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**NATIONAL REPORT  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA**

**BY**

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE**

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## INTRODUCTION

Education at all its levels not only provides competencies for personal and professional development, but also educates people to share common identities while in the same time contributes to the enlargement of the European space of education. More compelling, rising demand for qualified young persons requires innovative strategies to mobilize new resources and stimulate the education system to be responsive. To this end, it is an honour and challenge for the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria to be entrusted with the educational policy of the country, as well as with the coordination of the overall process of further improvement in the area of education, training and science.

One of the main responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and Science is to develop the legal basis of the education system in all its levels and forms. Having in mind its widely recognized importance for the stability of the society, the institution pays great attention on its development in compliance with the European trends, while at the same time is trying to preserve its main achievements - accessibility and democratic character. With this in mind, and in order to be able to contribute to the overall modernization of social life in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science has defined its prime objective – “*Quality and Accessible Education and Training for All*”. Three strategic priorities stem from this objective:

- Establishing a provision for knowledge society and quality of education;
- Improving the access to education;
- Opening the education system to the world through mobility enhancement.

These priorities are fully in line with the overall European trends oriented towards fulfillment of the EU Lisbon’s strategy target for 2010: “*Europe to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*”.

# **1. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM FACING THE CHALLENGES OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: AN OVERVIEW**

In the framework of the development of education and training in the European Union context, Bulgaria is establishing its education policy in compliance with the shared ambitions for progress and prosperity.

## **Deep roots and rich history**

The Bulgarian education system has a long-standing and rich history. Bulgarian people have always recognized education, both historically and traditionally, as a specific public value and have exerted efforts to provide their children with good quality education.

## **Main objectives**

Education is a crucial factor for the cultural advancement and human resource development in Bulgaria. Equal access to high quality education is recognized as a priority for the Bulgarian authorities.

Other objectives in this field are as follows:

- Modernization of the curricula and syllabi to make them relevant to the labour market requirements;
- Large scale implementation of ICT at school and providing Internet access;
- Identification of individual children's talents and relevant career guidance.

## **Administration and management in education**

The administration of the Bulgarian education system is carried out by the Council of Ministers. The management bodies of the public education system are the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), the Minister of Education and Science, the Regional Inspectorates of Education and the heads of kindergartens, schools and servicing units, higher schools. The management of education is carried out at three levels – national, regional and institutional (school / higher school).

## **Modernisation of education in Bulgaria**

Basic principles for modernization of the Bulgarian education system:

- **quality of education** as a function of the quality of teaching, financing, teachers' qualification and school equipment;
- **active partnership** among all parties involved - teachers, parents, employers, trade unions, non-governmental organizations;
- **competition** among the schools / higher schools based on provision of high quality and attractive education regardless of the form of ownership of the school / higher school;
- **openness**, i.e. making the education system flexible with respect to the labour market economy.
- **equal access to the education system** with a view to an adequate integration of all disadvantaged groups;

### **Basic Legislation and Strategic Documents**

*Public Education Act (1991), further amended and supplemented, providing for:*

- Democratic principles and traditions development, underlying the role of the Constitution of our country and meeting the European trends;
- Free of charge education, compulsory up to age of 16, secular;
- Setting-up of state educational requirements, which should be met by the education and training of pupils;
- Definition of the administrative structure and the functions of the governing bodies at national, local and school level.

*Level of Education, General Education Minimum and Curriculum Act (1999), further amended and supplemented:*

- It defines the compulsory, compulsory elective and free elective subjects, as well as the issues concerning the general educational minimum and the curriculum;

*Vocational Education and Training Act (1999), further amended and supplemented:*

- It regulates the issues concerning vocational training of pupils – its objectives, principles, stages, organization, and management.

*Higher Education Act (1995), further amended and supplemented:*

- It regulates the organisation, functions, management and financing of higher education in the Republic of Bulgaria.

On June 7, 2006 the National Assembly adopted the *National Programme for Development of School and Pre-School Education (2006 – 2015)* drafted by the Ministry of Education and Science. The programme is based on the conception of the child (student) as the main value of the education system. It defines *equal access to education* and *high-quality and efficiency of education* as main objectives and traces some specific measures to achieve them. Those measures concern improvement of secondary education structure, retaining of all students up to the age of 16 in school and reducing the number of drop-outs of the system; establishing of an effective internal assessment system through the widespread use of tests and the introduction of a system of standardized national external assessment; optimizing the school network by active policy towards gradual decrease of the undersized and mixed grades classes and bounding the network to the labor market demands and the socio-economic characteristics of the region; sustainable modern knowledge based school curricula for general and vocational education which comply with labour market requirements; introducing modules and options for early professional orientation and entrepreneurship in school curricula; support for lifelong learning activities; decentralization of the system management through delegating of powers to the school principals in financing, human resource management and teaching process innovation fields; introduction of a development-stimulating funding system as well as unified standards; working out a differentiated system of teacher's payment bounded with the quality of teaching and the students' results; promoting valuable partnership in schools' management by attracting parents and business in the process.

In the field of vocational education and training a *National Strategy for Continuing Vocational Education (2005 – 2010)* has been approved by the Bulgarian government. The purpose of the strategy is to define the priorities related to the development of the continuing vocational education within the lifelong learning context.

## **1.1. STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM**

### ***1.1.1. Pre-primary (pre-school) education:***

- It comprises children from the age of 3 to the age of 6 / 7, respectively;
- Kindergarten attendance is not compulsory;
- **The main objective** of pre-school education in Bulgaria is to provide an opportunity for each child to develop to a full extent his/her potential and to be prepared for school

education by being introduced to the respective environment, by receiving guidance on fundamental human values and developing skills for adapting to studying and to attending school.

- The kindergartens are preparatory institutions, where children from the age of three up to their enrolment in first grade in primary school are brought up, trained and educated. Pre-school education is organized and carried out in accordance with the state education requirements.
- Compulsory preparation of children for school a year before they enrol in first grade of primary school (since 2003/2004 school year) is organized in preparatory groups at kindergartens or preparatory classes at school, free of charge.
- The children in the preparatory groups who do not speak Bulgarian language well are provided with additional instruction, according to a specialized methodology, so that they reach a level of proficiency comparable to that of the rest of the children.

***Some educational statistics:***

- The number of children in kindergartens for the 2006/2007 school year was 206.7 thousand. It was increased by 2.7 % compared with 2002/2003, and by 0.5 thousand compared with the previous school year.
- The teaching personnel employed in kindergartens comprised 19.3 thousand. In comparison with 2005/2006 the total number of teaching personnel has increased by 51 persons (0.3 %). In parallel, the relative share of teachers with higher education at Bachelor's and Master's degrees has increased from 54.0 % in 2002/2003 to 62.9 % in 2006/2007. This is a prerequisite for implementation of contemporary methods of education and training.

***1.1.2. School education***

School education in Bulgaria begins at the age of 7, completed in the year of entering in the first grade. Six years old children may also enter school, if their physical and mental development allows that by virtue of their parents / guardians.

**According to the degree**, school education is divided into *basic* (awarded after the completion of the basic level of education) and *secondary* (awarded after completion of the upper secondary level of education);

**According to the education content** it is *general* and *vocational*. On the basis of this principle schools are divided into general and vocational.

## **Structure of the school education:**

The current structure consists of:

- **Basic (single structure) education (I – VIII grade)**

*primary school stage (I – IV grade);*

*lower secondary stage (V – VIII grade).*

- **Upper secondary education (IX – XIII grade):**

*upper secondary general education (with non-specialized and specialized schools);*

*vocational education and training (incl. post-secondary education)*

## **Types of schools (I – XII grade):**

- primary schools (I – IV grade);
- lower secondary schools (V – VIII grade);
- basic schools (I – VIII grade);
- secondary schools (IX – XII grade);
- profiled secondary schools;
- comprehensive schools (I – XII grade);
- vocational secondary schools (VIII/IX – XII/XIII grade);
- vocational schools – from VII/VIII grade with a duration of training up to 3 years, from grade IX – with a duration of training up to 4 years and vocational colleges upon completion of secondary education – with a duration up to 2 years;
- sports schools;
- art schools;
- special schools (for children with special educational needs);
- schools in the field of culture.

Upper secondary general education is provided at non-specialized schools (3 or 4 years course of study) and at profiled (specialized) schools (4 or 5 years course of study). Pupils may enter profiled (specialized) schools and vocational upper secondary schools upon completion of VII or VIII grade and taking entrance examinations, which correspond to the specialization of the respective school (Bulgarian language and Literature, Mathematics, Humanities, etc.) or be

admitted on the basis of submitted documents according to the requirements of Ordinance № 11 of March 28, 2005 on Admission of Pupils in Public and Municipal Schools.

The National Programme for Development of School and Pre-school Education (2006 – 2015) foresees the following changes in the current educational structure:

- completion of basic education after VII grade;
- VIII grade – a year of intensive foreign language and computer studies and/or vocational training for all pupils.
- Upper secondary education (VIII – XIII grade):

*first upper secondary stage (VIII – X grade):* the end of this stage will mark the completion of compulsory education.

