



Bulgaria

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Principles and general objectives of education

Education in Bulgaria is a right for all citizens, the overall goal being to prepare individuals for responsible citizenship in a democratic society. Education in the country encompasses two main areas: developing the intellectual potential of students, and instilling a sense of values and patriotism that will foster thoughtful, active members of society. With this goal in mind, education in the country seeks to provide basic skills and general education for all citizens from the age of 6 to 16 years, create strong ties between in-school instruction and preparation for life outside the classroom, and encourage a sense of responsible citizenship and sensitivity to global issues.

The objectives of education in Bulgaria are: to develop the intellectual potential of each student, foster individuality, independence and a desire for continual self-education; instil national, cultural and historical self-awareness, and responsible citizenship; ensure general and vocational training; encourage continual education, self-education and a desire to partake in public activities under the conditions of a market economy.

Current educational priorities and concerns

The development of the education system is linked to the transition to a democratic society and a free market economy. These processes are reflected in an increasingly decentralized education system where educational institutions have more choice in defining their curricula and programmes.

The expected results of this evolving system are:

- higher motivation on the part of students to obtain education;
- creation of stronger links between class content and the labour needs of the country;
- mastering and teaching current information technologies;
- developing more relevant profile-setting in education according to the interests and abilities of the students.

The education reform is also based on principles stemming from traditions in Bulgarian education, such as: ensuring an equal start for everyone through general and compulsory education up to the age of 16; providing secondary education for every citizen and a free choice of education; free-of-charge instruction in the State-funded and municipal schools; equality and joint instruction (co-education) of the pupils of



both gender; forging links between comprehensive and vocational training and between theory and practice; effective combining of compulsory and optional instruction; combining the in-class, group and individual forms of work; participation of parents and the community in school activities; providing opportunities for continuing instruction, ensuring various types of education and professional qualification regardless of age.

Since 1998, important reforms in the curriculum and education system have taken place, including: amendments to the National Education Act introduced the basic and secondary levels of schooling; general concepts, curricula and teaching materials were developed for Christian religious education; Islam was introduced as a school subject; information technology became a compulsory subject at the upper secondary level; national standards for eighteen pilot professions in eleven vocational fields were developed in compliance with the regulations of the European Union; and new curricula was developed in the fields of economics, tourism and agriculture in compliance with labor market requirements. Parents are now free to choose the type of school their children might attend.

The major problems and challenges for Bulgaria in the beginning of the twenty-first century are: the low enrolment of pupils in compulsory school age; the low graduation rate; problems ensuring equal rights within schools, as well as equal access to education; difficulties in implementing new information and communication technologies; a negative public attitude towards recent reforms; insufficient funding of education; and the perception of teaching as a profession with low prestige.

For the period until the year 2005, the Ministry of Education and Science has set the following essential goals: the further democratization and decentralization of education by encouraging wider autonomy and discretion at the regional and school levels, and public participation in solving key educational problems; developing a learner-centred curriculum; upgrading the quality of education by ensuring basic education for all, and mastering a minimum requirement of knowledge and skills for the social and professional realization of the student; modernizing the system for teachers' qualification and their professional growth; extending opportunities for optional instruction; allowing for diversity, flexibility and different ways of combining instructional content; developing a flexible system for vocational education and training; replacing the model in higher education of "narrow" specializations to wide-profile training; enhancing the quality of initial and in-service teacher training through the implementation of state requirements and the development of state standards; raising the level of mother tongue and foreign language instruction of students as an especially important condition for successful social and professional communication and achievement; making adequate use of computer equipment and information technologies in school education; and providing continuity of education in line with current technological developments.

The period of political transition has revealed many pedagogical and social problems which affect elementary school. The question of diagnosing the readiness of children for school has proved particularly topical in recent years. Keeping all children in school during compulsory education, and ensuring the enrolment of those who are not proficient in the Bulgarian language are major concerns. The most



pressing current concern is the need to double the number of schools in urban areas, where high enrolment requires that instruction be currently organized in two shifts.

The changes introduced in the education system are aimed at taking into account the globalization processes and training students with a view to enabling them to find their own place of self-realization, in their country, in the European space, as well as in the world. These changes seek to mirror the educational trends and innovations in the developed countries, preserving and furthering the good national traditions with a view to achieving a quality education for all. One of the principal objectives is to provide access to education and equal possibilities for all children and students, use of the potential of information and communication technologies (ICT) in raising the level of their training and development. Changes should also guarantee a high flexibility of human resources with a view to solving the problems access to the labour market, and ensure the full integration of Bulgaria into the European Union (the country officially entered the European Union in January 2007).

The priorities in the development of the education over the next years are: ensuring stability; enhancing the quality of education and vocational qualifications; providing equal access to education and equal possibilities for education; integrating children and students of different ethnic origin; integrating children and students with special educational needs; introducing ICT; introducing early foreign language teaching as a compulsory subject from grade 2 and ensuring possibilities for learning two foreign languages at the basic education level; improving the management and provision of resources for the system; fostering an efficient management of resources and their optimal utilization; enhancing teachers' qualifications, economic and social status; and establishing and maintaining an effective system of control over the quality of education. (MES, 2004).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

According to the provisions of the **Public Education Act**, adopted in 1991 and amended in 2002 and 2003, education in the country is secular. The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) must supply all students in Grades I-VIII with textbooks and obligatory manuals free of charge. Preparatory classes should be organized for children over 6 years of age subject to compulsory education, but who are in poor command of the Bulgarian language and have not attended kindergarten.

During recent years, several legislative instruments have been adopted for the development of the private school sector. For example, the Ordinance on **Private Schools of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technologies** (now the Ministry of Education and Science) states that the government must create the necessary conditions for the development of private school systems. The Ministry's position is that private schools, within the context of the changing economic, political, social and cultural realities in the country, have their place in the system of formal education. They present an extra opportunity for ensuring the constitutional right of each citizen to freely choose the type of schools and form of his/her education.

