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Principles and general objectives of education

The overall goal of education is 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, create strong ties between schooling and preparation for life outside the classroom, and encourage a sense of responsible citizenship and sensitivity to global issues.

The main objectives of education 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 continuing education, self-education and a desire to partake in public activities under the conditions of a market economy.

Within the framework of the *National Reform Programme 2011-2015*, the education priorities are: improving the quality of education; linking the curricula to actual needs of the economy; ensuring equal access to education and making the education system flexible with respect to the labour market economy; creating the preconditions for practical implementation of the lifelong learning concept; involving young people in the elaboration of sectoral policies; and transforming Bulgaria into a knowledge and innovation-based economy. (GOB, 2011).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

According to the provisions of the **National Education Act**, adopted in 1991 and amended many times (the last one in May 2010), education in the country is secular (Article 5). Article 4 stipulates that citizens shall have the right to education without any discrimination. Since 2008, the Ministry of Education must supply all pupils in grades 1-7 (including those in private schools) with textbooks and manuals free of charge (previously free textbook and school aids were provided free of charge to grades 1-4 pupils in state and municipal schools). (MOES, 2008).

In recent years several legislative instruments have been adopted for the development of the private school sector. For example, the **Ordinance on Private Schools** states that the government must create the necessary conditions for the development of a private school system.

A new structure for higher education has been in force since the end of 1995, enacted by the **Higher Education Act** (last amended in 2010). This Act provided for



the setting up of a National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education. The **Academic Autonomy Act** states that all universities and higher education institutions must independently determine all matters relating to their curricula, structure, teaching and research, qualification and certification.

Under the Higher Education Act of 1995, a **Regulation on Unified State Requirements for Obtaining the Professional Qualification of Teacher** was issued, defining the conditions and the minimum educational level for teachers and the criteria for their assessment. Before the enactment of the Higher Education Act there were also tertiary-level institutions providing teacher training outside the universities. These tertiary-level institutions were transformed into colleges and now offer programmes leading to the degree of a specialist.

The **Vocational Education and Training Act** adopted in 1999 defines the responsibilities of the institutions offering vocational education and training, and provides a new basis for their development.

The **Level of Education, General Education Minimum and Curriculum Act** of 1999 defined the two new levels of schooling (basic and secondary education) and specifies the compulsory, compulsory elective and free elective subjects, the curriculum learning areas, as well as issues concerning the general education minimum content. A number of Ordinances have been issued during 2000-2003 on topics such as the study content and the distribution of school time by grades, stages and levels.

The **Rules and procedures concerning the organization and the activities of the School Board of Trustees** of 1999 determine the organization, functions and activities of these bodies. Being civic society representatives, they have an important role in involving society in solving problems concerning education.

Article 53 of the **Constitution** (1991) stipulates that Bulgarian citizens have the right to education. Article 7 of the National Education Act stipulates that education shall be compulsory from the age of 6/7 to 16 years; education in state and municipal schools shall be free of charge. Article 8 specifies that students whose mother tongue is not the Bulgarian language shall have the right to study their mother tongue at municipal schools.

Administration and management of the education system

The administration of education is organized at four levels, i.e. national, regional, municipal and school. The **Ministry of Education, Youth and Science** (previously the Ministry of Education and Science, MOES) administers the education system as a specialized body of the Council of Ministers. It is responsible for the implementation of national education policies and plans. It forecasts and plans activities connected with the development of education in long-term programmes and operational plans; organizes and coordinates the work of the administrative units and educational establishments; and monitors the activities of all types and levels of schools (including nurseries). The Ministry 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.

The Ministry of Education organizes and coordinates 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 **Centre for the Control and Assessment of the Quality in Education**, under the MEYS, develops examination materials and standardized tests; checks the quality of tests and individual test tasks against accepted standards; organizes different types of exams at the national level in coordination with the Inspectorates; establishes, maintains and updates the database with test tasks and examination materials; processes and analyzes evaluations' results; and coordinates the participation of the country in international assessment studies.

There are twenty-eight **Education Inspectorates** at the regional level, which act as specialized territorial bodies of the MEYS. They have planning, coordination, and monitoring functions over the activities of schools within their jurisdiction. A regional Inspectorate comprises experts in the organization of secondary schools and experts in the different subjects and disciplines. The Inspectorates also play an active role in the preparation, organization and administration of the annual national external tests and matriculation exams.