*second upper secondary stage (XI – XII grade):* pupils will acquire knowledge and skills further developed and specialized. Pupils will also have the opportunity to prepare for their future higher education. At the end of this stage they will sit for national matriculation examinations, in order to complete their secondary education.

***Some general education statistics:***

- In the beginning of the school year 2006/2007 there were 2 551 general education schools. Out of these 250 were primary schools, 1 700 basic schools, 19 lower secondary schools, and 170 upper secondary and 412 secondary general schools. In comparison with the previous school year because of closure or transformation the total number of general education schools decreased by 80.
- In the 2006/2007 school year the number of pupils in all kinds of general education schools was 700.8 thousand, of which 143.1 thousand in rural areas. In comparison with the previous school year the number of pupils in general education decreased by 24.8 thousand or 3.4 %. In general education schools the number of girls was higher than the number of boys - 50.6 % of the total number of pupils. In comparison with the 2002/2003 school year the total number of the pupils in general education schools has decreased by 124.9 thousand or 15.1 %. For primary and pre-secondary education this reduction was 19.0 % and 20.7 % respectively and for secondary education there was an increase of 4.4 %.

- The newly enrolled pupils in first grade of the general education schools for the 2006/2007 school year were 68.7 thousand. Together with those repeating the grade the number of first graders came to a total of 69.1 thousand. Most often (in 90.8 % of cases) children enrolled in first grade in the year in which they reach the age of 7.
- The available data show that during the 2002/2003 school year 74.5 % of the pupils in general education schools were studying a foreign language while in the 2006/2007 school year they have already been 93.4 % of the total number of pupils.
- In 2006 70.9 thousand pupils graduated from basic education, and 36.0 thousand pupils from secondary education.

### **Vocational education and training (VET)**

- **Main objectives** – acquisition of vocational qualification and legal capacity for practicing a given profession (incl. the regulated professions). The VET system requires continuous improvement of the acquired vocational qualification, development of a motivation system for successful realization of the learners in the society, as well as development of general culture based on national and universal values.
- **The VET system** in Bulgaria prepares the citizens for professional realization by establishing conditions for acquiring professional qualification and its continuous improvement. It includes professional guidance, vocational education, and vocational training. These three parts of the VET system are implemented by professions and specialties, which are included in *the List of the Professions in VET*. This List is elaborated by the Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, as well as with the sectoral ministries and the stakeholders at national level, and next approved by the Council of Ministers.
- **There are state educational requirements (SER) for acquisition of a qualification in a given profession (standards)**, approved by the Minister of Education and Science. They are elaborated (in cooperation with the social partners), by the National Agency of Vocational Education and Training (NAVET), which is independent state body to the Council of Ministers. A new element in these standards (since 2007) is a text in English, which contains the name of the profession, the specialties included in this profession, the professional direction (by ISCED 97), and the learning outcomes, that shall be achieved after training in this profession. These SER are obligatory for both the institutions within the vocational education system and the vocational training system itself.

- **The professions and the specialties** in VET are classified by professional fields, by degree of education, and by degree of professional qualification.
- **Four degrees of professional qualification** in the vocational education and training system are available:

**I degree** – with professional competences for practicing of professions, which require performing of routine activities, accomplished under constant conditions:

- *input level:* VI grade completed;
- *output level:* basic education completed (for pupils), or VI or VII grade completed (for learners up to age of 16);

**II degree** – with professional competences for practicing of professions, which require performing of complex activities, accomplished under variable conditions:

- *input level:* VII grade or basic education completed;
- *output level:* X or XI grade completed, rights for sitting for matriculation acquired for completion of secondary education, or secondary education completed;

**III degree** – with professional competences for practicing of professions, which require performing of complex activities, accomplished under variable conditions, as well as taking responsibility for the other people’s work:

- *input level:* VII grade or basic education completed;
- *output level:* secondary education completed or acquired right for sitting for matriculation; it is determined by the state educational requirements for acquisition of a qualification by professions;

**IV degree** – with professional competences for practicing of professions, which require performing of complex activities, accomplished under variable conditions, as well as taking managerial responsibility for other people’s work and for distribution of resources:

- *input level:* secondary education completed.

- **Framework programmes for acquisition of a vocational qualification (since 2002):**

*Framework programmes “A”* for initial vocational training for acquisition of I degree of vocational qualification;

*Framework programmes „B”* for vocational training for acquisition of II degree of vocational qualification;

*Framework programmes „C”* for vocational education for acquisition of II or III degree of vocational qualification;

*Framework programmes „D”* for vocational training for acquisition of IV degree of vocational qualification;

*Framework programmes „E”* for initial vocational training for acquisition of qualification in a part of profession;

*Framework Programmes „F”* for further vocational training for up-to-dating or extension of already acquired vocational qualification, as well as for acquisition of I, II, and III degree of vocational qualification (since 2004).

- **The evaluation of learning outcomes** in vocational training for acquisition of a vocational qualification is performed by state examination procedure by using national examination programmes, approved by the Minister of Education and Science. These programmes are obligatory for both the vocational education and for the vocational training systems.

*Some VET statistics:*

- In 2006/2007 school year VET was carried out in 458 vocational secondary schools, 5 vocational schools and 23 vocational colleges with enrolment after secondary education.
- In 2006/2007 school year the total number of the pupils in VET was 194.7 thousand. Compared to the 2002/2003 school year it has decreased by 7.8 thousand or 3.9 %. Boys were predominant in VET and were 61.7 % of the total number of pupils.
- In 2006, 512 pupils in vocational schools and classes with enrolment after VI and VII grade or after completed basic education have acquired first level vocational qualification. In the vocational colleges with enrolment after completed secondary education 819 people have acquired fourth degree vocational qualification in the same year.
- During the 2006/2007 school year the total number of teachers working in VET schools was 18.8 thousand, of which 71.3 % were women. The highest relative share is that of teachers with a Bachelor's and Master's degree (88.8 %).

### ***1.1.3. Higher education***

Bulgarian higher education is also facing important challenges. Actually, the process of modernization of the Bulgarian higher education has two parts: integration in the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process) and integration in the European Research Area. Another concern of ours is the overall system reform oriented towards better compatibility with the labor market requirements. The main goals of the reforms process are:

- Provision for and guarantee of the academic autonomy of the higher education institutions;
- Development of a mechanism for quality assurance of higher education;
- Equal access to higher education for all within a lifelong learning context;
- Development of a system for efficient public funding and adequate resource provision for higher education;
- Involvement of employers and students in developing quality assurance policies.

Bulgaria is one of the first countries that have accepted the principles of Bologna declaration. The degree structure was firstly introduced by the Higher Education Act (1995). The document was further amended and supplemented in 1999 in compliance with the Bologna principles:

- **Structure of the higher education system**

The system of higher education provides training after completed secondary education and comprises the following degrees:

*Bachelor's educational and qualification degree.* According to the curriculum the acquisition of that degree requires:

- a) minimum 180 credits with a duration of the studies of at least three years leading to the Professional Bachelor in ... degree;
- b) minimum 240 credits with a duration of the studies of at least four years leading to the Bachelor's degree.

*Master's educational and qualification degree.* The requirements for the acquisition are as follows:

- a) minimum 300 credits according to the curriculum with a duration of the studies of at least five years;
- b) minimum 120 credits for holders of Professional Bachelor in ... degree;
- c) minimum 60 credits for holders of Bachelor's degree.

Colleges organize training for the acquisition of the Professional Bachelor in ... educational and qualification degree that provides specialized vocational training in the respective professional sectors and specialities.

Holders of the Professional Bachelor in.... educational and qualification degree can continue their training for the Master's educational and qualification degree only in the same professional sector in compliance with the terms and conditions laid down in the Rules of the higher school or in the State Requirements.

Studies for Bachelor's degree organized in compliance with the curriculum provide multi-profiled training or specialized vocational training in professional sectors and specialities.

Studies for Master's degree provide profound fundamental training combined with profile-oriented training within a given speciality.

Studies for *Doctor's educational and scientific degree* are carried out in scientific specialities.

- **The European Diploma Supplement and ECTS** were introduced in 2004;
- **Distance education** is legally regulated;
- **Joint degree programmes** (Bachelor's, Master's and Doctor's) – provided within the academic autonomy's framework, in partnership with foreign higher education institutions. Graduates receive Bulgarian and foreign diplomas.

#### **Access to higher education**

- admission of students and doctoral students – by competitive examination based on preliminary approved by the state number of places for students / doctoral students;
- higher schools may hold a general entrance examination or recognise the results of the entrance examination given at another higher school.
- higher schools by virtue of decision of their academic councils may admit applicants without entrance examination provided that the applicants have successfully passed the state matriculation exams within the approved by the state number of students.
- facilitated conditions and order of admission of students from disadvantaged groups;
- citizens of Member States of the European Union and of the European Economic Area shall be admitted to Bulgarian higher education institutions under the terms and procedures, provided for Bulgarian citizens (since 2007);

## **Quality assurance**

- At institutional level – internal systems for quality evaluation and control have been introduced by law.
- At national level – the external quality evaluation and control is performed by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA), which is an independent body of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria. The NEAA's criteria and recommendations are to a great extent in compliance with the Standards and Recommendations for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, elaborated by ENQA.
- Post-accreditation monitoring and control (since 2005);
- NEAA – member of the Central European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies and candidate for membership in the ENQA.