A new structure for higher education has been in force since the end of 1995, enacted by the **Higher Education Act** adopted by the Parliament. In line with



Chapter 10 of this Act, the setting up of a National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Establishments is intended to contribute to the development and application of criteria and norms for the evaluation of profitability in different education establishments. The last amendment to the Higher Education Act was approved on June 2005. The **Law on Academic Autonomy** states that all universities and higher education institutions must independently determine all matters relating to their curricula, structure, teaching and research, qualification and certification.

At the beginning of 1995, an Ordinance on **Unified Government Norms for Higher Education of Teachers** was adopted by **Decree No. 12** of the Council of Ministers. The Ordinance establishes obligatory forms for practical training of future teachers guaranteeing the minimum level of their teaching competence, and regulates the pedagogical and methodological elements in the study plans for teacher training.

The **Vocational Education and Training Act** was adopted by the National Assembly in 1999. This law clearly defines the responsibilities of the institutions offering vocational education and training, and provides a new basis for their development. National programmes for the acquisition of vocational qualifications shall be developed for different age groups with different educational levels, thus giving the whole vocational education sector the possibility to be more flexible and to better respond to identified needs.

The **Law on the levels of schooling, the general educational minimum and the syllabus** became effective as of 1999 and has defined the two new levels of schooling (basic and secondary).

The **Rules and procedures concerning the organization and the activities of the school board of trustees** of 1999 determine the elections, organization, functions and activities of the school board of trustees. Being civic society representatives, they have an important role in involving society in solving problems concerning education.

Education is free and compulsory from the age of 6 or 7 to 16 years. For persons over 16 years of age there are evening schools.

Administration and management of the education system

The all-encompassing goal of education is to further the democratization, decentralization and autonomy of educational establishments. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to develop a simplified administrative body, high professionalism and competence among educational specialists.

The administration of education is divided into national, regional, municipal and school levels. The **Ministry of Education and Science (MES)** administers the education system and is a specialized body of the Council of Ministers. It determines and carries out government policy in the field of education. It forecasts and plans activities connected with the development of education in long-term programmes and operational plans, organizes and co-ordinates the work of the administrative units and



educational establishments, and monitors the activities of all types and levels of schools. The Ministry approves educational documentation, oversees the introduction of innovations, and provides for the supply of textbooks, manuals, and teaching staff. It also conducts international activities in the field of education.

There are twenty-eight **School Inspectorates** at the regional level, which act as specialized territorial bodies of the MES. They have planning, co-ordination, and monitoring functions over the activities of schools in the different regions. A regional inspectorate comprises experts in the organization of secondary schools and experts in the various subjects of study.

The **municipal education bodies** represent an element of the government territorial structure and take part in the realization of education policy within the territory of municipalities. They are responsible for the compulsory education of pupils under 16 years of age, for pre-school education and extra-school activities of children, for health care, financing, material and technical assets, buildings, canteen catering, hostels, recreation, sports facilities, transportation of children, students, teachers, as well as for scholarships and special grants for students.

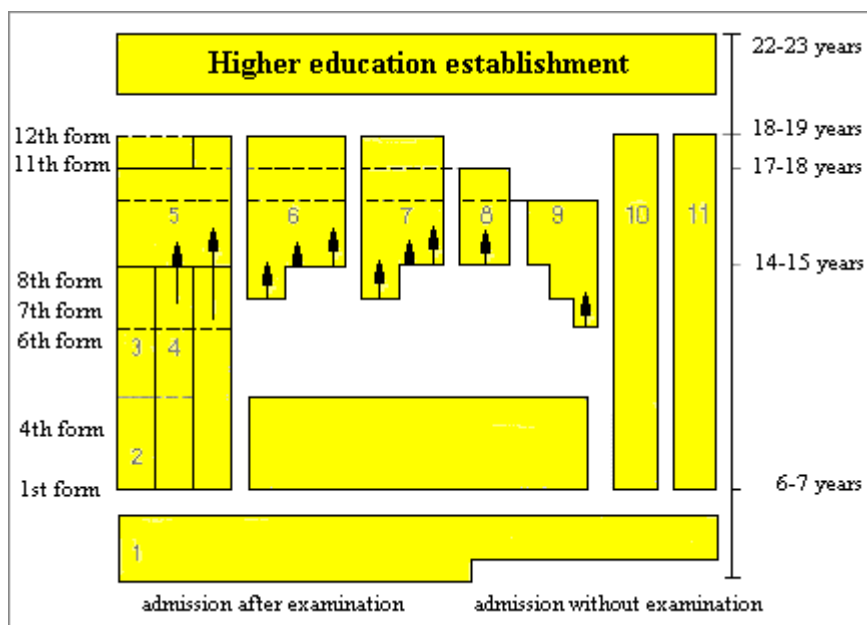
The school is a legal entity. Its autonomy (pedagogical, organizational, methodological, administrative and managerial, and in staff selection) has been considerably extended in recent years. The **school principal** and the **Pedagogical Council** are the administrative bodies of the school. The tradition of establishing boards of school trustees as a link with parents and the community has been restored since the 1995/1996 academic year. These boards of trustees comprise the school principal, teachers, parents, businessmen and cultural workers. **Parents Councils**, **Students Councils** and **Class Councils** could also be established to co-ordinate activities within schools. The school has a right to initiate its activity in compliance with the age structure of the students and the administrative needs of the school.

The Ministry of Education is also involved in organizing and coordinating activities with other ministries and departments that train specialists in their respective spheres, i.e. in the field of mechanical engineering, chemistry, agriculture, transport, mining and the economy.

The **National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency** is a statutory body for evaluation, accreditation and monitoring of the quality in higher education institutions and scientific organizations.

