
**INCLUSION IN THE CYPRUS EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AT THE
BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY : AN OVERVIEW**

NATIONAL REPORT OF CYPRUS

BY

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE,
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Table of Contents

INCLUSION IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF CYPRUS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: AN OVERVIEW

1. CURRENT STATE OF THE CYPRUS EDUCATION SYSTEM.....4-10
2. MAJOR REFORMS AND INNOVATIONS INTRODUCED IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY.....10-31
3. MAIN POLICIES, ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED.....32-35
4. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: WAY OF THE FUTURE.....35-39

FOREWORD

I would like to express my gratitude to the staff of the International Bureau of Education in convening this conference. By exchanging information and sharing policies and best practices we can help to make our common dream, of safeguarding each child's right to access to quality education in order to be able to reach the highest possible potential, a reality.

Sincerely,

Olympia Stylianou,
Permanent Secretary,
Ministry of Education and Culture

INCLUSION IN THE CYPRUS EDUCATION SYSTEM

FACING THE CHALLENGES OF THE TWENTY – FIRST CENTURY: AN OVERVIEW

1. CURRENT STATE OF THE CYPRUS EDUCATION SYSTEM

1.1 Overall aims

“The overall aim of education in Cyprus is the development of free and democratic citizens...who contribute...to the promotion of cooperation, mutual understanding, respect and love among individuals and people for the prevalence of freedom, justice and peace¹”.

The policy priorities of the Ministry of Education place particular emphasis on the following:

1. Democratization, that is:

- Respect for the dignity and uniqueness of each individual;
- Respect for the opinion of the majority;
- Opportunities for active participation in the decision making process;
- Equality of opportunity in all aspects of school life;
- Encouragement of cooperation and responsibility.

2. Creating favorable conditions for existence, cooperation and combating intolerance and xenophobia, in a world where an international character is increasingly developed, cultural diversity promoted and boundaries abolished.

The Government recognizes that all students have the right to an education appropriate to their needs and great efforts have been made to achieve this aim. The Ministry of Education and Culture adopts UNESCO’s views on inclusion to embrace all students,

¹ As specified in the current Cyprus Educational Curricula

such as children from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, children in rural and remote areas, children from ethnic and linguistic minorities, children affected by conflict and natural disasters, children with HIV and AIDS, children of migrants and children with additional and/or special educational needs. Educational requirements and support services are provided in an inclusive and least restrictive learning environment.

1.2 Structure of the Education System

In the context of the above overall aims, the Ministry of Education and Culture offers free and accessible education to all students without prejudice based on the gender, the abilities, the language, the color, the religion, the political beliefs or ethnic background. The Ministry is organized into departments, which are responsible for the administration of public schools and other educational institutions, as well as the supervision of private institutions, as follows:

- Pre-primary education - 3 to 6 years Department of Primary Education;
- Primary school – 6 to 12 years, Department of Primary Education;
- Lower Secondary School (gymnasium) – 12 to 15 years, Department of Secondary General Education;
- Upper Secondary School (Unified Lyceum or Technical/Vocational school) – 15 to 18 years, Department of Secondary General and/ or Department of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training;
- Higher and University Education, Department of Higher and Tertiary Education;
- Teacher Training , Documentation, Program Development: Pedagogical Institute;
- Educational Research and Evaluation: Center for Educational Research and Evaluation

Pre-primary education of one year's duration, Primary and Lower Secondary Education are mandatory and offered free of charge in the public sector. They cover all students belonging to the age groups between 4 years and 8 months to 15 years. All children

within this age group must be enrolled in a public or a private educational institution. Failure to do so will result in prosecution of the legal guardian.

Upper Secondary Education including Technical and Vocational Education and Training is available and accessible to all 15-18 year olds. It is offered free of charge in the public sector which covers 85.8% of the pupils. Even though education is not compulsory for children over the age of 15, the rate of enrolment of children in the 15-18 age group is about 95%.

People who have dropped out of school have a second chance to complete their schooling and obtain a high school certificate by attending an evening gymnasium or technical school.

Regarding children with special educational needs, the Cyprus Government has adopted the principles of the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, which proclaim that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs and that “those with special education needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them with a child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting those needs².” The Salamanca Statement also asserts that educational systems that take into account the wide diversity of children’s characteristics and needs “are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

The Salamanca Framework for Action calls for the Inclusive School, the fundamental principle of which is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both

² *The Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education*, paragraph 2.
www.unesco.org/education/educprog/sne/salamanc/stateme.html

different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school.

In Cyprus the above principles have been embodied in the Education of Children with Special Needs Law (L113(I)/1999), which regulates all issues concerning the identification of children with special education needs, their inclusion in normal schools and the provision of education according to their needs.

The Educational Psychology Service plays an instrumental role in advising students, teachers and parents on the handling of learning difficulties and other personal and adjustment issues. In secondary schools specially qualified teachers undertake the role of School Counselor. They provide students with vocational guidance, as well as advice on personal and social problems.

Demand for higher education is high: 82% of the students completing their Upper Secondary Education seek placements at Institutions of Higher Education. The Cyprus Government covers the cost of tuition for Cypriot students studying at Public Institutions of Higher Education in Cyprus, at both university and non-university level. Because of the rather limited supply of places in Cyprus, about 55% of Cypriot students study in other countries, with the most popular destinations being Greece, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Currently three public Universities are operating in Cyprus: The University of Cyprus, The Open University of Cyprus and The Technological University of Cyprus, as well as three private Universities.

Potential students of Higher Education are granted access to Public Universities as well as Public Institutions of Higher Education via the Pancyprian Examinations³. Candidate students may also be accepted on the basis of G.C.E., G.C.S.E or other equivalent examinations or on the basis of their success in special examinations set by the

³ The Pancyprian Examinations, which constitute a merging of the Final Year Exams for graduation from secondary education and the Entrance Examinations, previously used for entrance in higher education institutions, into a single exam, introducing a new system for entrance in higher and tertiary institutions of Cyprus.

Universities. Greeks of the Diaspora and Cypriots who belong to specific religious groups as determined by the Constitution of Cyprus, repatriated Cypriots and Cypriots who are permanent residents in other countries can claim on a preferential basis a limited number of positions (3%) based on G.C.S.E., G.C.E or other equivalent exams.