## **The institutions**

According to the Higher Education Act, the system of higher education includes universities, specialized higher schools and colleges, which may be public or private.

- *The universities* provide Bachelor's and Master's programmes, as well as programmes for acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor. Universities offer opportunities for studying various disciplines in Humanities, Natural and Social Sciences, Engineering, Arts. They are also involved in wide-ranging scientific research, development and manufacture, artistic and creative production, sports and health.
- *The specialized higher schools* offer higher education for acquisition of Bachelor's degree, and post-graduated training as well, provided in a single, core field of knowledge.
- *The colleges* in the higher education system are structural units of the higher educational institutions or are independent higher educational institutions.

## **Academic autonomy**

According to the Higher Education Act, the higher education institutions shall enjoy academic autonomy. It shall be such autonomy where the intellectual freedom of the academic community and the creative nature of academic instruction, research and artistic creation shall find expression as supreme values.

Within the academic autonomy's framework, the higher education institutions have the opportunity to cooperate with each other, with business organizations, as well as with European higher education institutions for developing joint degree programmes.

***Some higher education statistics:***

- In the beginning of the academic year 2006/2007, 39.2 thousand students - Bulgarian citizens were enrolled in universities and specialized higher schools and another 9.6 thousand were enrolled in colleges. 2.1 thousand foreign citizens were enrolled in universities and colleges.
- In the 2006/2007 academic year the number of the students was 226.9 thousand and 218.2 thousand of them were Bulgarian citizens, or 96.2 %. The number of students - Bulgarian citizens, has increased by 14.2 thousand (7.0 %) in comparison with the 2002/2003 academic year and by 11.8 thousand (5.7 %) in comparison with the 2005/2006 academic year. The number of foreigners has increased by 460 (5.6 %) compared with the previous 2005/2006 academic year.
- In the 2006/2007 academic year the highest relative share was that of students in the field of Business and Administration - 50.4 thousand (24.4 %), followed by the one of students in the field of Engineering and Engineering Trades - 35.9 thousand (15.8 %). The lowest share of students was in the fields of Transport Services - 0.9 %, Natural Life Sciences - 0.6 %, Veterinary - 0.6 %, and Mathematics and Statistics - 0.4 %.
- The number of the academic staff in the universities and specialized higher schools has decreased to 21.3 thousand during 2006/2007 or by 234 persons. 13.2 thousand regularly employed were 62.1 % of the totals. The structure of the academic staff by academic rank was the following: professors - 2 217 or 10.4 % of the total number, associate professors - 6 726 or 31.6 %, assistants - 9 121 or 42.8 %, senior lecturers and lecturers - 3 216 or 15.1 %, research associates with teaching duties - 20 or 0.1 %.

## **2. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE WAY OF THE FUTURE**

### **2.1. THE REFORMS: THE WAY TO THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

The Government of the Republic of Bulgaria understands the inclusive process of education as a dynamic approach towards embracing the diversity among students, where individual differences do not represent any problem, but rather offer opportunities to broaden the scope of education.

There is a direct link between the topic of the 48<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Education *Inclusive Education: The Way to the Future* and the *Millennium Development Goals* and *Education for All*. The Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria is deeply convinced that the practical implementation of the policies on inclusive education is beyond any doubt a challenge for the education systems worldwide; because knowledge and education are key factors of sustainable development and economic growth.

The significant changes undertaken over recent years have provided impetus for the advancement of the school education in Bulgaria. The *National Programme for Development of School and Pre-school Education (2006-2015)*, developed by the Ministry of Education and Science and adopted by the National Assembly of Bulgaria, is the first programme document laying down the fundamental principles and measures for development of the system in the next 10 years.

The considerable progress achieved in implementing the priorities in the Bulgarian education system over the last years underlines the optimization of school education funding mechanisms and the introduction of a system of national standards in external evaluation hold a special place. In 2008, for the first time, after more than four decades of interruption, state matriculation examinations (Matura) have been successfully carried out. After hard work undertaken at national level, the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science succeeded in putting them into practice. Graduates from secondary education had to sit for two compulsory state matriculation examinations – the first being in Bulgarian Language and Literature and the second one – in an elective subject. State matriculation examinations are an important part of the entirely new external evaluation system which is oriented towards students knowledge building-up. At the same time, many higher education institutions in Bulgaria declared their readiness to use the

results from the state matriculation examinations for admission to further studies.

The efforts of the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria to decrease the number of students who have not been included in the education system or have dropped out at compulsory school age, have resulted in free textbooks and training tools provision for the students from I to VII grade at state, municipal and private schools. One should also mention the provision of free transportation to central schools. The use of Information and Communication Technologies in all Bulgarian schools has made it possible to design electronic training courses and to provide laptops and multifunctional devices to all schools, whereas at least 98% of them have been connected to high-speed Internet.

Tangible advancement has been made in integrating children with special educational needs, as well as children for whom the Bulgarian language is not their mother tongue into the mainstream education. Therefore, a Center for Educational Integration of Children and Students of ethnic minority origin has been set up to the Ministry of Education and Science. Different awareness-raising activities have been carried out with a view to enhancing the sensibility of the society to their needs. As to the pupils with special education needs, several resource centers have been established. Measures have been taken to provide accessible architectural environment.

The progress achieved allowed the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria to better identify the upcoming challenges in the fields of school and tertiary education.

The success of MES of the Republic of Bulgaria indicated that the inclusiveness of the education system is fully in line, with the respect for the rights of the child and human rights, with the equality and the willingness to recognize the variety of differences both as a challenge and a wealth of the education environment.

Within that context the 2008 is the most important year in many aspects. Education became a topic of serious and concerned discussions, which highlighted the main challenges for the system. The years 2006 - 2007 were a period of outlining priorities and making first steps towards achievement of the goals set, the last twelve months were a time of key changes which have marked the development of school education for years ahead. The system accepted responsibly the important steps that have been taken.

The team of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) has the ambition to consolidate the achievements and build on them so that the education process actors feel the first positive effects

of the changes. Major focal points will include passing of a new law in the field of school and pre-school education, and building of a dynamic career development model for the Bulgarian system of tertiary education and science.

## **2.2. SCHOOL EDUCATION**

### ***2.2.1. National Programme for Development of School and Pre-school Education (2006-2015)***

For the first time a programming document setting out the main principles and measures for system's development in the next 10 years has been passed. As set out in the programme, every year on 1 October the Minister of Education and Science shall introduce in the National Assembly a report on National Programme's implementation in the previous year and on the main measures to be implemented in the next school year. The reports submitted have been discussed in the parliamentary Education and Science Committee.

### ***2.2.2. Improving school education financing mechanisms and enhancing cost efficiency***

#### **Introducing a unified per student cost standard**

From 1 January 2007, all state and municipal schools, kindergartens and service units are financed on basis of unified per student cost standards. The standard is unified but also differentiated in order to take account of the objective geographic and demographic characteristics, and municipalities are grouped into four categories. Following cooperation with the social partners, the unified standard was increased significantly.

In 2009, depending on the budget allocations for education, the standard per child/student should go above BGN 1400.

#### **Introducing a delegated budgets system**

The delegated budgets system is the second key component of the new school education financing model. In 2007, financing authorities applied the system on an optional basis and MES encouraged through various measures its wider implementation in schools. At the end of 2007, over 600 municipal schools in 45 municipalities, as well as all state schools financed from the MES budget (500) operate delegated budgets.

From 1 January 2008, the system is implemented in all 3062 state and municipal schools. The delegated budget enhances school principal's financial independence in school's management. He/she is given the powers of a second level spending unit, the right to make compensated changes of the revenues and expenditure plan, to manage school's funds, to determine individual remunerations, teachers' workload and the number of students in groups and classes, as well as to decide alone the personnel strength.

The following changes have been undertaken towards ensuring proper introduction and implementation of the system and efficient management of delegated budgets:

- Pursuant to the 2008 State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria Act (SBA), the municipalities have developed formulas for allocation to the schools of the funds received on basis of the unified standards. The municipalities are obliged to allocate not less than 80% of the funds on basis of the unified standards and the other 20% they can distribute, taking account of the objective factors for inequalities in the access to education. To help the municipalities, MES and the Ministry of Finance (MF) have prepared guidance documents and other materials for development of the formulas.
- MES has prepared and delivered to school principals a manual for introduction, operation, assessment and control of delegated budgets in the education system.
- An assessment of delegated budgets implementation has been made in fulfilment of the 2008 SBA and in accordance with the criteria approved by the Council of Ministers. Results show that over 97% of the municipalities have fulfilled properly the requirements of the law. Additional funds were allocated to these municipalities as an incentive for proper system implementation.
- The Institute of School Principals provided training on delegated budgets management to all school principals of state and municipal schools.

A major task for MES in 2009 is to contribute for the sustainability and irreversibility of the delegated budgets system in schools by making system's positive effects felt by the school principals and the teachers. As agreed with the social partners, a possibility for state and municipal schools to retain and include in their next year budget the excess of revenues over expenditures at the end of the previous budget year was included in the 2008 SBA. This measure encourages efficient management of budget funds and makes it possible to keep management effects for those to whom funds were initially allocated.

