THE PORTUGUESE EDUCATION SYSTEM

THE SYSTEM TODAY AND
PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
Bureau for European Affairs and International Relations

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

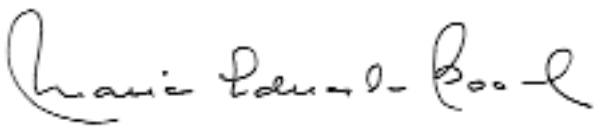
This Office has in recent years prepared two documents for submission to international organisations for the purpose of a comparative study of the education systems of member-states. The first of these, "Developing Education — Portuguese National Report" (1996), was presented to the 45th Session of the UNESCO International Education Conference and the second, "Description of the Education System" (1997), was prepared for the Education Systems Programme of the Organisation of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OIS). These two surveys differ in their form and emphasis and represent two complementary overviews of the Portuguese education system.

This document was prepared for the 2nd Conference of Education Ministers of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPSP) held in November 1998 in Brazil, in accordance with the decision, taken at the 1st Conference held in Lisbon, for the seven member countries to present to each other a picture of their educational situation, so as to open the way for debate and definition of areas of co-operation.

In the absence of any guidelines on the structure of the report, we have decided to present our description of the education system on the basis of the two documents referred to above, summarising and updating the information as necessary, drawing attention to changes underway and the current priorities and strategies for education and training.

As with the other two reports, our aim is to serve all those seeking a general description of the Portuguese education system and of the policies currently being implemented.

European Affairs and International Relations Office
The Director



1. POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURA BACKGROUND

- ***Geographical context***

Portugal lies within its long-established boundaries on the continent of Europe (occupying a long coastal strip in south-western Iberia), and its territory also includes the archipelagos of the Azores and Madeira, in the Atlantic Ocean. The country has a total area of 91,985 km2.

Portugal has a population density of 108 inhabitants/km2 (see Table 1, Annex 1). A breakdown of population by age reveals a gradually ageing
population, due in part to a falling birth rate and also to a gradual increase in life expectancy. Estimates therefore point to slow annual growth in the
resident Portuguese population.

- ***Political context***

In the nineteen seventies Portugal underwent a series of major political, social and economic changes, with the 1974 revolution marking the end of the dictatorship and colonial regime. This restored to the citizens of Portugal their fundamental rights and liberties, which are now enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Portugal and reflected in the democratic institutions now in place.

In 1986 Portugal became a member of the European Economic Community (EEC), now the European Union (EU), and has since achieved steady improvements in the economic and social spheres, making it today a modern developed society.

In accordance with the Constitutional Law, "the Republic of Portugal is a democratic Legal State, based on the sovereignty of the people, freedom of democratic expression and political organisation, respect for and guaranteed enforcement of fundamental rights and liberties, and the separation and interdependence of powers, with a view to achieving an economic, social and cultural democracy and the development of participative democracy."

In terms of international relations, Portugal is governed by the principles of the independence of nation states, respect for human rights and the rights of peoples, equality between States, the peaceful resolution of international conflicts, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and co-operation with all other peoples in the pursuit of the emancipation of mankind and human progress. The provisions and principles of general international law are enshrined in Portuguese legislation.

- ***Socio-economic performance***

The 1974 revolution, followed by membership of the European Union just over a decade later, led to a wide array of structural reforms, including increased flexibility in the labour market, opening up the economy to greater competition and expansion of the

education and training system. As a result of the new political situation, the eighties saw the creation of strong economic ties with other countries, especially in the form of foreign investment. This was carried further in the nineties with full integration in the European Common Market.

Growth in GDP in the order of 3.3% (see Table 2, Annex 1) and financial stability have enabled Portugal to be one of the founding members of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), and to adopt the European Single Currency, the Euro.

- ***Executive and legislative bodies***

Portugal is a unitary state and is governed, in terms of organisation and administration, by the principle of autonomy for the island regions (the archipelagos of the Azores and Madeira) and the principles of subsidiarity, the autonomy of local authorities and democratic decentralisation of public administration.

The principle of the separation and interdependence of the organs of sovereignty is one of the main features of the legal system enshrined in the Portuguese Constitution. These organs of sovereignty are the President of the Republic, the Assembly of the Republic, the Government and the Courts. Rules on the appointment, composition, powers and workings of these organs are defined in the Constitutional Law.

The President of the Republic represents the Republic of Portugal, guarantees the independence of the nation, the unity of the State and the proper working of democratic institutions, and is at the same time the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. The president is elected for a five-year term by the citizens of Portugal by universal, direct and secret suffrage; he is advised by the Council of State, over which he presides.

The Assembly of the Republic represents all Portuguese citizens. It comprises a minimum of one hundred and eighty and a maximum of two hundred and thirty deputies elected by separate constituencies for a four-year term. It is the main legislative body, and also has policy-making powers, together with powers to oversee the Government and the administration of the country.

The Government is drawn from the Assembly of the Republic and appointed by the President of the Republic. It is broadly responsible for defining and implementing policy and directs the work of the administrative authorities. The Government comprises the Prime Minister, Ministers, Secretaries of State and Sub-Secretaries of State and exercises political, legislative and administrative powers. It is politically accountable to the President of the Republic and the Assembly of the Republic.

The Courts are sovereign bodies responsible for administrating justice on behalf of the people. In the words of the Constitution, they “defend the rights and interests of the citizens as protected in law, repress violation of the democratic state of law and settle conflicts of public and private interests”. The courts are independent and subject only to the law, their decisions are applicable to all public and private persons and bodies and prevail over those of any other authorities.

- ***The Autonomous Regions: political and administrative status***

The archipelagos of the Azores and Madeira enjoy regional political and administrative autonomy, as enshrined in the Constitution, with their own governmental bodies, the State retaining full sovereign rights. The State is represented in these regions by a Minister of the Republic. Each of the two autonomous regions has a regional legislative assembly and a regional government.

- ***Local authorities***

The democratic institutions of the State include local government bodies, elected on a representative basis for each district. These bodies pursue the interests of the local population, and have their own assets and funding.

The local authorities look after the shared and specific interests of the local population; they administer public property and other property under their jurisdiction, and develop regional infrastructures.

Mainland Portugal is divided into parishes, municipalities and administrative regions, whilst the Azores and Madeira are divided into parishes and municipalities.

There are various types of local government bodies. Local authorities have an assembly with powers to adopt resolutions and a collegiate executive council. Parishes have a parish council (with powers to adopt resolutions) and the parish board (the collegiate executive body). Municipalities are governed by a municipal council (with powers to adopt resolutions) and a municipal authority (the collegiate executive body).

The bodies representing administrative regions are the regional assembly (with powers to adopt resolutions) and the regional board (the collegiate executive board). The administrative regions created by law are responsible for running public services and for co-ordinating the supporting the work of municipalities, whilst respecting their autonomy. They also prepare regional planning documents and take part in the preparation of national planning documents.

- ***Religion***

The Portuguese Constitution enshrines the inviolable freedom of belief, religion and worship, and also the separation between the State and the different religious communities. The Basic Education Law guarantees both the freedom to learn and teach and also the freedom to be taught any religion practised by the respective faith community.