Structure and organization of the education system

Bulgaria: structure of the education system



1. Crechès and kindergartens.
2. Elementary school (Grades I-IV).
3. Pre-secondary school (Grades V-VIII).
4. Basic school (Grades I-VIII).
5. Secondary comprehensive (general) school (Grades I-XI or XII).
6. Profile-oriented secondary schools offering four- to five-year courses.
7. Technical schools (vocational secondary schools) offering four- to five-year courses.
8. Secondary vocational schools.
9. Vocational schools.
10. Special schools.
11. Private schools.

Pre-school education

Pre-primary education is for children from 2 to 6/7 years of age. Government-funded pre-schools are prevalent (over 95%); however, a private sector is developing. Kindergartens are partially subsidized by local authorities; lower-income families pay lower fees. According to the amendments to the Public Education Act (2002 and 2003), in principle it is compulsory for children of 6 to 7 years of age to attend a preparatory group at the kindergarten or a preparatory class at school.

Primary education

Basic education is compulsory and comprises two stages: elementary education (Grades I-IV) and lower secondary education (Grades V-VIII). The normal entry age is 6/7 years. Vocational or technical classes can be attended after the completion of sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Basic education is completed without examinations. Certificates are issued at the end of the fourth and eighth grade depending on the scores in the subjects included in the plan of study.



Secondary education

Secondary comprehensive education covers Grades IX-XII and includes: profile-oriented secondary schools with admission after Grade VIII and a four-year course of instruction (natural sciences and mathematical orientation, the humanities, sports, etc.); profile-oriented schools with intensive foreign language instruction (admission after Grade VII and a five-year course of instruction); and comprehensive secondary schools from Grades IX to XI/XII. Secondary vocational education comprises technical schools (vocational secondary) with admission after Grade VIII (four-year course); technical schools (vocational secondary) with admission after a Grade VII, with intensive foreign language studies and a five-year course of instruction; secondary vocational/technical schools with admission after Grade VIII (three-year course of instruction). After sitting the matriculation exams, successful students receive a certificate or diploma entitling them to have access to higher education. After successfully passing equalizing exams, students are permitted to switch from one school to another, or from one profile to another.

The new system of higher education, established at the end of 1995, is organized as follows: the higher education system is organized as follows: (a) non-university education in colleges and institutes that offer three-year courses; graduates receive a diploma of higher education and qualify as specialist; (b) university higher education institutes offering four-year courses leading to the bachelor's degree (after which, an additional one and a half year is needed for a master's degree); (c) university higher education institutes offering five/six-year courses leading to the master's degree; and (d) postgraduate three-year (full-time) courses leading to the doctoral degree (four-year programme part-time).

At the elementary level, the school year covers thirty-one (Grade I) to thirty-two (Grades II-IV) working weeks; at the pre-secondary level, thirty-four working weeks; and at the secondary level, thirty-six working weeks in Grades IX and X, and thirty-one to thirty-six weeks in Grades XI and XII. The school week is five days long.

The financing of education

The main source of education financing is the State budget, via the Ministry of Education and Science, and from the local budgets via the municipal administrations. Funding is allocated according to the educational levels and type of school. Funds are allocated for capital investment, subsidizing of scientific research, upgrading the qualification of teachers, and for the salaries of teaching staff. Instruction in private schools is not funded by the government.

It is estimated that public expenditure on education represented 3.9% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2003, of which 0.9% for higher education (Slantcheva, 2007). According to Eurostat, the total public expenditure on education represented 4.57% of GDP in 2004.



The educational process

The education system changed greatly in the last decade of the twentieth century. Although the Ministry of Education and Science has retained a great part of its previous responsibilities, many of these responsibilities were delegated to the Inspectorates and the schools.

Many institutions and units are involved in developing the curriculum. These include the Parliament, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Inspectorates and the National Institute for Education, the universities and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, as well as teachers and school management officials.

The Ministry of Education defines the educational policy. Schools elaborate their curricula, in conformity with the law, the interests of the students, and the school's possibilities. The curriculum is adopted by the pedagogical council of the specific school and is approved by the head of the Advisory Council for Education. The schools specialized for arts, sports, and children with special needs elaborate separate school curricula. The Minister of Education and Science approves the study programmes for basic schools, vocational schools and schools for children with special needs, in conformity with state requirements for school content. Inspectorates also approve the school curricula of the schools in their region.

The curriculum has undergone many changes since 1990. These have included the introduction of new school subjects, an increase in the number of curricula for vocational schools, and a more flexible curricula for specialized schools. The content itself has also changed. New content for subjects such as early foreign language instruction, computer sciences, biology, and chemistry has been selected, and many integrated subjects have been introduced, such as history and civilization; geography and economics; ethics and law; biology and health studies; chemistry and environmental protection. (Ministry of Education and Science, 2001).

Pre-primary education

The objective of pre-primary education (kindergarten) is to provide an environment conducive to the development of the child's abilities, and to offer instruction which will prepare the child for formal education. The pedagogical process is aimed at the emotional, moral, aesthetic, intellectual and physical development of children.

Pre-primary education is provided by day-care, health, special and half-day kindergartens, and school preparatory groups. The 1995 pre-school enrolment ratio was 40.4% or 3% lower than in 1994. In 2000/01 the gross enrolment ratio for pre-primary education was 68%; and the pupil/teacher ratio was 1:11. According to provisional data made available by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in 2003 the gross enrolment ratio was 77%. There were 201,317 children enrolled with 17,109 teachers (100% women).

Children attending kindergartens are classed in four groups according to their age. The first group includes children from 2.5/3 to 4 years, the second group children from 4 to 5 years, and the third one, children aged 5 to 6 years. Children who are 6



years old are accepted in a group for preparation for school, in which they are trained according to a special programme. The distribution according to the age criterion is not compulsory, and mixed groups are formed, where necessary.