General and specific measures have been taken to make higher education equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity. Turkish Cypriots who hold a six-year high school diploma are eligible for admission upon success in special examinations set by the public universities. A limited number of places (10%) are granted to special categories of people such as the disabled due to the acts of war, children of missing persons, persons living in the occupied area of the country. 3% of the positions is also granted to the handicapped and people with special needs. Students with very serious financial problems may be subsidized by the Student Welfare Fund, which is supported financially by private initiatives. Facilities are also offered by the Immigration Department of the Republic with regard to securing entry visas and a stay permits for foreign students.

The establishment and operation of Private Universities, either of a profit or non-profit character, is stipulated by the provisions of the establishment of Private Universities in the Cyprus Law (109(I)/2005). Private institutions registered in the Republic of Cyprus can submit to the Ministry of Education and Culture applications for the establishment and operation of a Private University. Applications can also be submitted by the owners of existing Private Institutions of Tertiary Education, seeking the upgrade of their Institutions into university status. Three Private Universities currently operate in Cyprus (decision of the Council of Ministers, September 2007).

Twenty one Private Institutions of Higher Non- University Education operate in Cyprus, at present, under the Law. The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the registration and supervision of these institutions whereas many of their courses have been accredited by an independent accreditation body. The basic requirement for entrance to these institutions is the upper secondary school leaving certificate and good knowledge of English which is the language of instruction.

In Tertiary Education, the external Quality Assurance system of Cyprus is presently implemented within the scope of the Council for Educational Evaluation and Accreditation (SEKAP), which conducts programs of the private institutions of tertiary education. SEKAP consists of seven senior academics, of international standing, from at least three different countries. Worth mentioning is the close cooperation of Cyprus with NARIC in promoting quality in Higher Education, as well as the establishment of the Cypriot team of Bologna Promoters for the implementation of the Bologna Process in Cyprus. The establishment of a National Quality Assurance Body for Higher Education is currently being examined, as explained previously.

The Ministry of Education and Culture assigns great importance to the promotion of lifelong education and it has adopted several measures for enhancing adult education and providing opportunities for access to programs of lifelong learning for all citizens. A comprehensive Lifelong Learning Strategy for Cyprus, covering the period 2007 – 2013, was adopted in 2007.

The language of instruction in public primary, secondary and technical and vocational schools is Greek. However, a number of private non-profit as well as profit-making institutions, ranging from missionary boarding schools to vocationally - oriented institutions and foreign language centers offer curriculum programs in general education, specialized fields and languages. These schools are run by overseas organizations and/or religious denominations and local entrepreneurs. Their courses of study last six to seven years and the basic languages of instruction are English, French, Italian or Arabic.

In public universities the main language of instruction is Greek. In the other public and private tertiary institutions the Greek and English language is used.

Public expenditure on education, at about 7% of G.D.P., is very high by international standards. Private expenditure on education is estimated at about 3% of G.D.P.

1.3 Challenges Facing the Cyprus Education System

The Cyprus Education System is open to a wide range of influences, which create the need for change, modification and improvement. The main challenges are the following:

- Challenges in the international arena: These challenges emanate from the rapid development of science and technology, especially developments in information technology, the creation of information society and globalization. These factors are extremely important for Cyprus as its economy is small, very open and increasingly reliant on its human resources.
- The overall policy and the orientation of the State: The realization of the basic aspirations of the country concerning the upgrading of Cyprus to an international and regional centre of services, the adjustment to the information society and the improvement of the quality of life require readjustments and a new role in the education sector.
- European Union: The European dimension of the country's policy intensifies the need towards harmonizing the education system to European educational practices, without neglecting the local culture and character of the Cyprus Educational System. Furthermore, the most important challenge for the Cyprus Educational System arises from the strategic goal set by the Lisbon European Council for the European Union to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge- based society in the world by 2010.
- Social values and social changes: Education is considered as the means for social mobility and active participation in our society and a basic tool for effectively combating various social problems. New challenges for the education system arise from the increasingly multicultural nature of Cyprus society.

In view of the challenges and in conjunction with the realization that education is not only a basic human right but an essential pedagogical investment, the necessity for the continuation and strengthening of the education sector is acknowledged.

2. MAJOR REFORMS AND INNOVATIONS INTRODUCED IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

2.1 The Educational Reform Program and Process

In an environment where «the only factor that remains stable is change⁴», the Government of the Republic of Cyprus has initiated an ambitious Educational Reform Program, inviting dialogue among all stakeholders (Political Parties, Teacher Unions, Parents Associations, Associations of Students, and the Government, represented by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Planning Bureau) with a view to turn into reality the vision of a better and more modern educational system that would meet the needs and challenges of the twenty first century. This initiative was launched in January 2005, following a report by a Committee of seven academics which identified the weaknesses of the Cyprus Education System and the areas in need of reform and made recommendations.

The ongoing Educational Reform is an effort for a comprehensive introduction of changes and innovations at all levels and all aspects of the educational system. The main objective of this effort is to create a democratic and student-focused educational system, which includes all students irrespective of social, racial or ethnic background, gender, or physical or mental ability and offers high quality education to each student, thus assisting them to maximize their potential and acquire skills and knowledge which will enable them to become active and democratic citizens.

The process of reform is based on structured dialogue among all interested stakeholders. For this purpose, three Councils were set up:

Council for Primary and Secondary Education: This includes representatives of the Government, the teachers, the students, the parents and major political parties and discusses issues of interest to the school system.

⁴ As stated by the Greek Philosopher Heraclitus

Council for Higher Education: This includes representatives of the Government, the Universities and other Higher Education Institutions, the students, the parents, the Bodies responsible for quality assessment in higher education and major political parties and discusses issues of interest to the higher and university education.

Education Council: This consists of representatives of the Government and major political parties. It sets the agenda for issues to be addressed within the dialogue, reviews issues which have been discussed at the other two Councils and makes final recommendations to the Government.