Catholic Religion and Morality lessons are given in Portuguese schools (excluding higher education) by the Roman Catholic Church, on the basis of the Concordata signed between the Portuguese State and the Holy See. However, there is legislation which extends this principle to other faiths, so that they may all be deemed to enjoy equality of opportunity and treatment under the law.

- ***Language***

The official language of Portugal is Portuguese. Portugal has the highest level of linguistic uniformity in Western Europe, as Portuguese is spoken throughout the country, including in the Azores and Madeira. In the Miranda do Douro region in the North-west of the country, Portuguese co-exists with another language, Mirandês, recently recognised as an official language.

Because of Portugal's long history and complex cultural development, the Portuguese-speaking world is reckoned to number between 170 and 210 million people, with two established varieties of the language. This makes Portuguese the eighth most spoken language in the world (the third most spoken western language, after English and Spanish). It is the official language of seven countries: Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal and São Tomé e Príncipe. It is also one of the official languages of Macao, a Chinese territory under Portuguese administration until 1999, alongside Mandarin. It is also one of the official languages of the European Union and, as a result of the Mercosul agreements, to which Brazil is party, it is to be taught as a foreign language in the other countries covered by the accords.

The Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPSP) was founded in 1996, bringing together the countries in which Portuguese is the official language, with the aim of promoting and disseminating the Portuguese language and encouraging cultural exchanges between member countries.

- ***Cultural rights and duties***

Under the Portuguese Constitution, all citizens have the right to education and culture, and also the right, defined as fundamental, to learn and to educate and to set up private schools. The State therefore seeks to ensure that education is democratic and that the education given in schools and through other means contributes to equality of opportunity, to overcoming economic, social and cultural inequality, to individual personal development and to a spirit of tolerance, mutual understanding, solidarity and responsibility, to social progress and democratic participation in public life.

The State also seeks to promote democracy in the arts, providing the means and encouragement for all citizens to enjoy cultural activities, both as artists and audience, in collaboration with the media, cultural associations and foundations, arts and leisure organisations, heritage and conservation associations, residents' associations and other cultural bodies.

Finally, the State also encourages and supports scientific research and creativity and technological innovation, with a view to ensuring liberty and autonomy, increased competitiveness and links between scientific institutions and industry.

2. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM: STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION

The education system may be defined as the means and resources whereby the right to education is effectively enjoyed. It consists of a number of organised structures and activities, promoted and administered by a variety of institutions and other bodies (public and private organisations and co-operatives).

The main principles governing the work of the education system reflect the constitutional right to education and the State's duty to promote democracy in education, as the guarantor of equality of opportunity in terms of both access to education and academic success and of the other conditions required to ensure that education contributes to individual personal development, to social progress and to democratic participation in public life.

Respect for the freedom to learn and to teach is guaranteed, and the State may not take it on itself to institute educational or cultural programmes which conform to any particular philosophical, aesthetic, political, ideological or religious systems of belief.

The Basic Educational Law, approved by the Assembly of the Republic in 1986 (Law no. 46/86, of 14 October, subsequently amended in respect of certain clauses by Law no. 115/97, of 19 September) establishes the basic framework for organising and structuring the work of the current education system. This law established minimum schooling of nine years, with a minimum school leaving age of 15.

In accordance with this law, the education system comprises:
— *pre-school education*, where the teaching/learning objectives
complement the home learning process and are to be achieved in close co-operation with the family.
— *academic education*, which consists of a sequence of three stages, basic, secondary and higher education, each with its own specific aims, characteristics and forms of organisation. Academic education also includes special courses and leisure/recreational activities.
— *extra-muros education*, which includes literacy and basic educational activities, continuing cultural and scientific education, initial vocational training, vocational retraining and further training. These aims are pursued through a combination of formal and informal initiatives.

2.1. Pre-school education

Pre-school education is today defined as the first stage in basic education, viewed as part of the lifelong education process. It should encourage the balanced growth and development of the child, with a view to full integration in society as an independent, free and socially responsible person.

Pre-school education is aimed at children aged between three and five years and is provided at public, private and co-operative nursery schools which offer educational activities and support for the family, especially in the form of socio-educational activities.

Attendance is optional, in acknowledgement of the fact that the family has the natural and constitutional right to a central role in the process of infant education.

2.2. Basic education

Basic education is universal, compulsory and free, with a duration of nine years. Children aged six to fifteen are required by law to attend, which they may do at state schools or in private or co-operative schools.

The basic education system is divided into three cycles, organised as follows:
— *1st cycle*, with a duration of four school years, providing a rounded education, with students taught by a single teacher (who may however be assisted by others in specialist areas).
— *2nd cycle*, with a duration of two school years, in which the learning process is organised into interdisciplinary areas (basic level), mostly with one teacher for each area.
— *3rd cycle*, lasting three school years, organised around a unified curriculum, including a variety of vocational areas, with one teacher for each subject or group of subjects.

2.3. Secondary education

Secondary education courses have a duration of three years (corresponding to the 10th, 11th and 12th grades), and is open to students who have obtained the basic education diploma. Attendance is optional. Students are aged between fifteen and seventeen.

There is a variety of secondary education options available to students, who may choose between courses aimed primarily at those seeking to enter the job market (technology courses) and others for those hoping to continue on to higher education (general courses). All courses contain a technical, technological and vocational element, as well as Portuguese language and culture, in accordance with the general thrust of the course, and students are able to cross from one course to another. The curriculum is divided into subjects, with one teacher, in principle, for each subject.

2.4. Higher education

Higher education comprises university education and *polytechnic education*, organised along different lines.

Most students in higher education are aged between eighteen and twenty five. However, people aged 25 or over may apply for place in higher education even if they do not possess the necessary secondary education or equivalent qualification, or a higher education qualification, provided they prove they have the necessary skills and knowledge.

There are limits on the number of students admitted to higher education (*numerus clausus*).

University education can lead to the following degrees: *bacharelato* (first degree course, normally 3 years' duration), *licenciatura* (normally 4 years' duration), *masters' degrees* and *doctorates*. Polytechnic education can lead to a *bachalerato* or a *licenciatura*.

2.5. Special education system

The following special forms of education are available within the school system:

2.5.1. *Special education*

The aim of special education is the socio-educational rehabilitation and integration of individuals with specific educational needs, due to physical or mental handicaps. It consists of adapting the learning and teaching environment and system for students attending basic or secondary education; in cases where the extent of the student's handicap so requires, he or she may be taught at a special institution.

Whenever possible, students are integrated into mainstream schools, with adaptations to the curriculum and studies depending on the type and degree of the student's handicap. Special supervision is provided, with the help of specialist teaching staff; assessment is also geared to take the student's difficulties into account.

2.5.2. *Vocational training*

As a complement to the process of preparation for working life which begins during the basic education system, vocational training is offered in order to introduce students to the world of work, and to equip them with vocational knowledge and skills.

Vocational training is open to students who have completed their compulsory schooling, to those who have failed to complete it by the normal age limit and to those in employment seeking further training or retraining.

Courses are designed, in terms of institutions and teaching methods, to be sufficiently flexible in order to cater for students with different educational and vocational backgrounds. The vocational colleges are the prime examples of work in this area.