For economic reasons, many children are not able to attend kindergarten. In some cases, these children come from low-income and/or at-risk families. To combat this problem, the National Programme for the Development of Education has established new free (or for a minimum fee) school preparatory groups and kindergartens. In addition, a network of playing facilities will be created and playgroups will be formed for children from marginal-income families and for neglected or homeless children.

A new practice in pre-school instruction is that the content of studies for different activities is determined by two programmes: the Programme for Education of Children Aged 2-7 and Children's Activity in Kindergarten. The selection and structuring of the content is mainly guided by the principle of integration. These programmes are adopted at the national level and teachers are entitled to choose one or the other. The content of studies covers several global themes. The principle is for children to learn through play. The development of children is jointly promoted by teachers and parents in a natural environment (play, festivals, excursions, etc.).

A recent development in pre-school education is that the content of studies for different activities is determined by two programmes: the Programme for Education of Children Aged 2-6; and Children's Activity in Kindergarten. These programmes are adopted at the national level and teachers are entitled to choose one or the other. The content of studies covers several global themes. The principle is for children to learn through play. At the beginning of 2000, a reform of public pre-primary education was launched, directed towards the creation of programmes for the school preparatory groups. The programme "On the School's Threshold" is being implemented since 2000. One more programme for a preparatory group ("Hand in Hand") has been adopted in 2003. Both programmes define educational contents and envisage special measures for children from minority ethnic/language groups gaining command of the Bulgarian language and obtaining social and psychological preparation for entering a school. Special attention is paid to children from problematic families, who have difficulties in their socialization and intellectual development. Both programmes include: development of speech and enrichment of language, mathematics, preparation for reading and writing, acquaintance with nature and public life, arts, aesthetic and physical development.

According to the amendments to the Public Education Act (2002 and 2003), in principle it is compulsory for children of 6 to 7 years of age to attend a preparatory group at the kindergarten or a preparatory class at school. The state and municipal kindergartens are opened when at least 4, but not more than 8 groups (including 10-25 children) are formed. Most of the kindergartens are independent institutions, subordinated to the municipalities. They have an all-day operation regime and are accommodated in buildings constructed especially for them. In case there are fewer children, children groups are opened at the schools. (Ministry of Education and Science, 2004).



Primary education

All children at the age of 6 or 7 years, depending on the choice of their parents, are admitted in the first year of municipal and government-funded primary schools. Pupils in Grade I do not repeat the year except on recommendation of a consultative medical commission and a written request from their parents. Course content is general and vocational, and it has been recommended that teachers use didactic techniques and methods of work (such as group work) to create an atmosphere of interaction and mutual co-operation between teacher and pupils and amongst the pupils themselves.

Instruction in comprehensive and vocational schools follows a plan of study approved in 1995. The content of studies comprises a compulsory and an optional part. Basic instruction is compulsory, while optional instruction provides the opportunity to discover individual abilities and interests of children. Optional instruction is profile-oriented, compulsory-elective and free.

The correlation between compulsory, compulsory-elective and optional instruction varies depending on the schools. The above-mentioned possibilities are but a precondition for each school to establish its own criteria. The trend is towards a more practical approach in selecting the content of studies with a view to more effectively co-ordinating the goals, content and organizational forms of instruction. The major challenge is to improve course content. Currently, content tends to be highly theoretical in some subjects.

The weekly lesson timetable for basic education (1996 and 2001) is shown in the table below:

Basic education: weekly lesson timetable (1996)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade							
	Elementary				Pre-secondary			
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Bulgarian language and literature	8	8	8	8	5	5	5	5
Foreign language	–	–	–	–	4	4	4	4
Mathematics	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4
Native studies	1–2	2	2	2	–	–	–	–
History	–	–	–	–	2	2	2	2
Natural history	–	–	1–2	2	2	2	–	–
Physics and astronomy	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	2
Chemistry	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	2
Biology	–	–	–	–	–	2	2	2
Geography	–	–	–	–	–	2	2	2
Art education	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Music	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Practical skills	1	1	2	2	–	–	–	–
Technical work	–	–	–	–	2	2	1	1
Physical education and sports	4–3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2
Total weekly periods	22	22	24–25	25	27	30	30	30
Optional subjects	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

Source: Ministry of Education, 1996. Each teaching period lasts 35 minutes in Grade I and 45 minutes in Grades II–VIII.

Basic education: weekly lesson timetable (2001)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade							
	Elementary				Pre-secondary			
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Bulgarian language and literature	8	8	8	8	5	5	5	5
First foreign language	–	–	–	–	2.5	2.5	2	2
Second foreign lang.	–	–	–	–	2	2	2	2
Mathematics	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
My home country	2	2	–	–	–	–	–	–
Man & society	–	–	2	2	–	–	–	–
History and civilization	–	–	–	–	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Geography & ecology	–	–	–	–	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Man & nature	–	–	2	2	2.5	2.5	–	–
Biology & health ed.	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	2
Physics & astronomy	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.5	1.5
Chemistry & environ. protection	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.5	1.5
Fine arts	2	2	2	2	2	2	1.5	1.5
Music	2	2	2	2	2	2	1.5	1.5
Home economics & technology	1	1	2	2	–	–	–	–
Home economics	–	–	–	–	1.5	1.5	–	–
Technology	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
Physical ed. & sports	3	3	3	3	2.5	2.5	2	2
Compulsory electives	–	–	–	–	3	3	3	3
Total weekly periods	22	22	25	25	30	30	30	30
Optional subjects	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, 2004 and EURYBASE, 2002/03. Each teaching period lasts 35 minutes in Grades I and II, 40 minutes in Grades III and IV, and 45 minutes in Grades V–VIII.

The timetable also provides for four periods per week of optional instruction. These periods are mainly used and distributed between foreign language studies, sports or aesthetic-oriented classes. They are held outside the compulsory hours of study for no more than one hour a day. Curricula for optional instruction are prepared by teachers and approved by the school principal, after consultation with parents to determine possibilities for optional course work.