## **Programme-based financing of the school education system**

Owing to the serious system optimization and the savings made, in 2007 we managed for the first time to allocate BGN 171 million for financing of school education programmes, while not increasing the budget for education as a percentage of GDP (these are almost 75% of the absolute increase of expenditure on education in 2007). These processes were not easy ones, but thanks to the assistance and understanding of education process actors, we can now boast of good results – the funds were spent for achievement of specific goals along 14 lines of action. In 2007, MES prepared the following programmes, which the Council of Ministers approved:

- Consolidation of the school network;
- Modernization of the resource base of schools;
- The school – a student territory;
- Qualification;
- ICT in school;
- Energy efficiency;
- Fuller outreach of children and students in compulsory schooling age (BGN 30.4 million);
- Differentiated pay.

These programmes made it possible for schools to prepare projects and apply for financing of certain activities, which could hardly be implemented with the funds from the maintenance subsidy.

In 2008, the funds for national development of school education programmes were increased by 30% up on the 2007 amount.

A new programme “Introduction of a national standardized external assessment system” has been approved in addition to 2007 programme updates.

In order to better meet the different needs and capacities of municipalities, the module “Providing breakfast and milk to all I – IV grade students” of the programme “Fuller outreach of children and students in compulsory schooling age” was decentralized. To this end, one should also mention the programme “With care for every student”. The principle of funding projects under the programme “Modernization of the resource base of schools” was changed for municipal schools. In these schools, projects will be implemented within the programmes “Co-

financing of municipal investment projects targeting improvement of the resource base of schools”.

### ***2.2.3. Introducing the components of a national external assessment system***

The first components of a national external assessment system were introduced in the period 2005-2007:

- National external assessment after IV grade was first introduced in 2007.
- The examinations after VII grade were organized for the first time in a test format. To replenish the pool of test examination tasks, MES has organized on a monthly basis national competitions for compiling tests and test questions on Bulgarian language and literature and Mathematics with the participation of teachers and students from all schools. The first national test solving competition for VII graders was organized.
- State school-leaving examination (Matura) was piloted in April 2007 pursuant to the requirements of the Public Education Act. Five percent of the XII grade students took part in the pilot Matura. It was organized in a test format.

The external assessment system was developed further in 2008:

- An external assessment after IV grade was carried out again and the knowledge and skills of students who have completed V grade were tested for the first time. Like in the past year, results had no effect on students' marks but provided a good and objective measure of the level of achievement of state educational requirements and contributed for the implementation of a more efficient educational policy. The external assessment carried out in the school year 2007/2008 made it possible to follow students' achievements in two consecutive IV grades. In the next year, the scope of external assessment will be extended to cover VI grade students.
- For a second year running, the examination after VII grade was in a test format. In the past three years, MES pursued a consistent policy targeting a wider choice of schools and forms of learning for students. It is manifested in the increased planned number of students to be admitted on basis of examinations after VII grade. This number was increased as follows: in 2006 – 26 000 students, 1000 classes; in 2007 – 27 560 students, 1060 classes; in 2008 – 33 587 students, 1198 classes.
- The second national test solving competition for VII graders was organized. For the first time the three top ranking students in the national round of the competition were given

the option to use their results as an examination mark for the respective subject and not sit for an entry examination.

- At the end of the school year 2007/2008, for the first time in decades, school-leaving examinations (Matura) were organized for all students completing XII grade.

The Matura was carried out following serious preparatory work, including an information campaign:

- On the insistence of the Minister of Education and Science the tertiary education institutions announced as early as February their decision concerning the admission to tertiary education institutions on basis of the Matura examination marks. A total of 41 tertiary education institutions accepted the Matura, including 36 which acknowledged Matura examination marks as university entry examination for certain specializations and 5 included these marks only as a component of the final ranking score. Information about the specializations and the method of recognition of Matura results was published on the Matura site.
- The National Assembly passed amendments to the Public Education Act aimed at improving the regulation of the secondary school-leaving examination and ensuring its implementation.
- Experts provided detailed information on the secondary school-leaving examination to parents and students during reception days and hours in the Regional Inspectorates of Education.
- MES opened a hotline where parents and students can ask questions about the Matura and get information and assistance from ministerial experts.
- A special information site integrating the Matura information has been launched ([www.zamaturite.bg](http://www.zamaturite.bg)).
- Test compiling competitions for all 15 Matura school subjects were organized for teachers and students.
- All schools having XII grade classes were provided with information boards with the most important Matura dates.
- A leaflet containing answers to Matura FAQs was prepared and published in three national newspapers.
- Debates and discussions on the Matura involving representatives of all stakeholders was organized.

Applications for Matura examination were filed by 76 080 secondary school graduates from 1071 schools (in the school year 2007/2008 XII graders were 79 334 in number). Applications

for Matura examination were filed also by 157 students with special educational needs (SEN). 72 951 students sat for the school-leaving examination. 1854 students sat for optional examinations. Over 12 000 teachers invigilated at the examinations. Fourteen national assessment commissions comprising 1382 assessors were set up for all school subjects. 145 823 examination papers were assessed. A commission of 320 people was set up to classify and declassify examination materials; technical commissions of 135 people were also formed.

The following main conclusions can be drawn up on the basis of Matura results:

- The system and the students accepted smoothly the state school-leaving examination. The Matura was organized and carried out without any notable problems.
- The test format presented no difficulties for the students.
- On national level, the Matura examination marks for Bulgarian language and literature are similar to the marks in the diplomas for completed secondary education of 2007 school-leavers.
- Very high, including maximum results, were registered in all subjects.
- Education and training in special-field secondary schools is at very high level – Matura results are higher than the marks in the diplomas for completed secondary education of 2007 school-leavers.
- There are sizeable differences in Matura results by types of schools.
- There are notable differences in Matura results at municipal level.
- Sizeable differences between the Matura results and the marks in the diplomas of completed secondary education of 2007 school-leavers are registered at school level (in History and Philosophy the difference is more than one unit).
- Students have difficulties in particular with the tasks to create a text and to state a thesis and support it with arguments.
- The results for the school subjects, which are most closely related to self-understanding, forming a scale of values and an attitude to the other people, the country, and the world, are not satisfactory.

#### ***2.2.4. Lowering the number of students in compulsory school age who are not enrolled or are dropping out***

The implementation of two major measures for preventing the drop out of students continued in the first two, as well as in the third year and the scope of these measures was broadened.

## **Providing free access to learning content**

- Until the school year 2007/2008 the State provided free textbooks and school aids to I – IV grade students in state and municipal schools. In January 2008, the Council of Ministers expanded the right to free textbooks and school aids to cover also V – VII grade students and private school students from I to VII grade.
- In order to take account of the needs of different schools and to enhance competition in the supply of free textbooks, their purchase was decentralised by delegating it to the municipalities which at their option granted the right to the schools.
- The set up of electronic learning courses in all general subjects, which are made available to the students in the national education portal, continued in the reference period. Development of new electronic aids for students will be financed from Operational Programme “Human Resources Development”.

## **Providing free transportation**

Over 700 motor vehicles have been procured in the period 2005-2008 in order to guarantee equal access to education of commensurate quality through free transport to the central schools, as follows:

- 2005 – 219 motor vehicles.
- 2006 – 153 motor vehicles.
- 2007 – 237 motor vehicles.
- 2008 – 95 motor vehicles.

### ***2.2.5. Information and Communication Technologies in school***

Serious efforts for strong set-up in of Information and Communication Technologies in school were made in the period 2006-2007:

- 2006 was proclaimed a year of e-learning.
- Information Technologies began to be taught as early as in V grade.
- E-learning courses have been developed.
- 3000 portable computers, 2000 multimedia projectors and 3000 multifunctional units (copier-printer-scanner-fax) have been purchased and made available to Bulgarian schools.

- Towards introduction of IT training in V grade, training has been provided to over 95 000 teachers of basic computer literacy, over 3000 heads of computer labs, over 2000 teachers of Information Technologies.
- The national education portal has been launched ([www.start.e-edu.bg](http://www.start.e-edu.bg)).
- Electronic register of the diplomas for completed secondary education has been set up and all diplomas issued at the end of 2006/2007 school year have been registered therein.
- Over 98% of the schools in the country have been provided with high-speed network connection to the Internet.

In the period 2007-2008, MES continued to pursue an active policy in respect of Information and Communication Technologies, the more important measure undertaken including:

- All teachers in the 31 biggest Bulgarian schools were provided with portable computers, a wireless (WiFi type) network was build and phased-in implementation of the Electronic School Register was launched, aiming to incorporate gradually all schools in the country.
- New computer configurations and peripherals have been purchased – 4500 portable and 3100 desktop computers, 3000 multimedia projectors have been made available to schools with over 300 students, whereby the ratio of the number of students using one computer improved to 11.5:1.
- A project for top up financing of national Information and Communication Technologies programmes has been approved within Operational Programme “Human Resources Development”. It includes activities for procuring of cheaper or free Internet access from the home for 20 000 teachers and specialized software for the schools; providing e-content development and foreign language training to teachers; upgrading the information system of education with new modules and application components; financing of activities for licensing and adaptation of valuable foreign language learning content; building a national ICT helpdesk and call centre; development of electronic aids in Humanities for I – III grades, etc.