The participation of political parties in the above mechanism is an innovative feature which aims at building consensus to the highest possible degree and the continuity of educational policy, through extensive discussion of the main issues.

The major policy changes carried out within the process of educational reform are outlined below.

2.2 Restructuring of the Ministry of Education and Culture

The Council of Ministers has approved the proposal of the Ministry of Education and Culture for the restructuring and the upgrading of the Ministry and the Pedagogical Institute and also the establishment of an Educational Research and Evaluation Centre.

The weaknesses of the existing structure and organization of the Ministry of Education and Culture have been identified in numerous studies that have examined the Cypriot Education System (UNESCO's Report, Report of the Committee for the Educational Reform), other institutions commissioned by the Government (Report of the General Controller of the Government) as well as organizations directly involved with the Education System (Educational Organizations).

The common conclusion of all studies can be summarized by the following statement of the Committee for the Educational Reform: «The administrative system of governing

and monitoring of the Ministry of Education and Culture remains strictly centralized, bureaucratic and inflexible».

The Restructuring of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the implementation of which started in 2008, aims to modernize the Ministry's organizational structure on the basis of the following axes:

- Decentralization,
- Establishment of horizontal administrative structures,
- Establishment of new permanent posts within the Ministry,
- Possibility of secondment of teachers to the Ministry in order to exercise specific duties for a predetermined period,
- In- service training of administrative staff,
- Re-engineering of departments such as the Accounting Department and the Registry.

2.3 Establishment of a Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation and Restructuring of the Pedagogical Institute

The Council of Ministers has also decided to upgrade the pre-existing research unit of the Pedagogical Institute into a new Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation (CERE). The aim is to carry out more and deeper applied research into educational issues and practices as well as objective evaluation of education programs, to be used as a basis for the formulation and implementation of evidence-based education policy.

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The Pedagogical Institute (PI) will also be restructured and upgraded in order to carry out its functions in in-service training and the provision of supporting services more effectively.

The CERE and the PI are envisaged to cooperate closely with each other and with Universities and other higher education institutions. For this purpose, a common Scientific Council was established, composed of university professors and education

specialists, which will oversee the operation of both institutions and advise the Government on priorities, policies and programs.

2.4 Revision of National Curriculum

The modernization, restructuring and upgrading of the national curriculum from pre-primary education to upper secondary general technical and vocational education, with the aim of better addressing the needs of the students for the 21st century, is one of the major issues of the Educational Reform Program. The objective is to create an integrated continuum of early childhood education, pre-primary education, primary education, secondary general and secondary technical and vocational education. Within this framework special emphasis will be given to defining aims and key contents of different subjects and thematic entities in order to form a more unified educational approach. The new core curriculum will be developed so as to provide all students opportunity for individual choice and provision of supporting services, including supplementary instruction in areas of need. The key competencies that Europe's citizens should acquire to enable them to adapt to changes will be effectively addressed.

For the development of the new curriculum, the Government has set up a Committee of experts which is currently preparing its recommendations.

2.5 Teacher Training

The radical improvement of the quality of teaching through teacher training is one of the key objectives of the Educational Reform Program. Within this context, the pre-service training of secondary school teachers, which was carried out by the Pedagogical Institute, has been upgraded and assigned to the University of Cyprus.

Furthermore, a comprehensive strategy for in-service training of teachers has been adopted, which provides for the systematic identification of training needs and planning

of specific programs to address these needs for upgrading the skills of teachers at various stages of their career, keeping them at the fore front of technological and educational developments and compensating for any weaknesses they may exhibit. The strategy promulgates a combination of institutional and school-based training variety of forms of training aiming at a balance between theoretical and practical training.

In addition to the in-service training programs already carried out by the Pedagogical Institute, in the context of the new strategy a novel program has just been introduced for on-the job training, mentoring and assistance of newly appointed teachers.

2.6 Introduction of Mandatory Pre-primary Education

Pre-Primary Education has become mandatory as of 1st September 2004 for children aged 4 years and 8 months to 5 years and 8 months. Children of this age must attend public kindergartens, or private kindergartens which are registered and approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Attendance in public kindergartens is free for children of the mandatory age. Younger children aged 3 to 4 years and 8 months take up vacant places in public kindergartens and pay fees. Children of poor families who receive public allowance from the Welfare Services are exempted from the payment of fees. The State covers all expenses for the introduction of this innovation while at the same time continues to subsidize the functioning of community kindergartens.

2.7 Promotion and Implementation of the All-Day School in Primary Education

(i) Optional All- Day Schools in Primary Education

The number of schools in which an optional afternoon program is offered has increased to 150, compared to 70 six years ago. In 126 schools the optional afternoon program is offered to grades 4, 5 and 6 and in 24 to grades 1-6. The All-Day Schools function from October to May, four days a week, until 4:00 pm (four periods were added to their daily program). No changes have been made concerning either the curriculum or the timetable of the morning school. The afternoon program includes carrying out assigned

homework, reinforcing teaching and teaching of two of the following optional subjects: English, Information Technology, Music, Physical Education, Art, Design and Technology. The number of children per class ranged from 8 to 25 according to the subject and needs of each school unit. Classes' and groups' compositions depend on the pupils' and teachers' interests. The Ministry of Education and Culture provides to all schools functioning as All- Day Schools the appropriate equipment. Expenses and necessary arrangements for the provision/preparation of the meals are undertaken by the parents. The Ministry of Education and Culture covers the cost of the meals of the students coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

In 2005-6 the Optional All-Day School concept was introduced in Pre-Primary Education and is now applied in 20 public kindergartens.

(ii) All-Day Unified Schools in Primary Education

The All-Day Unified School was introduced on a pilot basis in nine Primary Schools in 2006-2007 and in another six schools in 2007-2008. The pilot program has a total duration of three consecutive years and will be evaluated by an independent Evaluation Committee which has been established.

Schools which participate in this program have longer tuition hours and an enriched curriculum for all children compared to the ordinary primary schools. The educational context and the administrative arrangements of the All-Day Unified Schools are very different from those applied to All-Day Voluntary Schools. All-Day Unified Schools operate under a unified curriculum, unified school management and staff and an upgraded educational context. During the four days the school operates in the afternoon, lunch is provided to children. During lunch, additional subsidiary staff provides services, and the children are supervised by their teachers. The cost of meals is covered by the parents. However, the Ministry of Education and Culture, based on socioeconomic criteria, covers the cost of meals for a number of children.