The courses and modules on offer are taught in a variety of contexts: some are given at basic and secondary education establishments, others through protocol agreements with companies and local authorities, with financial aid available for public and private institutions and schemes. Community schemes and services are encouraged, and specific institutions for vocational training can also be created.

2.5.3. *Adult education*

Adult education is offered in order to enable individuals to attend basic and secondary education courses as part of their lifelong educational process. It is open to those who have either passed the normal age for attending these courses or to those who missed the

opportunity to enter the normal education system. The prime aim is to eliminate illiteracy.

These courses are open to anyone aged fifteen or more (for basic education courses) or eighteen or more (for secondary courses).

Students work towards the same qualifications and certificates as their counterparts in the mainstream system, although the conditions for access and the way their studies are organised are distinct and designed to suit their age range, their accrued life experience and their respective academic competence.

2.5.4. *Distance learning*

Distance learning, using multimedia and new information technologies represents a way of complementing mainstream education and also an alternative to normal schooling.

Distance learning methods have been used for adult education courses, employing written and audio-visual teaching materials and regular correspondence between students and the educational establishment responsible. It has been of particular importance in teaching training, both for in-service training and for equipping existing teaching staff with the additional qualifications now required for the profession; distance learning techniques have also played a part in extra-muros educational schemes. The main distance learning institution is the Universidade Aberta (Open University).

An alternative course to the 2nd cycle of basic education has also been developed using distance learning techniques. This has been implemented in areas where access to the schools is difficult for geographical reasons and in areas where the student population is small and lacks the normal state or private provision.

2.5.5. *Portuguese language teaching abroad*

Portuguese language teaching abroad is organised in order to disseminate and promote the study of Portuguese language and culture. This takes a variety of forms, which can consist of including Portuguese in the school curriculum (primary and secondary) in other countries, and of additional classes. It also includes creating and maintaining lectureships in Portuguese in foreign universities, under the guidance of Portuguese teachers.

The State supports initiatives to set up Portuguese schools in other Portuguese-speaking countries and for Portuguese ex-patriate communities, and also initiatives taken by Portuguese associations and foreign organisations (both state and private) which seek to disseminate and teach Portuguese language and culture.

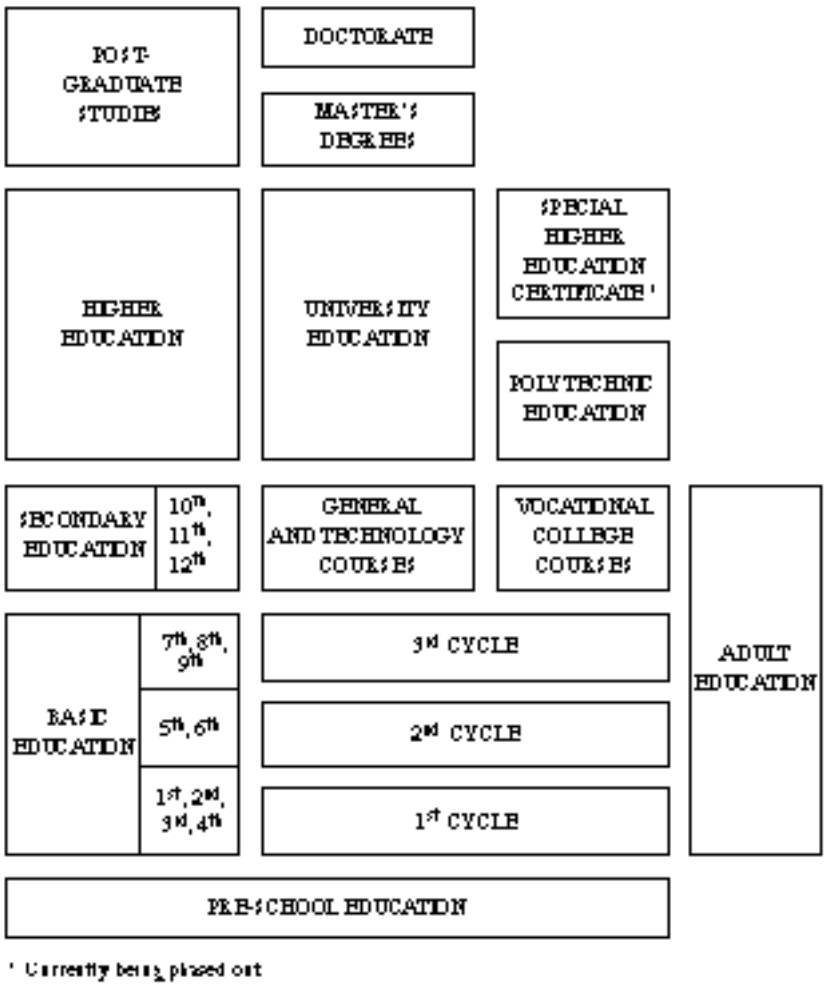
2.6 Extra-muros education

The aim of extra-muros education is to enable all individual citizens to develop their knowledge and potential, in a way which complements their academic education or fills the gap left by their failure, for any reason, to attend normal schooling. These activities are designed to contribute to the lifelong all-round education of the population.

Extra-muros activities can be organised as community schemes run by educational establishments or else as open systems using the media and appropriate technology.

These activities can be organised directly by the State or else by private, local authority or other organisations with State support.

FIGURE 1. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM — DIAGRAM



3. DESCRIPTION OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

3.1. Pre-school education

The objectives of pre-school education are, in brief, to stimulate the capacities of each child and to facilitate its development, to contribute to its emotional stability, to encourage it to observe and understand the natural world and human society, to help in its moral development, to encourage integration in different social groups, to develop expressive and communication skills, to encourage hygienic and healthy habits and to detect early signs of dysfunctions, handicaps or special gifts, directing the child to special institutions or specialists whenever necessary.

- ***Expansion of pre-school education***

It is the Government's objective to increase pre-school provision to around 20% and thereby cater for more than 45,000 children in this age group. Two major pieces of legislation were published with this aim in 1997: the Pre-school Education Outline Law (Law no. 5/97, of 10 February) and the Expansion and Development Programme for Pre-school Education (Decree-Law no. 147/97, of 11 June). The new legislation defined pre-school education as the first phase in basic education, viewed in the context of continuing lifelong education, and established that it would be provided by creating a network of special schools, in which public and private schools would work together and be considered as a valuable social resource, defining at the same time the general principles of pre-school education, the rules for the organisation of these schools, the requirements they must meet and the financial aid available for developing the system nation-wide. Complementary legislation drafted jointly by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment and Solidarity has defined the pedagogical and technical requirements for the creation and running of pre-school institutions and set up a source of low-interest state loans. The legislation also established the rules for allocating financial incentives and support for the construction and renovation of pre-school institutions.

Support for the expansion and development of the pre-school system includes pedagogical support, financial aid (for infrastructures, equipment, running costs and training) and welfare support for families. This support is allocated on a priority basis to areas where there is a lack of pre-school facilities, where the academic failure rate is high and urban areas with a high population density.

The State is responsible for setting up a public pre-school system, supporting initiatives in this area from other sectors of society, allocating special support to disadvantaged areas and guaranteeing equal opportunities. Most state pre-school institutions are run by the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Employment and Solidarity (when needed on social grounds).

