, digital improvements, partnerships with business, and compliance with global standards.

Poland's education reforms for 2025–2026 provide a valuable blueprint for Ukraine's recovery and integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). By introducing a local model of an academic ombudsperson, Ukraine can improve university governance, reduce pressure from the hierarchy, and enhance mental health in educational institutions, thereby meeting European standards for academic freedom.

A mandatory repository for electronic diplomas will ensure the continuity of education and labour-market mobility, even if physical documents are lost. Finally, Ukraine should focus on transforming its economy into an innovative one, using special purpose tools to connect science with business.

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