#### ***2.2.6. Making the school a more attractive territory for the student and ritualizing school life***

MES makes targeted efforts to make school not just a place where students learn new things, but an attractive territory where they discover and express themselves, manifest and develop their talents, build a sense of belonging to a community, and spend their leisure time.

## National programmes

- *The School – a Student’s Territory Programme*

A special The School – A Student’s Territory Programme including two modules – Ritualizing School Life and Developing Out-of- School and School Activities was first approved in 2007. It finances projects targeting development of extracurricular and out-of-school activities and ritualization of school life such as:

- activities related to the celebration of school fests, traditions and school anniversaries.
- activities related to development of a school uniform element with a school distinguishing symbol.
- development of extracurricular and out-of-school activities.

In 2008, funds for ritualizing school life and for the financing of projects for development of school uniforms have been increased sizeably. A new module “National Student Competitions and National and International Olympiads” has been developed and allocated budget funds.

In 2007, a grant aid scheme “Let’s Make School an Attractive Territory for Young People” was launched within Operational Programme “Human Resources Development”. It finances activities for development of extracurricular and out-of-school activities. 251 contracts with beneficiaries were signed within the scheme (out of 689 project proposals submitted). As this grant scheme enjoys wide interest, it will be reopened in 2008.

- *Modernization of the Resource Base of Schools Programme*

- *Sports in School Module*

In 2007, significant funds were allocated for the building up of an environment for student sports development. The Sports in School Module is implemented along three lines: activities for rehabilitation and routine maintenance of outdoor grounds and facilities; activities for construction of outdoor sports grounds with artificial pavements; activities for modernisation of gymnasiums.

- *Rehabilitation of School Furniture and Technical Equipment*

In 2007, several schools were provided with new furniture. New equipment for teaching Chemistry, Physics, Biology has been provided as well.

- *Building of Accessible Architectural Environment Module*

In 2007, activities for adapting the architectural environment to the needs of the people with disabilities were carried out in 55 schools.

The 2008 module budget is important for construction of platforms and adaptation of sanitary rooms, and for building of accessible architectural environment in infrastructure-specific facilities (lifts and hydraulic facilities) in about 40 schools.

The schools which will benefit from the Modernization of the Resource Base Programme in 2008 are state schools. For municipal schools these activities are included in the programme “Co-financing of municipal investment projects targeting improvement of the resource base of schools”.

### **Holidays, rituals, awards, initiatives involving students**

Over the last years, MES has shown the necessary consistency and insistence in establishing traditions for the uniform celebration of national holidays and holidays important to the school education system, including by introducing new holidays:

- A tradition has been set up to open the school year on the same day in all schools by raising the national flag and under the sounds of the national anthem. To that end, national flags, pylons and CDs with the national anthem have been made available to all schools.
- On May 24<sup>th</sup> Bulgaria celebrates the Day of the Slavic Alphabet and Culture. The Cyrillic Alphabet was created by the Saint brothers Cyril and Methodius in 855. On MES' initiative 24 May is celebrated with a school parade of brass bands from all over the country.
- A day of students' self-government is organized on 9 May in MES and in all schools across the country.
- An active campaign to improve the attractiveness of vocational training by organizing national competitions by professions was launched for the first time. 15 competitions were organized in the 2007/2008 school year according to a schedule of events approved by the Minister of Education and Science.
- The first National Fashion Performance Show of models of school uniforms and school-leaving celebration clothes made by students from 12 vocational schools of clothing and fashion design across the country was organized in May 2007. In May 2008, MES

organized for a second year running a fashion performance show of school uniforms under the motto “School Clothes Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow”.

- 2008 was declared a year of key competences. Competitions on the following key competences were organized: “Native Language Communication”, “Mathematical Competence and Basic Knowledge of Natural Sciences and Technology”, “Social and Civil Competences”. Competitions on other key competences like “Foreign Language Communication”, “Learning Skill”, “Digital Competence (ICT)”, “Enterprise and Entrepreneurship”, “Cultural Awareness and Creativity” are to be organized for Bulgarian students.

### ***2.2.7. Improving teacher’s prestige and social status***

MES focuses its main efforts on designing a career development model for teachers and a model of differentiated teacher pay.

#### **Developing and introducing a differentiated teacher pay model**

In 2007, MES developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance, the World Bank, and the social partners a differentiated pay model which was put to broad-based discussion and was piloted in 27 educational institutions across the country. The model was included in the National Differentiated Pay Programme approved with Council of Ministers’ Decision No. 541/07.08.2007.

- Module One – pedagogical specialists.
- Module Two – heads of kindergartens, schools and service units.

In 2008 a wider outreach (97%) has been achieved compared to 2007, which calls for the following conclusions:

- The psychological barrier has been overcome because the principle of voluntary participation has been preserved.
- Pedagogical staff’s motivation to participate in the differentiated pay has been improved.

#### **Developing a career development model for teachers**

The model developed by MES has been examined with the social partners and put to broad-based discussion. It envisages five positions of teachers’ career development – junior teacher,

teacher, senior teacher, principal teacher, and teacher – methodologist. The main objectives of this model include: enhancing teachers' motivation for full-fledged participation in the teaching process; ensuring career development in accordance with the personal plans, capacity and ambitions of every teacher, linking the respective position to higher responsibilities but also with corresponding pay by integrating the model in the differentiated pay system. The new system will be implemented by the end of 2008.

### **Determining teacher salaries on a decentralized basis**

In 2008, in line with the decentralization of the administrative and financial management of schools, a number of principal changes were made in the method of determining the pay of school education system employees.

The pay of school education system employees is no longer determined centrally. The average gross monthly salaries were eliminated as an external limit of the teacher pay in a school. The new ordinance on the salaries of the employees in the units within the public education system sets out only the general salary structure rules and minimum salaries by position levels. The mechanisms applied to determine individual teacher salaries are negotiated in the collective labour contract and/or in internal salary rules, and individual salaries are determined by the school principal. Mechanisms have been set up to pay for the additional teacher load above the minimum rate – the amount is either included in the basic salary or given as an additional labour pay.

### **Qualification activities (in-service training; training in new subjects, ICT and foreign languages)**

- In the 2006/2007 school year, 24 214 teachers were included in routine qualification activities and in the period August 2007 – August 2008 their number was 26 017.
- In addition to routine qualification, in the first two years the main focus of qualification activities was placed on providing teachers with training on “Man and Nature” for V and VI grade, as well as on the training of basic ICT skills.
- Special focus was placed on foreign language teachers. On basis of the National Programme for Qualification of Pedagogical Staff, which the Council of Ministers approved in 2007, 1455 teachers with lower than higher education were provided with training for the professional qualification of a foreign language teacher. 1150 teachers

with higher education continue their qualification training for acquiring the professional qualification of a foreign language teacher. The training is scheduled for completion in November 2008. Qualification courses for improving the knowledge, skills and competences of foreign language teachers were organized and carried out according to the requirements of the Common European Framework of Languages, as follows: 200 teachers of Spanish; 100 teachers of Russian; 60 teachers of French.

- The project “Improving the qualification and building an environment for career development of teachers, professors in high schools and school principals”, which has been approved within Operational Programme “Human Resources Development”, will be launched by the end of 2008. Implementation of project activities will make it possible to tailor professional competence development to the demand of highly qualified teachers in priority areas:
  - introductory qualification for newly appointed teachers.
  - routine and upgrading qualification for key competences – qualification courses for foreign language teachers and certification by accredited external institutions.
  - ICT and digital competence qualification courses.
  - Qualification courses for teachers from vocational schools, with focus on enterprise and entrepreneurship.

#### ***2.2.8. Improving the managerial competence of school principals***

The Institute of School Principals became effectively operational on 1 November 2006 and launched a qualification programme for school principals. The qualification programme started with training of current school principals. From November 2006 till July 2007 all 2924 school principals completed short-term courses on managerial skills improvement, including on delegated budget management.

Over the period September 2007 – July 2008, training was provided to 2336 school principals. 67 newly appointed school principals also received training. By the end of 2008, 720 school principals and 200 heads of kindergarten will receive training within two national programmes.

#### ***2.2.9. Consolidation of the school network. Central and protected schools.***

In the past few years MES and the municipalities have made serious efforts to consolidate and restructure the school network and to cut down the number of smaller size and merged classes.

The consolidation process is a demonstration of the principle of ensuring an opportunity for every child to receive access to quality education, and of the goals of improving education cost efficiency.

### **Consolidation of the school network**

Due to the decreasing number of students, a special Consolidation of the School Network Programme has been approved in support of municipal efforts to consolidate the school network and strengthen central schools. 64 municipalities applied with 78 projects for funding from the Consolidation of the School Network module. 47 municipal programmes were selected within the measure “School restructuring and set up of central schools”. In 2007, municipalities closed a total of 74 schools with funding from the programme and in 9 municipalities closing of more than 1 school was financed. 22 municipal programmes are selected within the measure “Cutting down the number of classes”. 64 classes were closed, resulting in improved rate “number of students per class”.