The combined public and private systems add up to a coverage rate of 54.6% of the population aged between 3 and 5, corresponding to 74,000 children in the first year and 104,000 in the second (see Table 3, Annex 1).

- ***Curricular guidelines***

The curriculum and the teaching methods used in pre-school education should be appropriate to the socio-economic setting, in the spirit of "inclusive education", i.e. seeking to reach all children, accepting their differences, supporting the learning process and responding to individual needs. This means that the programme chosen by the nursery teacher should seek to meet the general aims of pre-school education and also take into account the organisation of the educational environment, the need to take children forward from what they already know, the educational aims and specific subject areas: *personal and social education*, *expression/communication* and *learning about the world*. Personal and social education is regarded as a theme running through the whole of pre-school education, while learning about the world covers different forms of expression and mathematics. There is a rule that each pre-school class should have a minimum of twenty and a maximum of twenty five children, except in areas with low population density, where smaller classes may be authorised or other forms of education organised. These alternatives include *peripatetic pre-school education* and *community pre-school education*.

- ***School year and teachers***

The dates of the school terms and holidays are decided by the board of studies for each pre-school institution prior to the academic year, after consulting the local authorities, parents and guardians. Timetables are also fixed in this way, allowing ample time for each type of educational activity, and also for community work and family support, taking the local families' needs into accounts. Meals should be served during the school day when required.

Classes are taught and supervised by *nursery teachers* with the appropriate qualifications; these teachers are also responsible for other social and educational activities undertaken by the class. The pre-school system run by the Ministry of Education has a ratio of 25 children per teacher (1995/96 figures).

- ***Welfare support***

A policy of equal opportunities means that all families should enjoy the same chances in access to pre-school education, independent of their incomes and regardless of whether the school is public or private. The State is therefore responsible for ensuring this, by providing the educational components of the pre-school programme free of charge.

Families pay fees for other activities in accordance with the income. Other welfare services are offered, including school health services and psychological and guidance services.

3.2. School education

3.2.1. *Basic education*

The general aims in basic education reflect the following pedagogical concerns:
— to create a setting propitious for overall and harmonious personal development, by allowing students gradually to discover their interests, aptitudes and capacities, so that they can grow and develop both as individuals and as members of society.
— to develop values, attitudes and behaviour which contribute to the development of democratically aware and active citizens.
— to facilitate the acquisition and mastery of the knowledge, tools, skills, capacities, attitudes and values needed to make an informed choice about further educational options or employment opportunities.

The *specific aims for the 1st cycle* are to develop spoken language, to start and gradually develop reading and writing, basic arithmetical notions and calculations, the physical and social environment, art, drama, music and movement.

The *specific aims for the 2nd cycle* are education in the humanities and arts, physical education and sports, science and technology, moral and civic education, preparing students to assimilate and critically interpret information, so as to allow them to acquire working methods and tools, and the knowledge needed to continue their education.

The *specific aims for the 3rd cycle* are to acquire a systematic grasp of modern culture in all its different aspects, including the humanities, literature, arts, physical education and sports, science and technology, such as is needed for employment or for continuing in education, together with academic and career counselling to help students make an informed choice as to future studies or employment.

- ***Methodology and subjects***

In keeping with the principles enshrined in the Basic Education System Law relating to the full and harmonious personal development of individuals, the education of free citizens and the full personal realisation of each student, the methods used in the basic education programmes are designed to enable the student to take an active and conscious part in his or her own learning and to harness his or her interests, experiences and knowledge so as to develop attitudes and skills which allow them to investigate and process information autonomously, also leaving room for personal creativity and inventive skills. These principles also involve creating a good school/community relationship, so that students can use what they learn to transform their social environment.

Given that educational activities are learner-centred, teachers act increasingly as the facilitators of learning situations, proposing activities which take the students' own experiences as the starting point, inculcating a taste for learning and developing a spirit of curiosity and creativity.

In accordance with Decree-Law no. 286/89, of 29 August, the school curriculum in basic education was reformed, as from the academic year of 1989/90, and is now organised on the following principles:
— priority is given to the teaching and learning of the mother tongue, as an active element in all components of the curriculum.
— priority is given to personal and social education, especially through study of a subject with the name Personal and Social Development.
— an interdisciplinary approach to syllabus design, in order to create links between knowledge and skills acquired in different subjects and in school activities.
— the teaching of the foreign language as from the 1st cycle, so as to organise language teaching/learning on a structured and sequential basis.
— organisation of complementary curricular activities, so as to use the students' free time in a creative and educational way.
— adoption of an assessment system designed to promote academic success for all students, depending on their individual pace and progress.

The curriculum is organised in three cycles, each cycle filling out and complementing the previous cycle, in order to provide a solid all-round education. This means that links between different subjects are created vertically (between cycles) and horizontally (between different components) (see Tables 1, 2 and 3, Annex 2).

A consultation process has been underway during the last year with a view to revising the curriculum and the assessment system in both basic and secondary education, with the aim of defining core learning standards and skills to be attained by the end of each cycle and educational level.

- ***Complementary activities***

School activities are part of the curriculum but not part of any particular subject; they are compulsory and are organised by the School Board or Board of Studies. Their aim is to carry the learning process further through multidisciplinary activities and projects, to raise students' awareness of the environment in which the school is located and to develop the spirit of initiative, organisation, independence and solidarity.

These activities consist in practice of projects which fit in with the school's annual plan. Taking part in the projects are students, teachers, parents and guardians and other people in the community involved in education. Students' performance in these activities is reflected in their assessment for the subjects or subject areas covered by the project.

Extra-curricular activities are organised by the school and are optional for students. These take the form of recreational and cultural activities, primarily outside normal school hours. There is normally a range of activities on offer, including cultural activities, community work, sports, arts and technology projects and other schemes designed to help integrate students into their local, regional and national communities.

In the subject area *Personal and Social Training* students can choose between Personal and Social Development, currently being piloted, Catholic Moral and Religious Education, or else a corresponding subject for other faiths, when offered by the school.

- ***Students: entrance requirements***

Children who reach six years of age by 15 September each academic year enter the *1st cycle* of basic education. Children who reach their sixth birthday between 16 September and 31 December and those who reach their fifth birthday before the beginning of the school year may also register for the *1st cycle*, if their parents or guardians so wish, provided they show signs of early development. These children can only be accepted if there are places available at the school, and no changes to the organisation of the school are allowed in order to accommodate them. Places are assigned on a priority basis to older children.

The *2nd cycle* is open to children who have successfully completed the 1st cycle of basic education and with a minimum age of nine years. Children must be re-registered with the school they attend during the previous academic year.

The *3rd cycle* is open to children who have successfully completed the 2nd cycle or who have qualifications deemed as equivalent. Children must be re-registered with the school they attend during the previous academic year.

According to figures for 1995/96, 1,208,420 students were registered in the three cycles of basic education, 91.4% of them in the state sector (see Table 4, Annex 1).

The academic success rate for basic education varies for each cycle, falling slightly over the course of the nine years, from 100% in the 1st cycle, to 84% in the 3rd cycle (see Table 5, Annex 1).