Some secondary comprehensive schools offer a specially developed plan for early foreign language studies (starting in Grade I) and flexible plans of study for music, choreography and pictorial art classes, approved by the Ministry. The establishment of such schools should meet the requirements for the provision of staff and material facilities and should be coordinated with the municipal administration and the regional inspectorate of the Ministry.

Elementary school teachers plan their activities by distributing educational materials for the subjects they teach. The form master develops a study plan with students in accordance with their interests and needs. Special attention is given to health education and instruction, ecological and civil education, traffic safety instruction and civil defense, practical classes and the development of professional interests, education for moral values, civics, physical education, and arts.



The readiness of children for school is determined by a Medical and Pedagogical Commission attached to the municipal council. The school principal is also entitled to organize such diagnosing of a child's readiness for school (by tests or in an interview), in order to determine any special needs for the child.

The pattern for organizing education and instruction at the elementary school level is determined by the pedagogical council, taking into consideration the preferences of the parents and the conditions of the school. It can follow a half-day or a full-day scheme. Besides comprehensive instruction, a full-day pattern (in two versions) includes self-instruction, organized recreation and sports, and interest groups.

Basic education covers Grades I-VIII and comprises comprehensive preparation in all subjects. This period lays the foundation for studying the basics of the different sciences. There are opportunities for intensive training in Grade V which make it possible for students to move from one form to another at an accelerated pace. Upon completion of Grade VIII, successful students are awarded the Basic Education Certificate, showing the annual score in the subjects of study in Grade VIII and the score in optional instruction. The overall score for completed basic education is calculated as an average score, with 0.01 precision, of the score in all Grade VIII subjects: Bulgarian language and literature, first foreign language, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography.

The weekly and daily organization of educational activities must comply with the characteristics of the region and ensure sufficient time for work, recreation and play. Instruction in all schools and at all levels of education is carried out in Bulgarian. In some colleges, private schools, and schools that offer intensive foreign language study, some subjects are taught in the respective foreign language. In government-funded schools, foreign language studies begin in Grade V and comprise four weekly hours of instruction up to Grade XII (or XIII). Some of the better schools in the country are the secondary schools with foreign language instruction in English, French, Russian, German, Spanish, Italian, as well as the humanities, natural sciences and mathematics schools.

In 2000/01, the gross enrolment ratio for primary education was 103% (105% in 2003); the pupil/teacher ratio was 1:18 (1:17 in 2003). The Ministry has been pursuing a policy to reduce the number of pupils per class, with a view to creating better conditions for class work, and providing more instruction and care to each individual student.

Secondary education

Secondary comprehensive education is completed upon successful performance in the last year of secondary education and successful passing of written matriculation exams. It is carried out in profile-oriented secondary classes within comprehensive secondary schools and includes compulsory basic education and profile-oriented instruction in a specified scientific field or professional sphere. Compulsory basic education consists of a minimum of comprehensive education, information technology and foreign-language instruction. The weekly lesson timetable for the comprehensive school is presented below:

General secondary education (comprehensive school): weekly lesson timetable (1996)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade			
	IX	X	XI	XII
Bulgarian language and literature	3	3	3	2
Foreign language	4	4	4	4
Mathematics	4	3	2	2
Computer studies	–	–	2	2
History	2	2	2	–
Philosophy	2	2	2	2
Physics and astronomy	2	2	1	–
Chemistry	2	2	–	–
Biology	2	2	–	–
Geography	2	2	–	–
Art education	1	–	–	–
Music	1	–	–	–
Technologies	2	2	–	–
Physical education & sports	2	2	3	3
Sub-total	29	26	19	15
Compulsory elective subjects (profile-oriented education)	2	5	12	17
Total weekly periods	31	31	31	32

Source: Ministry of Education, 1996. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

The tradition of profile-oriented schools in foreign languages, mathematics, and humanities will be maintained in the future. Some schools will move towards a more vocational approach. The secondary education system also comprises special profile-oriented schools for students with exceptional abilities in specified scientific fields, as well as profile-oriented schools on a national level.

Students sit written matriculation exams in secondary comprehensive schools with non-profile instruction in: Bulgarian language and literature; and an optional comprehensive subject studied within the framework of compulsory-elective instruction followed in the last secondary school form. In the profile-oriented classes of the secondary comprehensive schools and the secondary schools with profile-oriented instruction, students take exams in Bulgarian language and literature and in the main profile-oriented subject.

Students who have successfully completed the last secondary school form with an average arithmetical score on the respective subject of study at least “very good” (5.00) and an annual score for the last year of study (in general compulsory instruction or compulsory-elective instruction) also no less than “very good” (5.00) are exempt from sitting the matriculation exams. Students who have successfully completed the secondary comprehensive education are awarded the Secondary Education Diploma. The diploma must specify the profile of instruction. Vocational education is offered in different types of schools:



- Technical and secondary special schools with admission after Grade VII. The course of instruction lasts five years. Students receive secondary special education. Technical schools have intensive foreign language training (fifteen weekly hours in the first year, six weekly hours in the second, and three weekly hours in the third and fourth years). Secondary special schools, after Grade VII, train their students in the field of culture.
- Technical schools (admission after Grade VIII). The course of instruction lasts four years. Students receive secondary specialized education.
- Secondary vocational/technical schools (after Grade VIII). The course of instruction lasts three years. Students receive secondary vocational education.
- Vocational schools (with admission after the sixth, seventh and eighth grades). These schools cater to students who have dropped out from the compulsory comprehensive school. Thus, they are offered an opportunity to acquire professional qualification and to complete their basic education. The course of instruction varies: one, two or three years, depending on the student's entry point.
- Vocational classes within comprehensive schools. They are made available in areas of low population density lacking a developed network of vocational schools.