The programme continued in 2008 and total funds were increased three times. 126 municipal programs for consolidation and 5 projects of Regional Inspectorates of Education for consolidation of the network of special schools have been submitted for the programme. 123 municipal programmes for consolidation and 5 projects for consolidation of the network of special schools with a total value of BGN 1.4 million have been selected. In 2008, the number of schools closed with funding from the programme is 296 and the number of transformed schools is 13. Six special schools were also closed. In 2008, municipalities received funding for consolidation of the school network and set up of central schools.

In 2008, the programme scope was expanded to include a new module “Consolidation of the school internal structure” which finances the payment of compensations for termination of labour relations resulting from changes in the personnel structure and composition. Funding for the module is provided on a monthly basis.

Additional instruments were provided in 2008 within the policy for ensuring equal access to education and as a corrective of the school network consolidation – additional financing for central schools and regulation of the protected school status.

## **Central schools**

May 2008 amendments to the Public Education Act regulate a mechanism for additional financing of central schools for transport, canteen meals and semi-boarding education. This opens up additional opportunities for strengthening of central schools, in parallel to the support provided along the line of school network consolidation.

## **Protected schools**

MES has developed and put forward for discussion the protected schools concept – closing these schools would impair the access to education. The Minister of Education and Science introduced in the parliamentary Education and Science Commission possible criteria for giving a protected school status and the after effects of designating a school a protected one. The protected school status was regulated in the Public Education Act.

### ***2.2.10. Integrating children with special educational needs and children for whom Bulgarian is not their mother tongue***

Notable progress was registered in 2006-2007 in respect of the integration of children with special educational needs and of children for whom Bulgarian is not their mother tongue:

- the targeted policy pursued in the past few years resulted in higher number of children and students with special educational needs integrated in kindergartens and schools – in 2007 they were 4380 compared to 1593 in 2006 (about 175% up). The number of kindergartens and schools providing integrated training to children and students with special educational needs is increasing steadily – 770 schools and 183 kindergartens in 2007 against 130 in 2004, or about 631% up on 2004 and 40% up on 2006.
- Serious efforts have been made also to build accessible architectural environment in kindergartens, schools and service units. The number of institutions with such environment is increasing and in August 2007 stands at 184 – 153 schools, 22 kindergartens and 9 service units. In 2007, projects for ensuring architectural access to children and students with special educational needs in another 55 schools and service units were developed and approved under module “Building an accessible architectural environment” of the national programme “Modernization of the school resource base”.

- The 28 resource centres for integrated education of children and students with special educational needs set up in 2006 were successfully launched and in 2007 they employ 635 resource teachers and specialists.
- Active policy for deinstitutionalization of children from special schools and consolidation of the network of special schools is pursued.
- Fifteen homes for raising and educating children deprived from parental care (HRECDPC) and 31 special schools were closed in the period 2006-2007, including: 13 auxiliary schools for mentally retarded students, 2 schools for children with speech problems, 1 hospital school; 1 health improving school; 12 sociopedagogical boarding schools (for students with deviational behaviour); 1 auxiliary instructive boarding school (for mentally retarded students with deviational behaviour); 1 day kindergarten for children with physical disabilities. The students from the closed special schools have been directed mainly to integrated education in a mainstream educational environment.
- From 1 January 2007 HRECDPCs have been transformed into special social service institutions (childcare homes) under the Social Assistance Act and their management was delegated to municipalities.
  - The Centre for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities set up with Council of Ministers' Decree No. 4/11.01.2005 became operational in 2006.
  - According to data from the Regional Inspectorates of Education, in the 2006/2007 school year 16 577 Roma students were trained in 262 receiving schools outside Roma quarters with 578 semi-boarded groups. In the 2006/2007 school year, 95 students studied Roma as their mother tongue.

Active work in the field continued in 2008:

- In 2008, the number of children and students educated on an integrated basis in kindergartens and schools is 5573 (1193 up on 2007). The integrated education of these children and students is supported by 883 resource teachers, psychologists, speech therapists and hearing rehabilitators.
- Over 500 pedagogues receive training on working with children with disabilities in a mainstream educational environment.
- Implementation of activities for deinstitutionalization of children from special schools and consolidation of the network of special schools continued. 7 special schools have been closed – 3 auxiliary schools and 4 sociopedagogical boarding schools. Thus by the end of the 2007/2008 school year special schools in Bulgaria have been reduced to 100.

- Free textbooks for students with special educational needs and Braille textbooks for children with impaired sight have been provided.
- Special efforts have been made to provide the necessary conditions, assistance and technical means for the students with special educational needs to have no problems when sitting for the secondary school-leaving examination:
  - longer examination hours;
  - accessible architectural environment, separate rooms;
  - consulting teachers and other specialists (psychologists) depending on the type of disability and student's individual needs;
  - oral examination for students with disabilities which prevent them from sitting for a written examination;
  - adapted text (for example, larger characters) and technical devices (Braille machines, Braille printers, Braille paper, magnifying glasses, audiotapes, discs with special computer programs).
- Methodological guidance has been developed for the complex pedagogical assessment teams in the Regional Inspectorates of Education.
- A seminar was organized to train resource centre directors on preparing of programmes for development of integrated education in the respective region, on building up partnership with parents and the society in general.
- Seminars and working meetings were organized with a view to achieve a change of attitudes towards support for the integration of children with special educational needs.
- Two information campaigns were organized in support of the integration of children with special educational needs and towards changing public attitudes, as well as two national conferences with international participation on the education of children with special educational needs and on inclusive education.
- Four training seminars on assessment of educational needs and building of supportive environment in kindergartens and schools were organized with experts, pedagogues, and parents, representatives of other institutions and of non-governmental organizations.
- In the second half of 2007, the Centre for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities opened up an opportunity for implementation of various activities under 4 programmes.

## **2.3. HIGHER EDUCATION**

During the last years, the experts of the Ministry of Education and Science took an effort in reaching relative agreement on the main challenges, facing by the system of higher education, and the measures for overcoming them, taking into account current trends in Europe and throughout the world. Back in 2006, the Ministry initiated a broad public discussion on the key elements of the future Strategy for the Development of Higher Education, which is to form the basis for a new Law on Higher Education. Part of the measures proposed became part of the Law for Amending and Supplementing the Law on Higher Education of May, 2007. The main goal of the amendments was to create opportunities for competition among universities and thus increase the quality of higher education. Part of the amendments had the immediate aim of strengthening external control over the activity of universities in terms of compliance with the law and spending of public funds in a transparent manner.

### ***2.3.1. Changes in the model of financing of higher education***

- One of the most significant changes, stimulating the competition among universities, has been the substantial increase in the number of students enrolled each year. For the academic year 2008/2009 the universities offered places for 58 802 students (out of which 50 581 in state universities, incl. military academies, and 9914 – in privately owned universities). This is an increase of over 6000 places in comparison with the year 2007/2008 and of over 15 000 places in comparison with the year 2006/2007. The places for doctoral students in universities and scientific institutes have increased by 46 % in comparison with the year 2007/2008 – 1403 (1049 full-time students and 354 part-time students), while in the year 2006/2007 the number of those students was 963. The increased number of students to be accepted in universities gives opportunities to more people, completing their secondary education, to make a choice in accordance with their personal preferences, capacities and ambitions and decreases the number of students, enrolling in illegal structures, encourages universities to offer attractive educational environment and creates potential for full abolishment of entry examinations and the introduction of the state matriculation examinations as an “entrance” to higher education.
- With the amendments of the law, the universities also received more powers in determining tuition fees. This year the Council of Ministers approved again the proposals of universities for their tuition fees, as they were made, adhering to the following two principles: fees should be lower than 30 % of the differentiated normative allowances for students and should not exceed

two average monthly salaries for the country, as determined by the National Institute of Statistics.

- In order to increase the accountability and responsibility of universities for the spending of public funds, the Law on Higher Education stipulated that the state subsidy for universities should be based on the number of students actually enrolled and not on the number of places announced. Along with this, a financial sanction is imposed on state universities, which do not work within the capacities, determined by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency. In 2008 the Ministry of Education and Science has exercised control over the number of students accepted, the universities' adherence to their pre-determined capacity and undertook measures for bringing institutions into compliance.

### ***2.3.2. Changes, related to the institutions, offering higher education***

The Law on Higher Education introduced an express prohibition for teaching to be done outside the main units and branches of the universities, created in accordance with the law.

### ***2.3.3. Increasing transparency in the management of universities through the creation of boards of trustees***

The Law on Higher Education provides for each state university to create a board of trustees, comprising persons from outside the university. Up until now, 16 state universities have created their boards.

### ***2.3.4. Improvement in the accreditation regime and in the quality control over the higher education***

- The availability of academic staff and proper material conditions was introduced as an absolute condition for the accreditation of universities.
- A prohibition was introduced for one and the same member of the academic staff to take part in the accreditation of more than two universities.
- An obligation was introduced for an opinion poll of students to be done at least once a year, with the results being announced publicly.
- Each member of the academic staff is now obligated to develop and announce a description of his/her course.

- There is now a requirement for the evaluation of knowledge and skills of students to be done in writing, unless the specifics of the respective field do not allow that.