- ***School year***

The starting and finishing dates for school activities for students, and dates for holidays and national examinations are fixed each year by the Ministry of Education. Each individual school is responsible for fixing the dates of the school year, assessment meetings, publication of marks, school examinations and registration periods.

The school years generally begins in the third week of September, and ends in the second fortnight of June. Holidays are given at the end of October, at Christmas, Carnival and Easter. The school year is divided into three terms, which end at Christmas, at Easter and in June, followed by student assessments.

The school week comprises 25 hours for the 1st cycle and 31 hours for the 2nd and 3rd cycles. Individual schools are responsible for designing weekly timetables in accordance with these general rules.

Timetables for the 1st cycle are managed flexibly, organised by individual teachers in view of the characteristics of the children in the class and the timetables agreed by the School Board. Schools may decide to allocate normal timetables (morning and afternoon) to children in all three cycles, or else decide to run a shift system in which some children attend in the morning and others in the afternoon, depending on the demand for classrooms.

- ***Assessment and certificates***

The purpose of learner assessment is to collate information and to make it possible to take decisions as to the capacities and needs of individual students; it also ensures that the aims of compulsory education are attained and is a guarantee of academic success. Assessment serves to control educational practice and is conducted on a systematic and continuing basis.

Assessment involves team work on the part of teachers, especially in the *Form Board*; students also participate in the process, together with parents and guardians and other education officers, including psychology and guidance counsellors and special education staff. Various forms of assessment are used in basic education, and together they are designed to contribute to the students' academic success and the quality of the system as a whole.

Most assessment in the basic education system is *continuous*, and aims to provide qualitative and descriptive information on different learning areas and to gauge attainment of curricular aims, so that intermediate aims can be established and new methods and other measures can be adopted when required.

Final assessments consist of an overall evaluation of the student's developing knowledge and skills, capacities and attitudes. These assessments are made in relation to nationally fixed minimum standards defined for basic education and each cycle, as well as the aims established in each individual school. Final assessments are made at the end of each term and at the end of each school year.

At the end of the 3rd cycle students sit a written test set by the school in each final subject for the cycle, except Physical Education, Personal and Social Development and Catholic Moral and Religious Education (and the equivalents for other faiths). The tests deal with the subject matter taught in the syllabus for each subject and on knowledge and skills developed in the academic year in question.

In the 1st cycle final assessments are given in the form of a written report, whereas for the 2nd and 3rd cycles marks are given on a scale of 1 to 5, accompanied by a written report reflecting the information collected through continuous assessment. At the end of each year and cycle, students are either passed or failed, those failing being required to repeat the year, and those passing moving on to the next stage.

When in the view of the School Board (1st cycle) or the Form Board (2nd and 3rd cycles) a student is in danger, at the end of the second term, of having to repeat the year, the student is required to undergo a *special assessment test*, leading to a recovery plan, the outcome of which is assessed at the end of the year.

Students are only required to repeat the year as an exceptional measure and when they are found to fall far short of attaining the standards required, and after all other possibilities have been exhausted. Students are failed if they obtain a mark of less than 3 in more than 3 subjects in years other than the final years of each cycle, and in more than 2 subjects in the final year of each cycle, when Portuguese and Mathematics are also included. Students who repeat the year have either to repeat all parts of the

curriculum or else to follow a special study plan covering only the subjects or subjects areas where they are a long way behind.

Students can also obtain equivalent qualifications to those provided by the mainstream education system by opting for adult education classes, also administered by the Department of Basic Education.

Special assessment consists of a multi- and inter-disciplinary evaluation process conducted by teachers and other education officers in cases where a personalised study programme might help the student to academic success. These assessments can be conducted at any point during the academic year.

Standards assessments are conducted in order to assess the quality of the education and learning process and to enhance standards, without having any effect on the subsequent careers of individual students. The tests are prepared by the Ministry of Education, and may be set at any point during the academic year.

There are also *external assessments* for students attending private or co-operative schools following their own programmes or without pedagogical independence status, and also for children taught by private tutors or at home. These consist of national examinations for the end of the 2nd and 3rd cycles, which students are required to sit if they wish to continue their education.

Students who pass in the final assessment at the end of the 3rd cycle are awarded the *basic education diploma*. Students who attend school up to the minimum school leaving age but fail to pass in this final assessment are awarded *a certificate of compulsory education*. These students may apply to sit a final examination, set by individual schools, in order to obtain the diploma. These examinations are taken in the first half of September, and special support is offered to help students prepare.

- ***Educational counselling and auxiliary services***

The Basic Education system Law lays down the principle of fair and effective equality of opportunity in access to education and educational success, especially in relation to basic education.

Each school has a *Psychology and Counselling Service* (PCS). This department provides educational counselling, psychological and pedagogical help for students, parents and teachers, in order to help with educational activities and to foster the development of interpersonal relationships. These services are provided by psychologists or specially trained teachers whose intervention is compulsory in the following situations: in special assessments, helping students who drop out of school or with irregular attendance, in providing careers guidance for 9th grade students and in adopting educational support measures.

Schools are also required to organise, monitor and assess *educational support measures* to help ensure that all students are successful learners, in keeping with their own individual pace. These measures consist of a set of strategies and activities designed and

conducted in the school or the outside environment, both within and outside the curriculum.

Educational support can take the following forms: different approaches to particular student groups within the same class and with the same curriculum, temporary streaming, alternative use of teaching facilities and students' time, alternative curricula, private study rooms, specific programmes designed by teachers, interdisciplinary programmes (2nd and 3rd cycles), student self-help groups, tutoring programmes to help develop learning strategies and to monitor progress, recreational activities, including activities to make up for the lack of teachers or complementary curricular activities, and catch-up programmes at the beginning of the school year. Alternative curricula, in particular, enable students to learn in specific areas, through use of an individual study plan. Schools are allowed up to 7% of total teaching time for curriculum subjects in which to implement these measures.

In special situations, principally when schools are located in areas with sever socio-economic or cultural problems, areas where there is a high proportion of students on special education schemes and in schools where multicultural integration is an issue, schools have been grouped together, as part of a pilot scheme running since 1996/97, in *Priority Educational Action Areas* (PEAA), where medium and long term projects involving the community as a whole are implemented in order to combat educational failure and social exclusion.

- ***Physical education and sports***

The aims of basic education as established in the Basic Education System Law also include physical development and motor skills, as an integral part of the general education of young people and as a means of approaching other areas of knowledge. Schools are therefore required to possess specific indoor and outdoor facilities for physical education and sports. They are also required to organise School Sports Clubs, in order to complement curricular activities. The purpose of School Sports Clubs is to organise special classes or groups for each sport, age range and sex; each group is organised and supervised by a teacher. School sports include internal competitions and matches/competitions with other schools.

Students involved in high level competition are allowed a measure of flexibility in their education, depending on the needs of their particular sport.

- ***School welfare schemes***

The welfare support and complementary educational activities provided under the school welfare system include general and restricted schemes. *General schemes* are those offered to all students, namely in the form of meals, school transport and accommodation schemes. *Restricted schemes* are those offered solely to students from low-income families, and include the provision of books and school materials, as well as direct financial benefits. Welfare support and complementary educational activities therefore take the form of meals and nutrition programmes, school transport, student accommodation, school insurance and welfare activities. These services are organised

and provided by public and private educational establishments, except for transport, which is organised and subsidised by municipal councils.