The Ministry of Education and Culture will consider the gradual extension of the program to more primary schools all over Cyprus, upon completion of its independent evaluation.

2.8 Special Education

The Education of Children with Special Needs Law (L113II)/1999) is the legislative framework which regulates the identification of children with special education needs, the educational resources to meet their needs and the ongoing evaluation of the students' progress. This Law marked a change from the previous policy, in that it provides for the integration of students with special needs in to mainstream classes, in accordance with the Salamanca Principles. Nine Special Schools operate for children with severe disabilities whose educational needs cannot be addressed within regular schools.

According to the Law, a student is deemed to have a special educational need if he/she has significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of students of a similar age or if a disability prevents or impedes him/her from using the standard educational facilities and resources available in to mainstream classes. Special educational services are provided free of charge by the state to those students in need between the ages of 3 and 18 years (extension of education up to 21 years can be approved where it is deemed necessary). In each educational area, a District Committee is established which examines the cases of referred children and makes proposals to the Directors of the relevant levels of education regarding placement and educational provision. The District Committee has the duty to evaluate the needs of any student considered to have special needs. The evaluation of any student is carried out by a multidisciplinary team including a psychologist specialist, special education teacher, a doctor, a speech pathologist and any other specialist indicated. Students, to whom special education and training have been determined, attend ordinary schools, special units or special schools with appropriate infrastructure, adapted to their own needs and to their individual

program, which is set up by the joining officials, in cooperation with the teachers and parents of the child. The child's progress is supervised by the same officials.

Special educators can be either fully assigned to mainstream schools and run special units at regular schools or act as peripatetic teachers and provide individual support to students with special needs in various school units. The abovementioned educators are considered part of the schools' teaching staff in much the same way as other specialized educators such as music, physical education or art teachers.

Children to whom special education and training has been determined, attend regular school units, special units or special schools with appropriate infrastructure, adapted to their own needs and to their individual program, which is setup by the Special Education Coordinators (SENCOs), the teachers and parents of the child. The same officials also supervise the child's progress.

In the context of the Educational Reform Program, the whole system of special education will be appraised, with a view to its improvement.

2.9 Expansion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Program in All Public Schools

A very extensive program for expanding ICT in all public schools, from pre-primary to upper secondary, is under implementation in the last five years. The program is aimed at ensuring that all students are computer literate and able to use and benefit from ICT and that teachers are able to use ICT effectively in the educational process. The action plan for ICT addresses the following sectors:

Infrastructure: The technical infrastructure includes the acquisition of equipment, the networking and the construction of computer laboratories.

National Curriculum: The plan suggests the enrichment of the National Curriculum at the level of objectives and activities in order to include ICT use in schools and also the

development of essential material (software and other) in order to assist the use of ICT in the educational process.

Teacher Training: The training of teachers aims at the acquisition of skills for ICT tools and the ability to use them in the educational process. The Cyprus Pedagogical Institute is responsible for developing and implementing teacher training programs. Thus far, programs related to ICT have been offered to about 85% of all teachers in primary and secondary education.

In Pre-Primary and Primary Schools ICT is not taught as a separate subject in the Cyprus' National Curriculum, but is used as a dynamic tool in the teaching and learning process, aiming at a more effective implementation of the school curriculum and developing of skills such as problem solving, decision making, communication and information handling. A team of ICT advisors assist the teachers in the use of software and the integration of ICT in the learning process. The enrichment of Science Curriculum aiming at the exploitation of ICT tools in the learning process has been completed. Digital material is being developed such as simulations, databases, web quests and other, in order to utilize the additive value of ICT. The action plan is now being extended in the subject of Mathematics aiming at enriching the curriculum.

During the past few years, the syllabi of Information Technology courses in Secondary Education have been updated in order to meet European standards and current trends. The teaching of these courses at the Gymnasium and the Lyceum aims at engaging pupils in meaningful learning using the computer as a problem solving tool. There are 181 IT labs with 17 computers and one printer per lab in all Gymnasias and there are 120 IT labs in all Lyceums, depending on the curriculum needs. Each lab contains 18 computers, printers, scanners, and multimedia hardware. All computers in all IT labs are connected to the Internet via ADSL lines. Furthermore, a video projector is installed in all laboratories. The video projector is connected to the teacher's computer. In 2007 the eLearning course offered by CISCO Networking Academy continued in ten Lyceums in Cyprus. Several Information technology teachers were trained ahead in order to facilitate the course.

In all Gymnasia, Information Technology is taught for two periods per week in each of the three classes. The main objective is for pupils to cover material of European standards (ECDL). Furthermore, pupils are taught basic issues of algorithms and programming. In the A' Lyceum Class, the subject is taught for two periods per week and the objective is to introduce pupils to Information Technology. In B' and C' Classes of the Lyceum the common core subject is taught for two periods per week and the optional subject is taught for four periods per week in each class. Computers are also used in all Lyceums as a teaching tool in courses such as Typing, Physics, Biology, History, and Languages. Furthermore, software and hardware support is provided for all other curriculum disciplines and subjects. One to twenty PCs have been placed in the Typing and the Technology classes of every Lyceum in Cyprus. Additionally, one to six computers have been placed in rooms such as Physics labs, Language Rooms, History, Mathematics, and Multimedia classes, as well as in the Counseling offices. Finally, computers can also be found in all school libraries with Internet access.

The Learning Management System (LMS) refers to the use of platform that enables the communication between teachers, students and parents in issues like absences, homework, examination grades etc. This platform was launched on a pilot basis in 8 schools in Secondary General and Secondary Technical and Vocational Schools, in November 2008, whilst its installation in all public schools is expected to be completed in 2009-2010.