Admission of students in the various types of vocational schools depends on school criteria. Traditional links with enterprises and firms have been established which provide material assets for practical training, as well as opportunities for the students to participate in real production processes. The Government plays a leading role: it plans vocational education, finances and organizes it, and monitors the quality of instruction. Transition to a market economy gave rise to contacts with employers, trade unions and industry. Such partnership is effected in the organization of the overall process of education and especially in determining the requirements of vocational training and the evaluation of professional competence. It is expected to help overcome certain shortcomings (in vocational training and evaluation of professional competence) which have emerged during the transition process and the resultant economic crisis. Recession has severed the contacts of some enterprises with the vocational schools and has thus adversely affected the quality of practical training.

In 1994 a New List of Occupations for School and Extra-School Training was approved, replacing the four lists of occupations used previously for vocational training. The new list comprises 183 occupations, distributed between twenty-two professional spheres, and includes seventy-three occupations less than the former four lists. Occupations are differentiated by the degree of qualification, depending on the type of school and the level of the vocational and comprehensive training offered. The occupations of the third qualification degree studied in the technical schools underwent the greatest change. There are seventy-one such occupations, far less than in the former list, where they numbered 133. Their content and profile have been extended. The profile of occupations of the second qualification degree in secondary vocational/technical schools, has also been extended. Only the occupations of the first degree of qualification in vocational schools have increased in number (plus twenty-



two). They have a narrower profile, owing to the lower educational level of the students. New craft occupations (mainly at the first and second qualification degree levels) were added to cater to the needs of the newly developing small and medium-sized private enterprises. In 1995, education standards for the content of instruction in seven occupations were prepared and, in 1996, such standards were developed for an additional eighteen occupations. In 2003 a new list of occupations has been approved.

Content of studies is structured into three groups of subjects: (a) compulsory (Bulgarian language and literature, optional foreign language, history, geography, mathematics, physics, biology, philosophy, physical culture, theoretical subjects of study relevant to the respective occupation, and practical training); (b) compulsory-elective (one-two subjects of the comprehensive or vocational instruction, optionally selected but compulsory for study within the framework of the established hours of study for the week); and (c) optional (subjects and activities, listed or not in the plan of study, optionally selected and studied in addition to the compulsory hours). Compulsory-elective and optional instruction involve four to six hours a week in the various courses of instruction. The correlation between compulsory comprehensive and compulsory vocational training in technical schools with admission after Grade VIII is 1:1.5, and in the secondary vocational/technical school it is 1:1.25.

Starting from the year 2000, the normative base related to the secondary education has been renovated, new normative documents were approved and a series of changes were introduced. For the upper secondary stage new state educational requirements, new syllabi and new curricula for all educational subjects are being developed and implemented. Changes are also introduced in the system for grading of the students' achievements, which are related to a more extensive promotion of the test evaluation, better consistency and measurement of the entry and exit levels. (MES, 2004).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

Students' knowledge and skills are evaluated during the process of study by tests and other oral, written and practical forms of examination. Current control is exercised by the teacher, with test forms selected personally by him/her, while the teacher and government education administrative bodies also carry out tests from time to time. Knowledge and skills are evaluated according to a six-point scale. Scores are recorded for each term of study, academic year and level of education. A comprehensive annual score is recorded in Grade I, while in Grades II-IV only the annual score in the main subjects of the study plan is recorded.

The National Testing Centre (NTC) was set up in 1994 to organize and carry out national testing and examinations in order to evaluate the efficiency of education. Instruments and techniques for testing and evaluation of the results of education are now in the process of preparation. Since 1996, the NTC has been incorporated into the Institute for Research in Education.

In accordance with the Conception for Development of Secondary Education in Bulgaria (April 1997), national requirements for the assessment system are being developed. The main part of the new system for assessment is the monitoring of national tests. During 1997, experimental tests in mother tongue and literature,

mathematics and professional competencies for the students graduating from secondary vocational schools have been applied.

The national assessment in Bulgarian language and mathematics (Grades IV and VIII) held in 1998 in all the 28 regions of the country provided information on the study content relevancy to the pupils capabilities, together with indications on the education strong and weak points. The results show that 67% of the pupils in Grade IV successfully passed all questions and tasks, while 22% did not cover the minimum requirements.

Higher education

Higher education in Bulgaria includes non-university and university higher education institutes (the latter including university and specialized higher schools) offering four academic degree programmes (specialist, bachelor's, master's, and doctor). As mentioned, the higher education system is organized as follows: (a) non-university education in colleges and institutes that offer three-year courses; graduates receive a diploma of higher education and qualify as specialist; (b) university higher education institutes offering four-year courses leading to the bachelor's degree (after which, an additional one and a half year is needed for a master's degree); (c) university higher education institutes offering five/six-year courses leading to the master's degree; and (d) postgraduate three-year (full-time) courses leading to the doctoral degree (four-year programme part-time).

In 2003/04 the total enrolment at the higher education level was 228,468 students, of whom 195,666 in public institutions and 32,802 in the private sector. A total of 16,294 students were enrolled in colleges, 207,340 in universities and 4,834 in specialized higher schools (offering doctoral degree programmes). There were 22,532 faculty staff in 2003 (public and private). In the same year, the network of higher education institutions (public and private) consisted of nine independent colleges, 41 colleges within universities and specialized higher schools, and 42 universities and specialized higher schools. Programmes are offered in some 52 broad fields of study introduced in 2002 with the adoption of the National Classification of Fields of Study. (Slantcheva, 2007).

The requirements for enrolment vary depending on the type of the institutions, and in addition to the diploma of completed secondary education can include written competition exams and several tests. Procedures for application are determined on a yearly basis. One of the positive trends in the development of higher education in recent years is the legislative regulation concerning the autonomy of higher education establishments. The right to manage their own finances has led to competition between universities, which is reflected in the diversification of programmes of instruction, and in the creation of new courses.