The *meals and nutrition programme* includes the daily provision of free milk, educational activities in the field of nutritional health and the provision of subsidised or free meals in school canteens or cafeteria. School meals are required to provide students with a balanced nutritional intake, appropriate to the needs of the school population.

Students in basic education who live in areas where the schools are more than walking distance away and where there is no suitable public transport are provided with an appropriate system of school buses.

In order to ensure that students attend compulsory minimum schooling and to help students obliged to leave their families during the school term, accommodation is offered in hostels at a moderate price, taking the size of the family into account.

Accident prevention schemes and *school insurance* also help to improve students' welfare, complementing the work of the national health service. Accident prevention schemes include educational activities at schools as part of the curriculum, design to help prevent any harm to students. The school insurance scheme means that students are entitled to financial help in the event of suffering an accident at school. The *Health Awareness and Action Programme* also contributes to keeping the population of school age healthy.

The *Social Welfare Programme* exists in order to allocate direct financial benefits to students from needy families. It consists of help with or full payment of the costs of food, books and other school materials, extra-curricular activities, placement with foster families and exemption from fees.

3.2.2. *Secondary education*

The aims of secondary education are to build on the knowledge and skills acquired in basic education and at the same time to prepare young people for further studies or for entering the labour market.

The secondary curriculum seeks to meet the three main objectives established for secondary education in the Portuguese Constitution:
— to facilitate consolidation and enhancement of students' personal autonomy, enabling them to attain self-realisation and healthy social relations.
— to consolidate, extend and master the knowledge, skills and working methods needed as the basis of a humanistic, artistic, scientific and technical culture, and to help students define their own interests and motivation in relation to educational and vocational options, from the perspective of a lifelong educational process.
— to foster values and practical attitudes which will prepare young people for consciously playing their role in society.

- ***Options in secondary education***

Students who have completed the 9th grade and wish to continue in education can choose between a variety of options in both the mainstream school system and the special education sector.

The range of courses on offer in both the normal school system and the special education sector can be divided into two main groups, in accordance with their ultimate aims:
— *predominantly employment-oriented courses* (PEOC): *technology courses* in the mainstream secondary sector, *technical courses* in the adult education system, *courses at vocational colleges* working in the vocational education system and *special arts courses*.
— *predominantly study-oriented courses* (PSOC): *general courses* in the mainstream secondary sector, the *general courses* offered by the adult education system and *special arts courses*.

- ***Methodological guidelines and curriculum content in the mainstream secondary sector***

In accordance with the Basic Education System Law and the specific legislation for each level of education, the secondary curriculum has the following main aims:
— to give priority to the teaching of Portuguese.
— to design the curriculum from an interdisciplinary perspective.
— to present assessment as an ongoing process designed to enhance students' self-confidence.
— to enhance educational support systems and transdisciplinary teaching.
— to encourage local initiatives, by leaving a degree of freedom in the choice and design of multidisciplinary projects and allowing schools to co-operate with other community institutions.
— to organise the different elements of the curriculum — humanities, arts, science, technology, physical education and sports — so as to provide students with a rounded education and to equip them for employment and for further or higher education.

Since 1986 the secondary system has been reformed with the express aim of creating a sequential and articulated system, in which two main options are offered within the mainstream educational sector:
— *predominantly study-oriented courses* (PSOC) or *general courses* — with a duration of three years and designed to build on the knowledge and skills acquired in basic education and to prepare young people for higher education.
— *predominantly employment-oriented courses* (PEOC) or *technology courses* — with a duration of three years and designed to prepare young people for the world of work.

A degree of flexibility is permitted, and students who complete technology courses may also go on to higher education.

The two types of courses offered in the mainstream secondary system — *general courses and technology courses* — are divided into four main subject areas:

Group 1: Science
Group 2: Arts
Group 3: Economic and Social Sciences
Group 4: Humanities

There is one general course and a number of technology courses for each group, making a total of four general courses and eleven technology courses (five technology courses for group 1 and two technology courses for each of the other groups) (See Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Subject Groups and Courses in the Mainstream Secondary System

GROUPS	COURSES
Science	General course Technology course – chemistry Technology course – civil construction Technology course – electrical engineering/electronics Technology course – mechanics Technology course – information technology
Arts	General course Technology course – design Technology course – arts and crafts
Economics and Social Sciences	General course Technology course – commercial services Technology course – administration
Humanities	General course Technology course – social work Technology course – media

The secondary curriculum is organised, like that for basic education, in accordance with Decree-Law no. 286/89, of 29 August. It comprises three main elements, which are found in all mainstream secondary courses: general education, specific and technical subjects, and technological or artistic training. There is also a compulsory interdisciplinary subject area (School Activities), as well as optional extra-curricular activities (see Table 4, Annex 2).

The *general education component* is common to all courses and is compulsory for all students. In the general course this component is allocated (minimum and maximum weekly figures) 12/15 hours in the 10th and 11th grades and 6/9 hours in the 12th grade. In technology courses, general education is allocated 12/13 hours in the 10th and 11th grades and 6/9 hours in the 12th grade.

The *specific subjects component* in each course comprises a variable number of subjects, depending on the group and the particular course. In the general course specific subjects are allocated (minimum and maximum weekly figures) 10/16 hours in the 10th and 11th grades and 14/20 hours in the 12th grade. In technology courses, they are given 7/8 hours in the 10th and 11th grades and 7/9 hours in the 12th grade.

There is a *technical training component* in all secondary courses, the nature of which depends on the type of course (general or technology courses), the subject group, the options offered by the school and the students' interests. In the general course technical training is allocated (minimum and maximum weekly figures) 6 hours in the 10th and 11th grades and 3 hours in the 12th grade. In technology courses, it is given 10/11 hours in the 10th and 11th grades and 15/17 hours in the 12th grade.

The secondary curriculum is currently under review as part of an assessment of the secondary system as a whole. This is taking the form of a nation-wide consultation process, with a view to producing a national curriculum clearly focussed on the acquisition of basic transversal skills in all courses and sectors, with the possibility of greater diversity so as to provide technological and technical training designed to enhance the employability of school leavers.

- ***Complementary curricular activities***

In addition to the general and specific subjects and to technical, technological and vocational training, the curriculum also includes space for School Activities which belong to no specific subject area but are intended, as with the equivalent activities in basic education, to provide students with personal and social education, through participation in multidisciplinary activities and projects which help to develop a spirit of initiative, organisational habits and personal autonomy, and also to forge links between the school and the local community.

Schools also organise optional extra-curricular activities or a recreational and cultural nature, so as to make creative and educational use of students' free time.

Technology courses can also include specific activities organised by the school. Examples of these might be: seminars during the course, work experience during the course, and end-of-course work experience placements.

- ***Students: entrance requirements***

All general and technology courses are open to students who have successfully completed their basic education (9th grade) or the equivalent, regardless of the vocational area chosen or the type of course. Students must be aged 14 or over.

In the academic year of 95/96, the academic success rate for secondary education was 56.5% of students aged between 15 and 17, and more than 90% of secondary education students were registered in the state sector (se Table 6, Annex 1).