Municipal bodies for education represent an element of the government territorial structure and participate in the implementation of the educational policy within their jurisdiction. They are responsible for the compulsory education of pupils up to age 16, for preschool education and extra-mural activities of children, for health care, financing, material and technical assets, premises, school meals, hostels, recreation and sports facilities, transportation, as well as for scholarships and special assistance for students.

The school is a legal entity. Its autonomy (pedagogical, organizational, methodological, administrative and managerial, as well as in staff selection) has been considerably extended in recent years. The **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 1995/96. 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 coordinate activities within schools.

The **National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency** is an independent body for evaluation, accreditation and monitoring of the quality in higher education institutions and scientific organizations. The Agency develops and adopts the procedures and related documentation for the process of accreditation, evaluates the projects for establishment or transformation of higher education institutions, and assesses their activities. The Agency follows the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The **Higher Attestation Commission**, under the Council of Ministers, specifies the criteria for conferring academic degrees and provides methodological guidance to the scientific councils.



The main tasks of the **National Agency for Vocational Education and Training** (VET), established in 2000 under the VET Act as a specialized body of the Council of Ministers, are to: assure and maintain the quality of the VET system according to the labour market needs; cooperate with social partners in implementing coordinated policies for lifelong learning, continuing vocational training and introducing successful European practices; expand the access of the unemployed and the employed to VET; develop the list of professions and the state standards for acquiring qualifications. The Agency also licenses Centres of Vocational Training that offer people over 16 years of age flexible and adjustable training programmes.

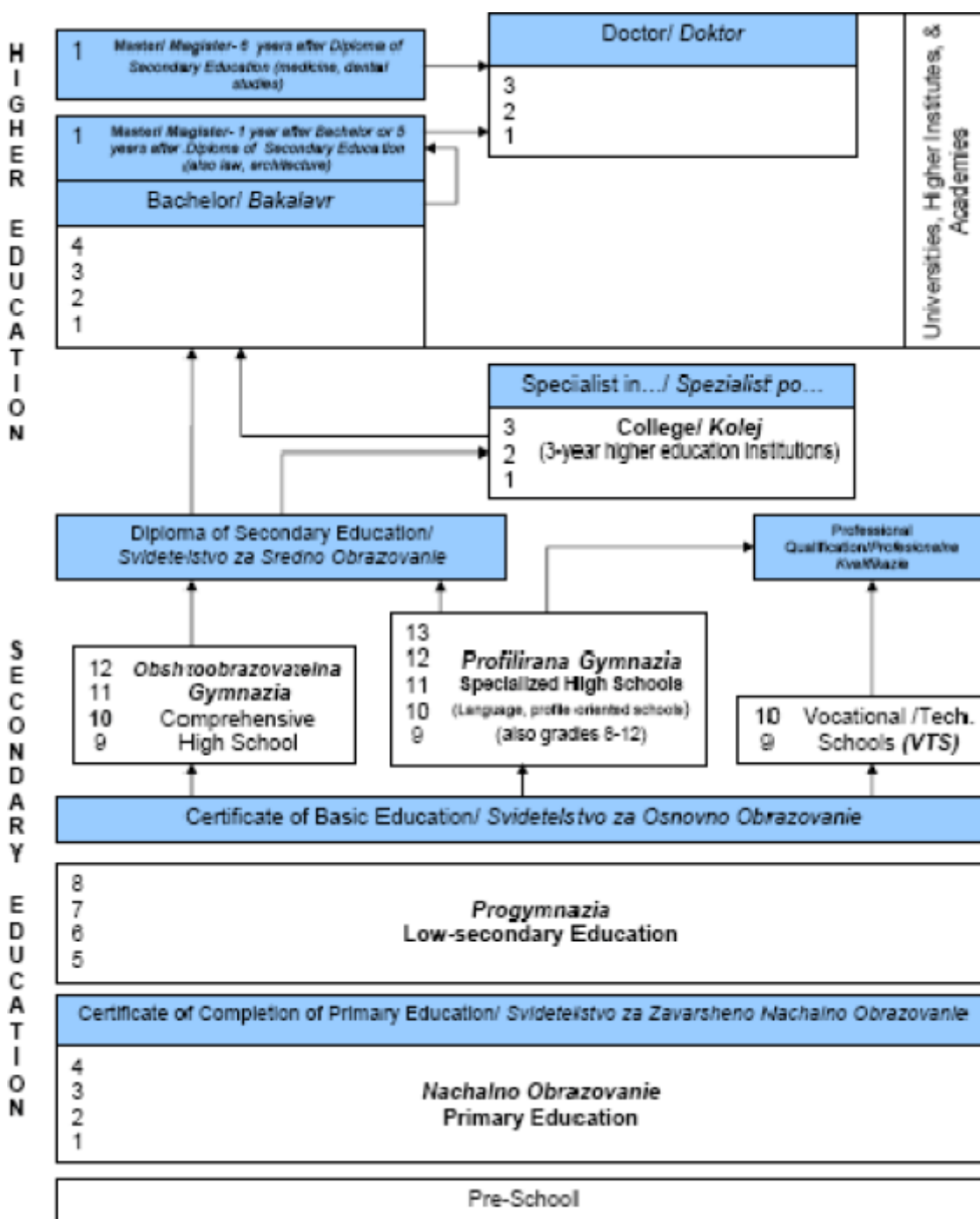
The **National Council for Vocational Qualification of the Workforce** at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy coordinates the development of national policies and strategies for training and vocational qualification of the unemployed and employed.