While university administrations strive to meet the growing demand in specialized types of training, the improved quality of education does not necessarily follow. This leads to unprecedented growth in particular areas, such as law (450% growth) and economics (250% growth). Such an imbalance merits consideration of the need to limit the autonomy of particular higher education establishments to



conform to the framework of the general goal of the development of the system of higher education.

The marked increase of the number of students having to pay for their studies, raises concern regarding the steady decline of the share of students receiving subsidies. Due to the inflation and increasing cost of living, students who pay for their education run the risk of not being able to finish their studies or, at best, may be compelled to take jobs in order to complete their degrees. Self-paid tuition, then, becomes a financial barrier in the availability of higher education, and a realistic threat to the potential for growth among young people. To improve the chances for education, the government proposed for the academic year 1996/1997 not only government-funded quotas but also quotas for paid education, thus attempting to restore the balance between the government-funded and paid education.

The autonomy of higher education establishments has increased institutional diversification, and has also led to vertical diversification of higher education by introducing more degrees (specialist, bachelor's, master's, doctor). Increased availability of higher education and rising enrolment are other characteristic features of the democratization of higher education.

Scholarships, canteens, hostels, and sports and recreational centres are maintained at great cost by the higher education establishments. The freezing of material assets creates an obstacle for upgrading the educational process and for introducing new forms of instruction and modern education. There are insufficient materials, supplies and equipment for the number of students.

Special education

Special schools provide education, training and rehabilitation for children with special physical, intellectual, and emotional disabilities.

There are approximately 132 special schools, for about 13,800 children, with an average of 7 students per teacher (data refer to 1995/96). The majority of special schools are boarding schools. However, the Ministry of Education favours integrating some students with special needs into general education schools in the hope that these persons can more easily become part of society.

The Ministry of Health Care and the Ministry of Education oversee the admission of students in the special health schools and the schools for handicapped students. Instruction and education in special schools is carried out according to government-set educational norms.

Private education

Private secondary schools are a recent development in the country. The first private schools in Bulgaria were established in 1992. The conditions for opening private schools are clearly defined in the Ordinance on Private Schools. The MES is legislatively entrusted with the regime of certification for these schools. In 1996, there were seventy-eight private schools in the country. Of these, twenty-one offered



elementary education, nine basic education, and six schools offered secondary comprehensive education. There were thirty-three vocational schools, four religious schools (Orthodox Christian and Muslim), and five secondary comprehensive schools with foreign language instruction. In the same year, there were approximately 6,000 students enrolled in private institutions with about 500 teachers. The relative share of private schools in regard to government-funded is approximately 1%.

In 2001/02 there were some 5,000 students enrolled in private general secondary schools.

As part of the secondary education system, private schools are supervised and monitored by the MES as a specialized government body for relevant competence in the sphere of education, and by the regional MES divisions and the regional inspectorates. The MES supervises the issuing of diplomas for completed secondary education and professional qualification.

In principle, private schools work according to curricula plans in which the compulsory portion coincides with the government plan of study. In addition, they may include other curricula which offer a more specialized training for students. These are curricula for intensive foreign language education, instruction in music, pictorial art, ecology, and civic education (for the secondary comprehensive schools). Private vocational schools offer programmes of study in management, trade and marketing, business administration, banking and insurance, tourism, hotel management, fashion, and agriculture.

Means of instruction, equipment and infrastructure

One of the tasks of the MES is to supply the education system with textbooks and obligatory manuals. This task is regulated by the National Education Act, the Decree of the Council of Ministers 218/X.1994 and the Ordinance 4/25.01.1995. Publishing and distribution of textbooks is based on competition and bidding. Each academic year subjects of study are chosen for new textbooks and are open to contest-based writing, publishing and distribution. The initial conditions for bidding are announced, and all Bulgarian publishing houses which meet the requirements set by the Ministry may take part in the competition. The schools may choose freely among several alternative textbooks which may be used for the instruction of their students.

The MES works with more than thirty government and private publishing houses which publish and distribute over 480 types of textbooks for comprehensive schools, and approximately 800 types of textbooks for vocational instruction. A new system for the distribution of textbooks for Grades I-VIII, introduced in 1995, provides for direct delivery of textbooks to schools. This ensures direct contact between the schools and the publishing houses, contributing to a realistic evaluation of the product.

Provision of textbooks is funded from a specialized fund in the State budget. The allocation of this fund ensures more secure financial support of the activities of all participants in the process. A considerable qualitative advancement has been made in the preparation of textbooks and manuals intended for elementary schools. The



definition of textbook standards for the various age groups is expected to further improve the procedure for development and approval of textbooks. To meet the needs of the secondary school students who purchase their own textbooks, a school supply scheme for their provision will be created.

In recent years there have been problems in supplying the schools with contemporary computer hardware and software. Some professional schools receive insufficient technical support. Owing to inflation and difficulties in purchasing modern equipment, the technical infrastructure of some vocational schools is not up-to-date. However, initiatives by administrations and donations by sponsors have considerably improved this situation.

As a result of the new economic conditions, the physical state of educational buildings has deteriorated. The funding of repairs for educational establishments falls short of real needs. Repairs and equipment are financed only in case of emergencies. Buildings, especially the older ones, are subject to increased decay. In their search for a way out of the financial difficulties, a number of schools have resorted to some new economic approaches, such as contracts on co-operation, sponsorship or lease of property. Generally, the state of material assets could not be termed good, since most of the building were erected more than 30-40 years ago, are ageing and do not meet the contemporary requirements of the educational process. However, the construction of new schools is hampered by the financial difficulties experienced by the State.

A tendency towards depopulation of schools in the small frontier and mountainous settlements and overcrowding in larger cities has been observed. This presents the municipalities and the MES with grave problems related to the appropriate use of the available buildings. Under the new economic conditions, the MES and the municipalities are looking for opportunities to develop the material and technical assets in order to make them better meet current needs.