- ***School year and timetables***

As for basic education, the main parameters of the school year are fixed each year by the Minister of Education. The exact starting and finishing dates for the school year, and the dates for assessment meetings, publication of marks, school examinations and registration periods are fixed by each individual school.

Weekly timetables for secondary courses vary between a minimum of 28 and a maximum of 3 teaching periods per week in the 10th and 11th grades and of 30 teaching periods per week in the 12th grade.

- ***Assessment***

The aim of student learning assessment in secondary education is to measure the degree to which the overall aims for secondary courses are being attained, and also to gauge performance in students' respective courses and subjects, by evaluating the knowledge and skills acquired and taking into account the values and attitudes developed by the students.

As in the basic education system, various forms of assessment are employed: *continuous assessment*, *final assessment*, *standards assessment*, *special assessment* and *external assessment*, organised on similar lines, and with similar aims, to the corresponding system in the basic education sector.

Continuous assessment consists of a systematic and ongoing process of collecting and processing data relating to the various fields of learning involved. The assessment is conducted by the teacher for each subject, in liaison with the counselling services and educational support services; each Form Director is responsible for ensuring that the students' assessment reflects their full, all-round performance. The purpose of this form of assessment is to inform students, parents and guardians, teachers and other persons involved in the education process of the progress and the quality of the education process; the assessments are given in the form of a written description, and should contribute to the fixing of intermediate targets to help students on the way to success, to the adoption of different teaching methods and educational support measures and should help students to redefine their academic options.

At the beginning of the 10th grade, the school authorities may, on the suggestion of the Board of Studies, decide to set diagnostic tests in any subject, in order to decide on catch-up measures in accordance with the outcome of the tests.

Unlike in basic education, *final assessments* are given on a scale of 0 to 20 for each subject, in accordance with the rules set out below.

Final marks for each subject are based in part on a final written test taken at the end of the 10th and 11th grades. Similar tests are also set at the end of the 12th grade, but only for practical and applied subjects, where no national examination is set.

Students pass in subjects which they conclude in the 10th and 11th grades and in 12th grade subjects not subject to national examinations when they obtain a mark of 10 or

more in the respective final assessment. Students move on to the next grade when they have obtained a mark of 10 or more in all subjects, or in all save two, provided that they score no less than 8 in the latter, and for a maximum of two consecutive years.

External final assessments consist of compulsory examinations set by the Ministry of Education and are designed to ensure that the marks given in secondary education are fair, allowing students to conclude their secondary education with a definitive final mark. Students sit final examinations in the general and specific subjects taken in the 12th grade, except for Physical Education and Personal and Social Development or Catholic Moral and Religious Education (or the equivalent for other faiths). Final marks for subjects in which national examinations are set correspond to the weighted average of the marks obtained by the students in internal assessments during the years in which the subject is taken and of the mark obtained in the final examination.

- ***Certificates***

Students who complete secondary education are awarded a secondary education certificate which specifies the course completed and the final mark. The certificate is issued by the administrative or management body of the institution where the student completed the course.

Students who complete technology or arts courses are awarded the secondary education certificate and also a vocational qualification certificate corresponding to level III in the European Union classification. This certificate qualifies them for certain professional activities.

- ***Educational support and counselling***

As in the basic education system, students with particular learning difficulties may, if they so wish, benefit from special help, provided their attendance is regular and they have not cancelled their registration. This help can consist of *additional and diversified teaching support* over the course of the year or an *intensive and diversified teaching support programme*, offered after the end of the third term.

In accordance with the relevant legislation, students in secondary education are provided with educational and careers counselling by the *Psychology and Counselling Services* (PCS) which have been set up in for individual schools or for groups of schools. These services are run by permanent staff comprising psychologists, teachers with special training in educational and careers counselling (*counselling officers*) and social workers.

These departments work in the field of psycho-pedagogical support for all members of the school community (students, teachers, parents and guardians, auxiliary staff, etc.). They also seek to develop relationships within the educational community and to offer educational and vocational guidance.

- ***School welfare schemes***

Social welfare schemes are also organised in secondary education, taking the form of positive discrimination designed to offset the social and educational disadvantages suffered by students from underprivileged backgrounds. Social welfare services include a wide range of measures, including meals and nutrition programmes, with school canteens and cafeteria, school transport, accommodation in student hostels, school insurance and welfare schemes.

New legislation has recently introduced *scholarships* for students from poor backgrounds wishing to go through secondary education. These take the form of an annual payment designed to help with the costs of attending secondary education.

- ***Other secondary education courses***

In addition to the general and technology courses, the secondary system also offers vocational courses, adult education courses and arts courses (see Table 7, Annex 1).

Vocational courses represent a special form of schooling offered as an alternative to the mainstream system. The vocational colleges, created in 1989, are designed to train intermediate technicians and are private institutions (set up local authorities, industrial associations, etc.), although the State has also, on a subsidiary basis, set up vocational colleges to provide courses in areas not covered by the existing system. The colleges are all, however, subject to the pedagogical, academic and organisational supervision by the Minister of Education.

Vocational courses are aimed at young people and seek, as a matter of priority, to respond to local and regional needs. The courses have a duration of three academic years, organised in the form of modules of variable duration which can be combined to create individual courses; the modules are organised according to successive academic and vocational qualification levels.

The curriculum for vocational courses includes a *socio-cultural education component*, common to all courses, a *scientific education component*, common to all courses in the same subject area and *technical*, *practical*, *artistic and technological training components*, depending on the particular course and occupying no more than 50% of the total timetable for the course. The courses also involve a compulsory work experience period, directly connected to practical activities in the respective vocational area and in contact with the socio-economic environment (whenever possible in the form of work experience placements).

Courses are organised into the following subject areas: administration, services and commerce, agro-food, environment and natural resources, performance arts, graphic arts, civil construction, design and technical drawing, electricity and electronics, hotel, catering and tourism, information, communication and documentation, information technology, personal and social services, machine tools, cultural heritage and artistic work, chemistry, textiles, clothes and footwear.

Students who successfully complete a vocational course are awarded a level III vocational qualification (in accordance with European Union standards). Students graduating from vocational colleges may go on to higher education, as determined by law.

The *adult education system* is designed to offer a second chance to attend basic and secondary education for those of above normal school age. The system offers greater flexibility and a broader range of curricular, methodological and assessment options than the mainstream system. The state sector represents the bulk of adult education initiatives (see Table 7, Annex I).

The curriculum for adult education courses comprises three components: a *general education components*, taken by all students, a *scientific education component* and a *technical training component*. Students can choose between the following options:
— for those seeking a secondary education certificate and a level III vocational qualification, the general education component is complemented by two subjects from the scientific education component (depending on the technical course chosen) and by the corresponding technical training component.
— for those seeking only the secondary education certificate, the general education component is complemented by a minimum of four subjects from the scientific education component.

As for the technology courses,11 different technical courses are offered in the adult education system: mechanical construction design, electrical engineering, accounting, secretarial services, information technology, community arts, civil construction, media design, media, arts and crafts and chemistry.