The LMS Platform has been designed to have the following capabilities: (a) Learning material according with to the curriculum, some material has been uploaded and is under testing; (b) Email and calendar facilities for the students, the teachers and the parents; (c) Space for personal WebPages for the students and the teachers; (d) Lessons in synchronous (all students can use it at the same time) and asynchronous mode (any student can use it whenever is suitable for him/her). A pilot use of the LMS at 4 Lyceums, 3 Technical/Vocational schools and 1 primary school is expected to start in November 2008.

In an effort to keep pace with the rapid technological developments, Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training (STVE) is in the process of introducing new technology in the STVE curricula. A pilot project has been operating in A' Technical School Limassol and comprises instructional models in Pneumatics, Programmable Logic Control, CNC Machine Tools, Computer Aided Manufacturing and Robotics.

In addition to the above, upgrading of the curricula in Computers and Information Technology in STVE is at an advanced stage. The aim of the course is on the one hand to achieve computer literacy for all pupils in STVE and on the other hand to enable them to use Information Technology and Computers as a tool for learning and as a means of accessing information and carrying out various tasks in their adult life.

2.10 Zones of Educational Priority

The Ministry of Education and Culture in its effort to promote tolerance and dialogue and in order to eliminate stereotypes through education has set in place the program for Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP). The policy for the Zones of Educational Priority derived from the strategy of positive discrimination (UNESCO), which is based on the unequal treatment of inequalities.

Each ZEP consists of one Gymnasium (lower secondary school), the main primary schools in its capture area and the main kindergartens linked with these primary schools, in degraded areas with a pupil population coming from families of a low socioeconomic and educational level. The criteria for defining an area as ZEP is a high record of school failure and functional illiteracy in the area's school units, a high share of migrant or foreign language speaking pupils, a high number of drop-outs and high incidence of violent and anti-social behavior (young delinquency).

The Ministry of Education and Culture provides additional resources to the vulnerable groups of schools which are included in the Zones of Educational Priority.

Three Zones of Educational Priority were established in 2003-4 in the towns of Lefkosia, Lemesos and Pafos. A fourth ZEP has been established, during the current school year 2008-2009, in the town of Larnaka.

The ZEP specific objectives are:

- The democratic school that functions for the social inclusion of all children and for combating dropping out of the system and social exclusion.
- A school system that respects difference, pluralism (cultural, language, religious) and multiple intelligence.
- The reduction of functional illiteracy until completion of primary education and its elimination until the end of the ten year compulsory education.
- The elimination of the dropout phenomenon, especially during the ten year compulsory education.
- The drastic reduction of school failure at all levels of education.

Actions taken within the framework of ZEPs include:

- Reduction in the number of children per classroom.
- Employment of teachers speaking the mother tongue of foreign language speaking pupils.
- Offer of free meals to underprivileged pupils of the kindergartens and primary schools.
- Offer of afternoon activities (groups, clubs) at the Gymnasiums included in ZEPs.
- Posting of two educationists in each ZEP as coordinators.
- All-day functioning of the primary schools and Gymnasiums covered by ZEPs.

The operation of ZEPs has had positive results, such as a reduction of pupil drop-outs, of school failure (referrals and repetitions) and of referrals to the Educational Psychology Service, as well as improvement of school success.

2.11 Multicultural Education

During the last few years, a growing number of immigrant students, coming from a large number of different countries have enrolled in Public Schools. About 8,8% of the pupils attending Public Schools do not speak Greek as their mother language. Various support measures are currently being practiced. Bilingual students participate in the classroom along with the native Greek-speaking. A flexible system of intervention exists within the ordinary timetables. Bilingual students attend separate classes for intensive learning of the Greek language and specialized assistance according to their specific needs.

Extra teaching time of the Greek language is provided for children who have a language background other than Greek. Additionally, help is provided for individual, cultural, professional and social development and translators are employed to support the communication between schools, teachers and families not using the Greek language at an adequate level.

A comprehensive program for the integration of immigrant students in schools was adopted recently by the Council of Ministers. The main features of the program are: special classes for the rapid learning of Greek, the preparation of material with information about Cyprus and the educational system in 8 foreign languages for the students and their families, the training of language teachers in the teaching of Greek as a foreign and/ or as a second language and the monitoring of the needs and the progress of the students.

In addition, education in all schools is increasingly focused on the acceptance of difference, tolerance, the respect for other cultures, so as to prepare all students for living in a multicultural environment.

In recognition of the special educational and cultural needs of its religious groups, Cyprus is a signatory of the Convention for the Protection of Minority Languages. It has officially declared the Armenian language and, just recently, the Cypriot Maronite language as minority languages, undertaking specific responsibilities for their protection and revival.

Special measures have been undertaken for the inclusion of Roma students in the Cyprus Educational System, within the context of Zones of Educational Priority.

2.12 Program for Preventing Antisocial Behavior

Increasing concerns have been raised with respect to the antisocial behavior of some students in the school system. To address this problem, a number of programs have been introduced, at all levels of education, aiming mainly at the prevention of antisocial behavior, through raising students' self-esteem, teaching them to manage their feelings and preventing school failure, which has been identified as a major factor resulting in antisocial behavior.

The Ministry has assigned to a committee of experts the study of this issue and a fully fledged policy, with enhanced measures is currently being designed on the basis of its recommendations.

2.13 Functional Literacy Program

Functional illiteracy is a serious problem of modern societies making social adjustment difficult and leading students to delinquency, self destructive behavior and the use of addictive substances, psychological and health problems. The Ministry of Education and Culture started a program against functional illiteracy in 1989, which aims at offering equal opportunities for all in education in order to avoid social exclusion. Its main objectives are the fostering and development of basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic, comprehension, receiving and understanding information, facilitating and developing skills for critical thinking and communication in written and oral forms.

The Permanent Working Group for the promotion of literacy and school success was set up in 1999 with the following agenda:

- Carry research on literacy, school failure and reading skills;
- Organize, coordinate and evaluate preventive actions and programs in the areas already mentioned;

- Fight illiteracy and school failure by organizing, coordinating, supporting and evaluating programs that are currently in place in public schools.

2.14 Educational Psychology Service – Students Counseling Service

In recent years, awareness of the role of supporting services which deal with students' educational and personal problems has been increasing. The number of qualified educational psychologists employed by the Ministry of Education and Culture has risen significantly and a further expansion and upgrading of the Service is planned. The expansion and upgrading of the School Counseling Service is also under consideration. Currently, both Services are under external evaluation by experts and decisions will be made on the basis of the recommendations.