On 9 February 2005 the Council of Ministers adopted the National Strategy and the Action Plan for the Implementation of ICT in secondary schools, covering the period 2005-2007. The government expects to reach a ratio of 12 students per PC, establish Internet connections, train teachers, and develop specialized software.

Adult and non-formal education

In recent years the system of extra-school establishments in the country has been gravely destabilized due to the acute shortage of material and financial resources and, above all, the lack of a strategy on the part of the educational administration for its development. Currently 316 out-of-school units are in operation; of these, 164 centres are for work with children, 71 are unified children's complexes, 34 are centres for technical and scientific creativity, 30 are sports schools, nine are observatories and planetaria, and seven are art schools. The material assets for children's activities in leisure time and their in-take capacity have suffered a severe blow.

In 1995/96, the MES set as a priority task the development of extra-curricular activities. Attention was duly paid to the optimum functioning of the National Centre for Extra-Curricular and Extra-School Activities under the Ministry. The development



of a normative basis is underway. Working meetings, seminars, scientific and practical conferences are organized for reflection on the status and functions of extra-school education in the contemporary education system, of its national traditions, as well as for formulating new ideas on its content and themes, organization and material base. Conditions are created for the advancement of the productive skills of adolescents, and for satisfying of a wide range of needs and interests of the students outside their compulsory curricula. The contents of these activities exceed by far the framework of the school curricula, covering problems and innovations in the field of science, technologies, artistic culture, civic and health education.

Changes in the strategy for the expansion of out-of-school education are oriented towards not only the mastery of knowledge and experience, but at building self-confidence and positive attitudes, encouragement of personal initiative, mobility, striving for self-expression and self-improvement, and a healthy way of life.

Adult vocational education is provided through evening, extra-curricular and external classes. In evening technical schools, after the completion of Grade VIII, the course of instruction is four years, and in the secondary vocational/technical schools it is three years. After having completed secondary education, adults are also trained in technical schools (day-time and evening classes) offering a two-year course.

A network of licensed centres for vocational training has been built, which complements the formal educational system with additional training opportunities. The centers offer flexible and adaptive programmes in conformity with the needs of the requesting bodies. In 2004, the number of such centres was 176. (MES, 2004).

Teaching staff

Pre-primary and primary education teachers are trained in non-university higher education institutes (three- to four-year courses) or at university level (four- to five-year courses). Lower and upper secondary school teachers (specialists) acquire their qualifications through university courses lasting four or five years. In general, the education system is provided with the necessary qualified teaching staff. Shortage of teachers is felt in some remote regions of the country. In line with the growing international contacts of the country, the number of students studying English language has considerably increased in recent years creating the demand for more qualified teachers in that language.

In 2003/04 there were 60,338 educational staff (including directors) in general education schools, of whom 50,215 were women. A total of 50,326 teachers had higher education (bachelor's or master's degree), 9,367 had the degree of specialist, and 645 had completed upper secondary education. Some 21% of teachers were aged 50-59 years. (Kusheva, 2006).

Teacher training programmes comprise elements pertaining to mastery of the subject of study, pedagogical and methodological competence, and elements shaping the abilities for development of interpersonal relations (the latter, especially for pre-primary and primary education teachers).



The upgrading of professional qualifications of teachers takes place in three specialized institutes within the Universities of Sofia, Stara Zagora and Varna, as well as in a number of specialized units at other universities and pedagogical institutes. Various forms of qualifications are used: short- and long-term, annual specializations, seminars, discussions, lectures, etc. The system for obtaining a higher category of qualification is based on two degrees (second and first class) and ensures higher remuneration.

The transition to a new economic system calls for improvements in the system of teacher qualification. Attention is focused on: re-evaluation of the content, forms, methods, and planning approaches to qualification; replacement of the principle of obligation with the principle of economic interest to upgrade qualifications, backing up the achieved higher qualification level with higher remuneration; legislative guarantees for the optimum realization of the qualification processes.

At the end of 1996 was issued Ordinance No. 5 on the conditions for increasing the qualification of the pedagogical staff in the system of the public education and for achieving professional-qualification degrees, by which a new system for teachers' qualification was endorsed. In the period 2000-2004 the changes in the normative base mainly concerned the working conditions and social position of teachers. In 2001 some amendments and complements were introduced to the Labour Code, in order to improve the status, security and professional condition of teachers.

The standards for compulsory teaching load are relevant to the pedagogical staff and are defined in the Labour Code. The annual average is between 648 and 720 hours. Grades 1-4 teachers have a workload of 21 weekly hours. In the case of Grades 5-13 teachers, the amount of hours per year depends on the study subject: 648 hours per year for teachers of language and literature, mathematics, foreign languages, informatics, general-technical and special subjects; 684 yearly hours in the case of physics, chemistry, biology and astronomy; 720 hours per year for history, geography, philosophy, music, fine arts, physical education (sports); and 792 hours per year in the case of technology and non-specialized training. (MES, 2004).

Educational research and information

Scientific research in the field of education is carried out by the National Institute of Education, some higher education establishments, universities, and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The main areas of scientific research are: methodology of development of State education standards; improvement of the administration system of education towards democratization, as well as of the system for measuring and evaluating the efficiency of education; Bulgarian education in the twenty-first century; civic education and socialization; innovations in the technology of instruction; use of computers as a means for instruction and management.

The total number of researchers is no more than a few hundred. State financing is very limited and private sources are scarce. Educational research depends on the educational policy of the government, since governmental bodies at the different levels are the main consumers of research results. At the National Institute of Education there is a department in charge of collecting, processing, analyzing and



distributing educational information and databases. There is a great need for information concerning the education systems of other countries.

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Web resources

Ministry of Education and Science: <http://www.minedu.government.bg/> [In Bulgarian. Last checked: October 2007.]

National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency: <http://www.neaa.government.bg/> [In Bulgarian; some information in English. Last checked: October 2007.]

EURYBASE, the information database on education systems in Europe: <http://www.eurydice.org/> [In several languages.]

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>