Although *special arts courses* are not organised as a separate system, they are in fact regulated by legislation which establishes a distinction between general artistic education aimed at the school population as a whole and vocational arts education, aimed only at such students as display the potential for embarking and progressing on a course of professionally oriented artistic studies. These course are offered in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd cycles of the basic education system and in secondary and higher education, in special institutions. Students attend these courses either on an articulated or integrated basis or else on a supplementary basis.

Students on these courses who successfully complete their secondary education are awarded certificates allowing them to gain employment in their respective area or to go on to higher education. Special arts courses are offered in *dance*, *music* and the *visual arts*.

3.2.3. *Higher education*

Student numbers in higher education in Portugal have expanded significantly in recent years; the system comprises both *university education* and *polytechnic education* (see Tables 8 and 9, Annex 1).

University education is designed to give students with a solid scientific and cultural grounding and provide them with the technical training needed to exercise their

respective professions or to engage in cultural activities, encouraging the development of their capacity for conceptual thought, innovation and critical analysis. The courses are offered in universities and independent university institutions.

Polytechnic education is designed to give students a sold cultural and technical training at higher education level, to develop their capacity for innovation and critical analysis and to equip them with the theoretical and practical knowledge of their technical field, with a view to entering a profession. These courses are offered at specialist higher education establishments, generally grouped together in polytechnic institutes.

Mobility between university and polytechnic education is guaranteed by the principle of mutual recognition of standards of training and skills acquired.

- ***University education***

University courses are currently offered at the following institutions:

The state university system, governed by the Autonomy of Universities Law (Law no. 108/88, of 24 September) and by Decree-Law no. 170/96, of 19 September. The courses are given at universities, organised into faculties, institutes and other units (such as departments, courses or projects) and in other independent institutions. These institutions are created by the Government through special legislation.

The private or co-operative university system, with courses given in universities or independent institutions, governed by the Private and Co-operative Higher Education Statute. Under this statute, the approval of the Ministry of Education is required for the creation, organisation and running of private sector higher education establishments. When an educational institution is recognised as serving the public interest it is integrated into the national education system, giving it the concomitant legal rights and faculties, and at the same time the State's role in controlling the quality of the education offered is defined, together with the possibility of financial aid.

The Portuguese Catholic University, created with its own statutes under article XX of the Concordata between Portugal and the Holy See of 7 May 1940, was officially recognised in 1971. It is subject to the provisions of Decree-Law no. 128/90 of 17 April. The Catholic University if free to create faculties, higher education institutes, departments, research centres and other organisational units, notifying the Ministry of Education of all such developments.

- ***Courses, Curricula and Degrees***

Higher education courses are offered in the following range of areas: Education Sciences, Teacher Training, Visual Arts, Architecture, Social Sciences, A anthropology, Psychology, Sociology, Management, Economics, Law, Exact and Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Information Technology, Medicine, Engineering and Technology, Architecture, Agriculture, Media Studies, Musicology, Physical Education, Social Services, Military Studies, Arts and Humanities (including Theology).

In accordance with Article 13 of Law no. 115/97, of 19 September, which amended the Basic Education System Law, university courses lead the following degrees: *bacharelato* (first degree), *licenciatura* (full first degree), *master's* and *doctorate*.

As well as academic degrees and titles, university institutions may also confer honorary titles, certificates and diplomas of attendance, certificates of recognised learning or qualifications, certificates recognising the qualifications awarded by similar institutions, in Portugal or abroad, as well as honorary doctorates to distinguished persons from Portugal or abroad.

A *licenciatura* represents recognition of a solid scientific, technical and cultural grounding, permitting the holder to extend his knowledge and specialise in a particular area and to exercise his profession appropriately. Some *licenciatura* courses are still organised in the traditional way into academic semesters and years, with a curriculum consisting of a number of theoretical and theoretical-practical subjects, seminars and trial placements, but most courses are now organised using a system of credit units. As well as allowing for interdisciplinary courses, created by combining subjects taught in different scientific areas, this system allows individual institutions greater scope for fixing the content of courses. It also facilitates an ongoing process of curriculum review, as the curriculum can be revised each year. Depending on the type of course, conferences, seminars, work experience and study trips may be incorporated into the curriculum.

In courses which use the credit system, students are required each year to enrol for subjects which correspond to no less than 12 and no more than 25 credit units. Academic degrees are conferred when the students has obtained pass marks for the compulsory and optional scientific subject areas required by the curriculum and obtained the total number of credit units required by the course regulations. This total is set to reflect the scientific and pedagogical standard required as a guarantee of adequate education/training.

Master's degrees represent acknowledgement of in-depth knowledge of an area of study and practical research capacity. *Master's* courses consist of two components: the *curricular component*, organised using the credit unit system, and a *dissertation* especially written for this purpose, subject to discussion and approval. In order to complete the curricular component successfully, students on these courses are required to accrue a minimum number of credit units as fixed for their particular speciality. Master's courses have a maximum duration of four semesters.

A *doctorate* presupposes that the candidate has made an innovative and original contribution to the progress of learning, at a high cultural level in a given area and that he or she possesses the capacity to carry out independent scientific work; doctorates are therefore awarded with reference to the branch of learning in which the candidate is examined. These subject areas are approved by the relevant educational authority.

Candidates are required to undergo tests in a group of related disciplines taught at university institutions and for which *licenciatura* courses are offered; a dissertation must also be presented and defended. The dissertation is normally prepared under the supervision of a teacher at the university at which the candidate seeks to obtain his doctorate, although the supervisor may also be a member of staff at an educational or

research institution duly recognised by the university. When justified by the circumstances, students may also prepare their dissertations independently.

Depending on the subject area chosen, the university examination boards should also decide to set additional tests relating to topics, studies or research projects undertaken by the candidate in related disciplinary areas.

- ***Polytechnic education***

In accordance with Law no. 54/90, of 5 September, which approves the status and autonomy of polytechnic higher education establishments, polytechnic institutes are higher education institutions comprising two or more higher education establishments with the overall aim of pursuing the aims of polytechnic education in the same region and which come together in order to co-ordinate their respective education policies and in order to optimise their resources. In addition to higher education establishments, polytechnic institutes may include other organisation which pursue the same aims.

Higher education establishments or colleges provide cultural and technical education preparing students for highly qualified professions and contributing to the development of their local regions. These colleges are legally independent and enjoy academic, pedagogical, administrative and financial autonomy.

The *public polytechnic sector* is answerable solely to the Ministry of Education, and provides courses in specialist colleges with a variety of different titles, depending on the particular interests of the regions where they are located. Individual colleges can be grouped together in larger units, or *Polytechnic Institutes*, which are responsible for co-ordinating their activities and managing the group as a whole, in order to make rational use of the available resources.

Polytechnic education lays greater emphasis on vocational training than the corresponding university courses, and is designed to help students gain swifter access to employment in specific fields, such as agriculture, teacher training, nursing, technology and management, music, dance, theatre and film, media, accounting and administration and engineering.

Some polytechnic colleges are run jointly by the Ministry of Education and other ministries. These colleges are not members of larger institutes, and pursue a general plan which seeks to respond to urgent regional needs in the socio-economic and cultural fields.

Private and *co-operative polytechnic education* is offered by higher education colleges and institutes, as in the public sector. These courses can also be offered in higher education colleges which are not integrated in polytechnic institutes.