2.15 Open School Program

In order to achieve the overall objectives of social inclusion, it is necessary to ensure compatibility of programs run by local authorities and voluntary organizations with specific social inclusion objectives and policies. This will lead to a more decisive and substantial contribution of local authorities and the voluntary sector towards meeting the needs of the modern society.

The Ministry of Education and Culture in cooperation with four municipalities has launched an ambitious pilot program for the operation of "Open School". Through this program, the Ministry of Education and Culture provides financial assistance to the municipality for implementing a number of educational and social activities in the school premises, outside normal school hours. The activities are designed according to the needs of the community and typically include sporting and cultural events for young people and educational and social events for adults and senior citizens.

For the effective operation of the "Open School", the Municipalities, the School Boards the Parents Associations and the Ministry of Education and Culture cooperate closely in order to secure sufficient funds and design programs that benefit the community. The

program is envisaged to address many problems of the community, particularly to reduce antisocial behavior among young people, while at the same time making full use of school infrastructure.

2.16 Maximum Number of Students per Class

The decrease in the number of pupils per class for all grades in all public schools is an essential part of the Government's educational policy. By a decision of the Council of Ministers, the maximum number of students per class is gradually reduced to 25. The program has been completed in secondary education and most grades of primary school and will be completed in the school year 2010-2011.

2.17 Introduction of programs for talented students in Secondary Education

As the aim of the Educational Reform Program is to enable each students maximize their potential, special programs have been introduced (Music School and Sports School) in the last three years for talented students in music and sport.

The two Music Schools which have been established and are now in operation during the afternoon, that is after regular school hours. The two Sports Schools operate as "all-day" schools, with an extension of school hours and a redesigned school program so as to integrate additional sports training and lessons for the talented students.

2.18 Restructuring of Final Examinations of Lyceums and University Entrance Examinations

Up until 2005, final year students of Lyceums gave a final examination for the purpose of obtaining a leaving certificate and a different examination for the purpose of entering university. Since 2006, the two examinations have been merged into one, the Pancyprian Examinations and at the same time several improvements were introduced into the system.

2.19 Developments in Technical Education

The improvement of Secondary Technical Education is one of the basic objectives of the Educational Reform Program. The restructuring of the existing system is an issue which will be studied in depth. In the meantime, various studies have been carried out and improvements have been introduced.

More specifically, studies for the reform of the Apprenticeship Scheme have been carried out and work has started on the introduction of a Competence-Based System of Vocational Qualifications. The future development of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that will incorporate the System of Vocational Qualifications is expected to contribute to the further improvement of knowledge, skills and competences through lifelong learning. The transparency of Vocational Qualifications that is an important part of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is expected to improve the vocational education and training systems. As a result, the persons involved will acquire the knowledge, skills and competences that are needed in the labor market both at a National and a European level.

2.20 Developments in Higher Education

The twenty first century has already witnessed very significant developments in Higher, particularly University Education, in Cyprus. The University of Cyprus, which was established in 1992, remained the only University in Cyprus until 2005, whereas now there are six Universities in total, three public and three private.

The socioeconomic and technological progress of our times and the need for widening access to university level education, especially for persons already in the workforce, called for the establishment of a new form for a Higher Education Institution; the Open University. For these reasons, and in order to promote lifelong learning through open and distance learning, Law 234(I) of 2003 was put in effect, which provides for the establishment and operation of the Open University of Cyprus. The Open University of

Cyprus is a state university which offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses, as well as training and vocational programs of study.

Moreover, the need for the establishment of the Cyprus University of Technology (CUT) arose from the need to upgrade into university level, a number of applied and professional fields of study, previously offered by Public Institutions of Higher Education and from the need to increase supply of university level education in Cyprus. Law 198 (I)/2003, providing for the establishment and operation of the Cyprus University of Technology was published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Cyprus on 31 December 2003. The Cyprus University of Technology, which started its operation in September 2007, aspires to become a modern and pioneering University capable of offering high level training and research in popular fields, which today offer great economic, technical and scientific output.

The development program for the University of Cyprus also provides for further expansion, through the introduction of new faculties and programs of study. The University started operating in 1992 with the Faculties of Humanities, Social Studies and Education, Pure and Applied Sciences, Economics and Management. In recent years the Faculty of Engineering and the Departments of Biological Sciences and Law have been added, while recently the policy decision for the establishment of a Medical School has been made.

Law 109(I) of 2005 provides for the establishment and operation of Private Universities. Three Private Universities are now operating under the Law. All three have evolved from higher, non- University, institutions.

The future priorities in the sector include the further expansion of opportunities for higher education studies in Cyprus by increasing the number of courses and places in the public Universities, while at the same time safeguarding and upgrading quality standards.

The establishment of the Cyprus Quality Assurance Agency is under consideration. The aim of this Agency will be to promote quality assurance and safeguard

accountability for both public and private Higher Academic Educational Institutions through various measures. These measures should include external accreditation and development of internal quality culture based on the European Network of Quality Assurance (ENQA) Standards and guidelines and European agreements on collaboration for quality assurance. This new body is expected to undertake the functions of the Council for the Educational Evaluation-Accreditation of Programs of Study (SEKAP) and the Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KYSATS) and carry out the evaluation of all public and private higher education institutions operating in Cyprus.

2.21 Lifelong Learning Strategy

A comprehensive Lifelong Learning Strategy for Cyprus was established in 2007 and covers the period 2007 to 2013. The LLL Strategy received the approval of the Council of Ministers, which proceeded to the appointment of the National Committee for Lifelong Learning, the body responsible for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the Strategy, for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures taken and for the formulation of proposals concerning the reform of the Strategy.