The **Human Resource Development Centre** (HRDC), established in 1999 as a legal entity, actively supports the work of the MEYS and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in the field of human resources. The HRDC organizes, coordinates and carries out projects and research in the field of education, vocational education and training, labor market and human resources. The HRDC is also the coordinating body in Bulgaria of the European Lifelong Learning Programme, and is working on the selection, evaluation, financing and monitoring of projects under the Programme offering consultancy services and advice to interested stakeholders in applying to the Programme.

The **State Agency for Child Protection**, an authority of the Council of Ministers established in 2001 under the Child Protection Act (Decree No. 226 of 10 October 2000), is responsible for the development of a unified and coordinated state policy for child protection. The main tasks of the Agency include: coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the national policy and programmes in the field of child protection; organizing inspections in all public and private educational institutions to verify the compliance with the rights of the child; supervising and monitoring specialized institutions for children; developing criteria and standards for social services targeting children; and participating in the development of specific regulations under the Child Protection Act. The **National Council for Child Protection** is an advisory body to the chairperson of the Agency, with representatives from all governmental and non-governmental institutions engaged in the care of children.

Structure and organization of the education system

Bulgaria: structure of the education system



Source: Karabunarlieva, 2008.

Pre-school education

Pre-primary education is for children from 3 to 6/7 years of age. Children aged between 0 and 3 attend nurseries or nursery groups at kindergartens. Kindergartens are partially subsidized by local authorities; low-income families pay lower fees. According to the 2002 and 2003 amendments to the National Education Act, 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. A two-year preschool education compulsory for 5- and 6-year-olds is being introduced from 2010/11.

Primary education (basic education)

Basic education is compulsory and comprises two stages: primary education (grades 1 to 4) and lower secondary education (grades 5 to 8). The normal entry age is 6/7 years. Vocational or technical education courses can be attended after the completion of sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Basic education is completed without examinations. Successful pupils receive a certificate at the end of grade 4 (completion of primary education) and grade 8 (completion of basic education).

Secondary education

Secondary education covers grades 9 to 12 and is offered in: specialized secondary schools (gymnasias) with admission after grade 8 offering four-year programmes (natural sciences and mathematical orientation, humanities, sports, etc.); specialized secondary schools offering intensive foreign language instruction (admission after grade 7 for a five-year programme); and general secondary schools (grades 9 to 11/12). Secondary vocational education is offered in: technical schools with admission after grade 8 (four-year programme); technical schools with admission after grade 7 (intensive foreign language studies, five-year programmes); and secondary vocational schools with admission after grade 8 (three-year programmes). Secondary education is provided free of charge in state and municipal schools. Upon successful completion of the final year of secondary education students receive a certificate. Students passing the state matriculation examinations (*matura*, organized for the first time in 2008) receive a diploma granting access to higher education. Students are allowed to switch from one school/profile after successfully passing equalizing exams.