### ***2.3.5 . Improvement of the access to education and the living conditions of students***

#### **The Law on Loans for Undergraduate, Master and PhD Students**

In July 2008 the National Assembly adopted the Law on Loans for Undergraduate, Master and PhD Students. The draft was developed with the support of the Ministry of Finance and the Association of Banks in Bulgaria and was subject of a broad discussion.

- Undergraduate, Master and PhD students shall have the right to apply for loans if they:
  - have not attained 35 years of age;
  - are currently studying towards obtaining a Bachelor (Bachelor or Professional Bachelor), Master or PhD degree in a state or privately owned university or scientific organization in the Republic of Bulgaria, created and functioning pursuant to the law;
  - have not been suspended or have not left their degree programmes;
  - have not already obtained the same degree.
- Loans shall be given for the whole or part of the period of education for covering tuition fees and/or living allowance. The right to use a loan for living allowance shall arise in case of having or fully adopting a child during the study period and shall belong to the parent, exercising parental rights, or, if those are the two parents, to only one of them.
- Loans for students shall be granted with the financial support of the state in the form of:
  - guaranteeing the loan, including the principal and the interest;
  - covering the payments for the whole or part of the loan in the cases, determined by law;
  - bonus for good management.
- The following concessions for students are provided for:
  - loans are granted without any collateral or fees, commissions or other expenses;
  - low interest rates – the base interest rate of the Bulgarian National Bank, increased by two points;
  - long gratuitous period – from the signing of the loan agreement until one year after the first date, offered for the last state examination or thesis defense, or after the end date of the PhD

programme. During the gratuitous period students shall not repay the principal or the interest on the loan;

- long repayment period – 10 years from the end of the gratuitous period;
- opportunity for advance repayment without fees, commissions or additional interest;
- release from the obligations under the loan – by virtue of the law.

- Loans shall be given by banks, having concluded a standard contract with the Minister of Education and Science. Those banks will be included in a special electronic register, maintained by the Ministry of Education and Science.

- The new National Council on Student Loans chaired by the Minister of Education and Science, provided for in the law, was established. A standard contract to be offered to the banks is in a process of elaboration.

### **Improvement of the conditions in student dormitories**

- In 2007 the central state budget provided additional (beside the funds for capital expenses, included in the transfers to state universities) funds for repairs and rebuilding of student dormitories. Additionally, after consultations with universities and the Ministry of Finance, BGN 40 million from the state budget surplus were given at the end of the year for repairs, building, modernization and improvement of the material conditions in state universities.

- In 2008 the Council of Ministers adopted a programme for tied financing of repairs of student dormitories, amounting to BGN 50 million. Over 10 student dormitories will be repaired with these funds until the end of this year.

### **Increase of the scholarships for undergraduate, Master and PhD students**

- In 2008 the Council of Ministers increased the maximum amount of student scholarships from 90 to BGN 120.

- PhD students' scholarships were almost doubled – from BGN 250 to 450. A one-time bonus of BGN 1000 is provided for if the student submits his/her dissertation on time and another one-time bonus of BGN 1000 is given if the student defends his/her dissertation within one year after submission. Each university will be given BGN 4000 for the conduct of the defense procedures.

- Under the Human Resources Development Operational Programme additional funding of BGN 10 million will be provided for student scholarships, BGN 2 million for practical internships and training in companies and organizations, as well as another BGN 4 million for supporting PhD, post-doctoral, other post-graduate students and young scholars.

### ***2.3.6. Preservation of state property, managed by higher schools***

A law, prohibiting the restitution of lands, managed by higher schools, is being drafted. After the draft is elaborated, it will be open for public discussion and will be submitted for adoption to the Council of Ministers.

### ***2.3.7. Creation of electronic registers***

- During the reporting period, the Ministry of Education and Science created four electronic registers:
  - Register of current undergraduate, Master and PhD students and students, who have left their programmes;
  - Register of academic staff members in the universities;
  - Register of certificates of recognition of higher education;
  - Register of higher education diplomas.
- In accordance with the Law on Student Loans two more registers will also be created – a register of banks, included in the loan system, and a register of loan agreements.
- Drafting of an Ordinance for protection of higher education diplomas with hologram stickers.

## **2.4. COOPERATION FOR DEVELOPMENT: SCHOLARSHIPS GRANTED BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE TO FOREIGN STUDENTS FROM COUNTRIES NON-MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR THE PERIOD 2004 – 2008**

On the basis of long term bilateral agreements between the Republic of Bulgaria and states non-member of EU, the programmes, agreements and protocols signed and valid, stipulate the exchange of students for the period of their validity. The documents reflect the requirements of

the country of origin and the country of destination (host country) concerning the applicants' documents and the financial terms for obtaining a monthly scholarship, hostel accommodation, insurance and benefits. The selection of the candidates is made by the competent institutions in the country of origin, and the acceptance is approved in compliance with Bulgarian legislation.

Implementing the bilateral programmes, agreements and protocols during the period 2004 – 2008, the Republic of Bulgaria has granted scholarships to 154 foreign students to study in Bulgarian higher schools, as follows:

Armenia – 5, Vietnam – 15, Iran – 1, China – 48, Korea – 2, Kazakhstan – 3; FYRO Macedonia – 15, Mongolia – 3, Moldova – 37, Ukraine – 17, Croatia – 1, Serbia – 7.

According to Decree of the Council of Ministers No.103/2003 for educational activities among Bulgarians abroad, and Decree of the Council of Ministers No.228/1997 for accepting citizens of FYRO Macedonia as students in Bulgarian higher schools, annually 550 places are approved by Decree of the Council of Ministers. Students from Moldova, Ukraine, Serbia, FYRO Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo and Albania are accepted; for the above mentioned period they are approximately 1850.

On the basis of Decree of the Council of Ministers No.240/28.10.2003 for conceding free support for the reconstruction of Iraq within the framework of the Donors' Conference in Madrid, 13 Iraqi citizens were accepted to study in Bulgarian higher schools during the academic year 2005-2006, for obtaining a Master's degree. The resources for education, including the language preparatory and specialized courses, scholarships, subsistence, medical insurance and hostel accommodation, are provided by Bulgaria.

The total of the 4 year-period amounts to 2017 foreign students.

## **2.5. EDUCATIONAL POLICY AMONG BULGARIANS ABROAD**

In 2007-2008 the educational policy of the country among Bulgarians abroad became a serious subject of concern. The Ministry's experts made an analysis of the present state of affairs and, based on it, proposed new principles and specific measures to form a more effective and modern policy of the state towards Bulgarian communities abroad.

## **2.6. COOPERATION WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS**

### **Discussion of the key elements in the educational policy**

The expert team of the Ministry of Education and Science work in close cooperation with the representatives of trade and employers' unions and regularly discuss with them the main issues, related to the labour and social security status of the employees, working in the system of public education, and their conditions of labour. Representatives of trade unions and the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB) have taken part in working parties, related to the introduction of differentiated payment, the optimization of the school network, the development of the uniform standards of living allowance, etc.

### **Joint projects**

- The Minister of Education and Science has taken part in a number of events, organized by the NAMRB;
- The Ministry of Education and Science and NAMRB implement a joint pilot project for management decentralization in the system of school education;
- Policy discussions are also organized.

### **Cooperation with outside experts and civil society structures**

- A Public Council on the Issues of Religious Education was created as a consultative body with the Minister of Education and Science in order to elaborate a concept on the forms, mechanisms and terms for the introduction of Religion as a compulsory school subject. A special survey was also conducted on the public attitude towards the teaching of Religion in schools. The concept developed was presented at a special roundtable before Members of Parliament, sociologists, political scientists, etc.
- The Association of Banks in Bulgaria has taken an active part in the discussion of the main elements of the student loan model in Bulgaria and has rendered expert assistance to the team of the Ministry in the development of the draft law, regulating student loans.
- The Ministry signed with the Bulgarian Association for Information Technologies a memorandum for cooperation on the introduction and application of Information and

Communication Technologies in the system of public education and in the improvement of the quality of education.

- A meeting was held with the Board of the Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria, where the opportunities for broader participation of the private sector in the financing of scientific research was discussed, as well as the means of cooperation between business circles and the scientific institutions for building scientific infrastructure in Bulgaria and the development of hi-tech centers in cooperation with businesses.
- The Ministry and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation organized a roundtable on *The New Educational Structure of Secondary Education*. Teachers, heads of Regional Inspectorates of Education, trade unions, teachers' organizations, employers and representatives of the academic community took part in the discussion on the draft of new curriculum for VIII – XII grade.
- A roundtable was held with sociologists, political scientists, psychologists and activists, discussing the results of the state matriculation examinations and formulating conclusions.
- By order of the Minister of Education and Science a working group was created on the learning of literary Bulgarian language, comprising representatives of the academic and scientific community, as well as teachers and experts. Until the end of 2008 the working group has to analyze the education in the Bulgarian language, to elaborate state educational requirements towards the learning of Bulgarian language and to make an assessment of the need to adopt a law, regulating the use and protection of literary Bulgarian language.

## **2.7. BULGARIAN EDUCATION AND THE EU**

### ***Human Resources Development Operational Programme***

The Ministry of Education and Science, as an intermediate unit under the Human Resources Development Operational Programme, is directly responsible under priority axes 3 and 4, namely “Improvement of the quality of education and training pursuant to the needs of the labour market for building a knowledge-based economy” and “Improvement of the access to education and training”. The financial resources under those priorities amount to EURO 436 993 047, which is 36 % of the overall budget of the operational programme.