The LLL Strategy covers all levels and types of education and training, formal, informal and non-formal, from pre-primary education to adult and continuing education and training. All aspects of Lifelong Learning, including school education, technical education and training, informal and non-formal education and training that meet the needs of various groups of people of the Cypriot society are addressed in the aforementioned document. The challenges addressed by the LLL Strategy including Lifelong Learning Education are the following:

- Make education and training systems accessible to all citizens of Cyprus, including those with special needs and disadvantaged groups;

- Improve education and training systems, their content and infrastructure, in order to meet the educational and training needs of the modern Cypriot society;
- Increase research and development activities, especially in areas which are important for LL in Cyprus;
- Attain efficiency in governance of LL systems, with the active participation of all social partners.

The Educational Reform, the dialogue which has been initiated in 2005 for the restructuring and the modernization of the Cyprus Education System, constitutes a key vehicle for the implementation of the LLL Strategy, in addressing the above challenges. The main aims of the Reform, as mentioned previously, are to improve the quality of education, to modernize the curricula and the teaching methods, to offer equal opportunities to young people, and to contribute to overcoming the difficulties and eliminating obstacles for education of children and adults coming from diverse backgrounds and having diverse needs. The priorities for action and policy development within the strategy are:

- Address the needs of the society for civic education, social cohesion, active citizenship, entrepreneurship etc;
- Address the needs of children and young people for education and counseling;
- Address the needs of young adults for training in order to enter the work force;
- Address the needs of unemployed adults for retraining;
- Address the needs of the labor market in Cyprus.

The main policy measures in the LLL Strategy consist of:

- Modernizing teaching methods and curricula to include the use of technologies in teaching as well as to include European priorities.
- Support systems for the education and training of people with special needs and disadvantaged people.

- Expansion of the opportunities offered to young people for higher education studies in Cyprus by establishing new universities, new faculties to existing ones, and regulating the operation of private universities and other tertiary education institutions.
- Promotion of the training and strengthening of the employability of young high-school graduates, college graduates, unemployed and economically inactive women.
- Redesigning of the apprenticeship system in order to meet the needs of early school leavers as well as the labor market.
- Strengthening and expanding mechanism for vocational guidance within and outside the school system.
- Improvement of initial and in-service training for teachers.
- Promotion and support of educational research and development.
- Feasibility study for the operation of public vocational lifelong learning schools.
- Strengthening the administrative capacity of the public sector through training and development.
- Encouragement of the private sector to get involved in Education and training and development.
- Encouragement of cooperation for Lifelong Learning between relevant stakeholders, including policy makers, teachers unions, trade unions, political parties, parents' and students' associations, etc.

There is an on-going process of cooperation and consultation among relevant Ministries as well as various stakeholders. This includes cooperation with teachers, parents and students' associations as well as with political parties, employers, employees and local authorities. The Ministry of Education and Culture is promoting all the aspects of Educational Reform through respective Councils where all education stakeholders participate.

3. MAIN POLICIES, ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Cyprus has a comprehensive and inclusive educational and training system, offering extensive opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge and skills. The inclusive nature of the system is attested by the following indicators:

- (a) The enrolment ratio for children aged 5-14 is about 100% for both boys and girls. In the age group 15-18 the average enrolment ratio is about 95%, with girls exhibiting a higher ratio, 98%, than boys, 92%, (Statistics of Education, 2006/2007).
- (b) The percentage of people aged 20-24 that have completed the Lyceum, upper secondary education, is 83,7%, which is higher than the EU average, 77, 8% (Statistics of Education, 2005/2006).
- (c) Cyprus education and is mandatory up to the age of 15. About 98% of the graduates of mandatory education continue their studies to upper secondary education, 86,1% in secondary general and 12% in technical/vocational education.
- (d) About 82% of the secondary education graduates continue their studies in tertiary education, 37% in Cyprus and 45% abroad.
- (e) Free education is offered in public educational institutions at all levels.
- (f) Only 293 students are currently enrolled in Special Education Schools, compared to 4734 special education students in mainstream schools (586 of which attend special units).

Issues of concern with respect to participation rates are:

- the relatively low rates of participation of students in technical education, particularly of girls, who constitute only 14,8% of the total population in the technical/vocational schools;

- the overall participation rate in life-long learning, which amounted to 8,4% for persons aged 25-64, lower than the EU average (9,7%) and considerably lower than the European target of 12,5% by 2010.

It has become increasingly clear that statistics on participation rates do not give the full picture on the issue of inclusion of all children in the education system. Many children are at a disadvantage because of their socioeconomic background, physical or mental disability or other personal or individual characteristics or problems they face. Therefore, in the last years, attention has increasingly been focused on raising the quality of education and adjusting it to the needs of the individual student. All of the reforms outlined above have aimed at promoting a truly inclusive education system, which enables each student to reach the maximum of his or her potential. For this purpose, policy interventions were introduced at all levels of education.

Acknowledging the importance of early childhood intervention, pre-primary education was made mandatory because it was found that children who entered primary school without any pre-primary education were at a disadvantage in relation to other children and hence, they ran the risk of being left behind and eventually being marginalized in the education system and in society.

The Optional All - Day Primary School Program was introduced in response to a social need, in order to offer children of working parents to opportunity to stay in the school after the completion of the formal program, in a safe environment, with some educational activities. The All – Day Unified School was introduced on a pilot basis in order to expand, enrich and upgrade the quality of the formal education program which all children follow, thus promoting the aim of equal education opportunities.

The concept of Zones of Educational Priority was introduced in order to apply specially designed and reinforced educational measures in disadvantaged areas, with a concentration of families of low social and economic background, with positive results.

A social phenomenon that is relatively new to Cyprus is the inflow of large numbers of immigrants and temporary workers from a multitude of countries, which created a sharp need for special measures to facilitate the inclusion of the children of this group in the educational system. The policy of the Zones of Educational Priority has helped considerably in this respect. In order to give a further boost to this effort, the comprehensive policy on Multicultural Education was recently adopted.

The rapid expansion of University Education, both public and private, which is under way, is a policy aimed at making education at this level more accessible to Cypriot students. At the same time, great emphasis is placed on maintaining high standards of quality, because without quality education cannot be truly inclusive.

The aims of the educational reform program in general and the move towards inclusive education in particular have put considerable pressure on the teachers, whose task has become much more complex and difficult than it was in the past. Therefore, the continuous development of teachers' skills through pre-service and in-service training has become a factor of paramount importance.