- In 2007 Ministry of Education and Science opened four calls for proposals under programmes, financed by the Human Resources Development Operational Programme:

- Making Schools Attractive for Young People.

- Development of Mechanisms for School and Student Practical Internships.

- Support for the Development of Doctoral, Postdoctoral, Other Postgraduate Students and Young Scholars.

- Creation of Favourable Multicultural Environment for Practical Implementation of Intercultural Education and Training.

Out of the 1049 proposals received, 405 were approved and contracts were concluded with 397 beneficiaries.

- In June 2008 Ministry of Education and Science opened 6 new procedures. Financing, amounting to BGN 104 636 905, will be given to proposals under the following programmes:

- Information and Communication Technologies in the System of Public Education;

- Enhancing the Qualification and Creation of Opportunities for Career Development of Teachers, Academics and School Headmasters;

- Supporting the Introduction of Delegated Budgets;

- Development of a System for Quality Assessment of Secondary Education and a Rating System for Universities in the Republic of Bulgaria;

- Educational Services for Pupils with Insufficient or Outstanding Performance;

- Student Scholarships for Equal Access to Education and Enhancing the Motivation towards Better Results.

- In August and September 2008 three new calls were launched under the following programmes:

- Making Schools Attractive for Young People.

- Development of Mechanisms for School and Student Practical Internships.

- Support for the Development of Doctoral, Postdoctoral, Other Postgraduate Students and Young Scholars.

- To popularize the calls under the Human Resources Development Operational Programme, for which it is responsible, the Ministry of Education and Science held an information campaign, including information days throughout the country.

### ***Bulgaria's participation in EU programmes in the field of education***

As a Member State of the EU, Bulgaria also takes part in the EU Lifelong Learning Programme (2007 – 2013).

### ***Harmonization of Bulgarian legislation with the *acquis communautaire****

- Amendments and supplements to the Law on Public Education, introducing in Bulgarian legislation the requirements of Council Directive 77/486 EEC on the education of the children of migrant workers.
- Amendments and supplements in the Law on Higher Education, providing for enrollment of citizens of EU Member States in Bulgarian universities under the same conditions as for the Bulgarian citizens and providing for universities from EU Member States to be able to open branches on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria.
  - Adoption of a Law for Recognition of Professional Qualifications, introducing into Bulgarian legislation the requirements of Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, Council Directive 2006/100/EC of 20 November 2006 adapting certain Directives in the field of freedom of movement of persons, by reason of the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, Council Directive 74/556/EEC of 4 June 1974 laying down detailed provisions concerning transitional measures relating to activities, trade in and distribution of toxic products and activities entailing the professional use of such products including activities of intermediaries and Council Directive 74/557/EEC of 4 June 1974 on the attainment of freedom of establishment and freedom to provide services in respect of activities of self-employed persons and of intermediaries engaging in the trade and distribution of toxic products.
- Amendments in secondary legislation, related to the introduction of the requirements of the EU legislation towards the attainment of qualification in certain professions.
- Adoption by the Council of Ministers of a List of Regulated Professions in the Republic of Bulgaria. The Council's Decision also determines the competent authorities, giving/recognizing the right to exercise regulated professions in the country. Current information on issues, related to professional recognition in Member States, could be found on <http://regprof.nacid.bg>.
- Adoption in June 2008 of a Law for Ratification of the Convention defining the Statute of the European Schools.

### *Participation in the work of the bodies of the EU*

As of 1 January 2007, when Bulgaria became a Member State of the EU, the Ministry of Education and Science participates actively in the decision-making process and in the formation of the education policy of the Community. Bulgaria also takes an active part in the Council of the European Union in its format, gathering Ministers of Education, as well as in the work of its supporting bodies.

### **2.8. PARTICIPATION IN THE UNESCO PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES**

Bulgaria regularly participates in different events under the auspices of UNESCO.

At present, the Ministry of Education and Science is working for the promotion and implementation of UNESCO's Medium-term Strategy (2008-2013) in the field of Education, as well as of the Resolutions adopted by the Commission of Education, particularly those related to the European and East-European region.

Different activities at both international and national level are related to UNESCO's ASPnet schools. The participation of Bulgaria in the global ASP network of UNESCO is of particular importance to the secondary education in the country. Bulgarian schools joined the network in 1976 and now Bulgarian ASPnet includes 62 schools from all educational levels and geographical regions in Bulgaria. Its activities promote the main objective of the global ASPnet to create traditions and modern strategies for quality education and for the access to it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Within the period 2005-2007 the activities of Bulgarian ASPnet schools were dedicated to the commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Bulgaria in UNESCO.

In 2008 the activities of the ASPnet schools are connected with the European Year of the Intercultural Dialogue, declared by the European Parliament. The purpose is to further develop the cooperation in this area: to convert the intercultural dialogue into a means for better co-existence and mutual understanding, to increase the contribution of different cultures and forms of cultural diversity expression. One of the important international projects with the participation of ASPnet schools is "InterMuse: Intercultural Education through Museums", carried out with the NGO "SAGE".

The four-year mandate of Bulgaria, elected at the 2003 General Conference member of the Council of the International Bureau of Education (IBE) in Geneva, expired in 2007. During that

period Bulgaria was represented by the Ministry of Education and Science and was elected four times member of the Administrative Group of the Council.

By proposal of the Bureau of the Bulgarian National Commission, UNESCO approved and co-financed under the 2006-2007 Participation Programme a collection of good practices “The School: a Desired Territory for the Student”, elaborated by the Ministry of Education and Science. The book includes the 12 awarded reports presented at a national conference under the same name. Translated into English it reflects the main objective of the conference: to present to Bulgarian and international public opinion good pedagogical school practices, related to students’ motivation for learning, the provision of a stimulating school environment which meets the requirements, interests and needs of young people.

Under the patronage of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniel Valtchev, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education and Science, MES announced a competition for drawing and poster in an electronic version under the motto “It is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed”. The competition indicated the position of Bulgaria in UNESCO, the activity of the Bulgarian ASPnet schools as laboratories of creativity and popularization of the Bulgarian traditions in the world of education and science, the new technologies as a challenge for raising the quality of education. The competition was anonymous and open to all Bulgarian schools for students aged from 15 to 19 years old from different regions of the country. A specialized jury awarded first, second and third prizes, both for drawing and poster.

Within the period 2005-2008 the Bulgarian ASPnet Schools participated in a series of projects, the most important being: *Mondialogo*, a joint project of UNESCO and Daimler; the International student course *The cultural heritage and the youth*, in Norway; Youth Water Congress *The heritage of the Danube* in the framework of the project *The Blue Danube*, in Hungary; the International Conference within the project *The Great Volga River Route - Uniting the Seas (Baltic, Black and Caspian Sea)*, in Russia.

Within the framework of *Education for All* in 2007 representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science took part in the International Symposium *The cultural corridors in South-Eastern Europe – a challenge for capacity building*, organized in cooperation with the European Centre for Higher Education (CEPES), Bucharest, Romania.

Fruitful cooperation with CEPES has also been established in the field of higher education. Actually, there are five Bulgarian UNESCO Chairs, established within Bulgarian higher schools:

- UNESCO Chair in Culture of Peace and Human Rights, established in 1998 at Bourgas Free University;
- French-speaking UNESCO Chair in Engineering for Development, established in 1994 at the Technical University of Sofia;
- UNESCO Chair in Communication and Public Relations, established in 1995 at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" , within the framework of ORBICOM Network;
- UNESCO Chair in Sustainable Development and Ecological Awareness, established in 1997 at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski";
- UNESCO Chair in Cultural Management and Cultural Policies , established in 1997 at "Neofit Rilski" South-West University.

The Bulgarian government has taken the decision to nominate Mrs. Irina Bokova – Bulgarian ambassador in France and Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to UNESCO, for Director General of UNESCO.

### **3. THE MAIN SHORT-TERM CHALLENGES BEFORE THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE**

#### **3.1. IN THE FIELD OF SCHOOL EDUCATION**

- Adoption of a new law, regulating school education.
- Introduction of a system for career development of teachers.
- Introduction of the three pillars of the system of differentiated payment.
- Conducting outside assessment in the VI school grade.

#### **3.2. IN THE FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

- Continued work on the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education and amendments or a new Law on Higher Education.

*Main emphasis* – accreditation of universities and quality assurance

- Measures for protection of higher education diplomas – hologram stickers.
- Creation of an attractive social package for young scholars (scholarships, support for participation in conferences, etc.).
- Creation of an academic city for young scholars and their families.
- Strengthening of the higher schools as research centers.

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Education and training are key factors in promoting employability, active citizenship, as well as personal and professional fulfilment. The main goals of the Government of Bulgaria should be to cultivate the adaptability of the education system towards an ever-changing environment, and to guarantee its compliance with the European and international standards. Against that background, the Bulgarian education system continues its sustainable development towards reaching the common European and international goals by keeping its best traditions, being open for innovations and making the reforms transparent and understandable for all actors.

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