In the area of education of students with special needs, even though a very big step towards inclusion has been achieved with the adoption and implementation of the 1999 Law, various problems have appeared which necessitate an appraisal and improvement of the system.

The need is also felt for expanding and improving supporting services such as the Educational Psychology and the School Counseling Services, so that the psychological

and adjustment problems of certain students will be handled by professionals and, in addition, teachers will have access to professional assistance in dealing with everyday problems of the students.

The efforts that have been initiated in the last few years concerning the restructuring of the administrative framework of the educational system reflect a realization that effective administrative structures constitute a prerequisite for successful implementation of education policies. Of particular significance are the plans for upgrading of the Pedagogical Institute, as the main provider and co-coordinator of teacher training programs, and the setting up of the Educational Research and Evaluation Centre, through which the objective of research-based policy formulation will be pursued.

One important lesson that has been learned is that educational issues are of concern to the whole of society and therefore, all stakeholders need to be involved in the design of future strategy and policy in education. The setting up of the mechanism for the Educational Reform initiative was based on this concept. Furthermore, the Open School program brings together all stakeholders at a local level in designing and implementing activities which address the needs of the community.

4. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE WAY TO THE FUTURE

The strategy of the Cyprus Government for the educational sector is to proceed with the Educational Reform Program at a faster pace, in order to fully achieve the goal of an all inclusive, democratic and human school, which embraces all students equally and provides education to each and every child according to his or her needs, assisting them to reach the maximum of their potential.

The policies that have been outlined in section 2 will be implemented, assessed and improved. Some of the major new policy initiatives that are included in future plans for inclusive education are outlined below:

4.1 Revision of school curriculum

The process that has been initiated with respect to the revision of the school curriculum will be continued. The key themes of the new curriculum will be to ensure that children acquire the key competencies that they will need in order to be active and democratic citizens, to enhance their critical thinking and research capabilities and to include a variety of teaching methodologies and introduce flexibility in the school program, so that the teacher may use the most appropriate approach for the particular class.

4.2 Further Extension of Mandatory Education

The extension of mandatory education from 10 to 12 years, by adding a second year to mandatory pre-primary education and fourth year to mandatory secondary education will be studied in depth.

4.3 Teacher Training, Recruitment and Assessment

Both pre-service and in-service training of teachers will be radically improved so as to enable the teachers to face up to the challenges of the twenty first century. A long term program of priorities for teacher training, as well as annual plans, will be produced by the recently appointed Education Board.

In addition, as serious flaws have been identified in the systems of recruitment and assessment of teachers, both these systems will be revised and modernized, with a view to raising quality standards in the teaching profession.

4.4 Research based policy

The full staffing and operation of the Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation is expected to improve considerably the availability of objective, scientific research data on the educational needs of the children and the effectiveness of the various programs of

the Ministry of Education and Culture, on which the design of future policies will be based.

4.5 All-Day Unified School

The pilot program introduced in fifteen primary schools is running its third, final year and decisions concerning its extension will need to be made soon, on the basis of the evaluation that is under way. If successful, the program will be one the major innovations introduced in the education system in Cyprus.

4.6 Special Needs Education

A thorough review of current practices with respect to special needs education will be carried out, with the aim of improving them and ensuring the full inclusion of children with special needs. Particular attention will be paid to the assessment procedures, the design of special programs addressing the individual needs of the child, the training of all teachers in the handling of children with various types of disabilities and the best possible utilization of available expertise in special needs education.

4.7 Information and Communication Technology Program

Priorities in this area include the improvement of the planning and administration machinery for the program, the implementation of the initiatives that have been introduced for the full computerization of the administrative processes within the school system and the use of ICT in the education process and the introduction of measures to make the new technologies more accessible to all pupils, for example, by subsidizing the purchase of computers by the families of school children.

4.8 Zones of Education Priority

The program will be continued with the setting up of additional zones in areas which fulfill the criteria. At the same time, the policy interventions in the existing ZEP will be assessed and improved so as to cater to the requirements more effectively.

4.9 Multicultural Education

The recently adopted policy for Multicultural Education will be fully implemented, reviewed and improved in order to achieve the full inclusion of children from different countries and cultures in the education system and the fullest possible acceptance and respect of different cultures in the school population.

4.10 Psychological, social and adjustment problems of students

The Educational Psychology Service and the Educational Counseling Service will be strengthened and improved, following their evaluation, in order to enhance their contribution in the treatment of educational, emotional and psychological problems of students, in order to prevent their marginalization and exclusion from the education system. A fully fledged policy for preventing and handling antisocial behavior of students will be adopted as well.

4.11 Open School Program

The extension of the Open School Program to all municipalities as well as large villages is under consideration, as a method that promotes the involvement of the local society in the education and social life of community.

4.12 Talented Students

The needs of talented students will be addressed through the improvement and, possibly expansion of the Music School and the Sports School Programs that have been introduced in recent years. The introduction of more programs or methods for talented and gifted children will be considered.

4.13 Technical and Vocational Education

The improvement of Technical and Vocational Education and the encouragement of more students, particularly girls, to participate in it, is an issue which will be examined in depth in the near future. The issue of merging or linking it with Secondary General Education will be considered, within the context of the curriculum reform.

4.14 Higher Education

University Education will continue its expansion, in accordance to the development plans of the three public and the three private Universities. Particular attention will be given to the upgrading and maintaining of quality standards, both in University and in higher, non-university, education. Decisions will be made with respect to the establishment of the Cyprus Quality Assurance Agency which is currently under consideration.

4.15 Lifelong Learning

It is expected that the participation of adults in lifelong learning activities will rise as a result of the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Strategy which has been adopted.

5. CONCLUSION

At the beginning of a new century, educational systems all over the world are facing increased demands for the provision of quality education for the good of all. In order to meet today's numerous challenges and the complexities of contemporary educational provision, there is need to work with all stake holders –teachers, students, parents, the academic community, political parties- together in a spirit of understanding and cooperation, joining our efforts and potentials for the successful implementation of the ambitious reforms which are under way. In this quest for achieving educational reform, inclusive education is the key dimension for quality education.

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