Higher education

The new higher education system, established at the end of 1995, is organized as follows: (a) non-university education in colleges and institutes offering three-year programmes leading to the diploma of specialist; (b) university higher education institutes offering four- to five-year programmes leading to the award of a bachelor's degree; an additional one to two years of study lead to the award of a master's degree; (c) university higher education institutes offering five- to six-year programmes (long cycle programmes); and (d) postgraduate three-year (full-time) programmes leading to the doctoral degree (or a minimum of four years on a part-time basis). The European diploma supplement and the European Credits Transfer System (ECTS) were introduced in 2004.

The school year consists of 31 five-day teaching weeks in grade 1, 32 weeks in grades 2-4, and 34 teaching weeks in grades 5-8. At the (upper) secondary level, the school year comprises 36 teaching weeks in grades 9-11 and 31 weeks in grade 12.

The educational process

Many institutions and units are involved in developing the curriculum. These include the Parliament, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (MEYS), the Inspectorates and the former National Institute for Education (up to 2005), 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 ministerial instructions, the interests of the students, and the existing possibilities. The curriculum is adopted by the pedagogical council of the school and is approved by the head of the advisory education council. The schools specialized in the arts, sports, and children with special educational needs elaborate separate school curricula. The MEYS approves the study programmes for basic schools, vocational schools and schools for children with special needs in conformity with state requirements (standards) for school content. Inspectorates also approve the school curricula of the schools within their jurisdiction.

The curriculum has undergone many changes since 1990. These have included the introduction of new subjects, an increase in the number of curricula for vocational schools, and more flexible curricula for specialized schools. The content itself has also changed. New contents for subjects such as early foreign language instruction, computer sciences, biology, and chemistry have been prepared, 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. (MOES, 2001).

Pre-primary education

As mentioned, pre-primary education is for children from 3 to 6/7 years of age. Children aged between 0 and 3 attend nurseries or nursery groups at kindergartens. Kindergartens are partially subsidized by local authorities; low-income families pay lower fees. According to the 2002 and 2003 amendments to the National Education Act, since 2003/04 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. A two-year preschool education compulsory for 5- and 6-year-olds is being introduced from 2010/11.

The objective of pre-primary education is to ensure the harmonious development of the child. The basic aim of the kindergarten is to offer the necessary conditions for the development of children's abilities and prepare them for school. The pedagogical process is aimed at the emotional, moral, aesthetic, intellectual and physical development of children.

Preschool education provision includes full-day, half-day, weekly and special kindergartens, boarding kindergartens and school preparatory groups. Most kindergartens are separate institutions maintained by the municipalities. They have a full-day regime and are located in purpose-built premises. Children attending kindergartens are divided into groups according to their age. The first three groups are

for ages 3 to 4 years, 4 to 5, and 5 to 6 years. Children who are 6 years old attend the (compulsory) preparatory group. The distribution according to the age criterion is not compulsory, and mixed groups are formed, where necessary. (MOES, 2004). Normally, every group has two teachers who are trained to be generalists and to care for the well-being of all children. There are also music teachers/instructors; one music teacher is usually in charge of 12 groups. In larger kindergartens (i.e. with more than eight groups of children) there are also psychologists. Full-day and weekly kindergartens can also accommodate nursery groups for the youngest children aged 10 months up to 3 years old.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (MEYS) defines the educational activities to be pursued, the content and the criteria, as well as the assessment procedures. Teachers are free to select the most appropriate methods, materials and manuals, and to organize the activities in the most effective way.

The load and content of the different activities in groups are defined by the Regulation for Preschool Education adopted by the MEYS in 2000 and updated in 2005. The educational content is organized by subject, and for each age group the subject is widened and developed. The compulsory preparatory group programme includes the following: Bulgarian language, social science, natural science, mathematics, music, basic skills, arts, play and recreation, and sports. The basic principle is for children to learn through play. Within the preparatory groups, the basic form of instruction takes place through classes which prepare the children for the classroom style of education at school.

Children progress automatically from one age group to the next, regardless of their individual development or learning achievement. Teachers inform parents about what children have learned and about the results of their activities on a weekly basis. In preparatory groups or classes, children are assessed also through tests on their level of command of Bulgarian (for those children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian) and their overall preparation for school. Parents are informed about the performance of their children and teachers provide them with recommendations if there are gaps in the development and preparation of the children.

The National Statistical Institute reports that in 2010/11 there were 2,138 kindergartens (mainly all-day institutions) of which 988 were in rural areas (in 2005/06 there were 3,331 kindergartens with an enrolment of 206,243 children). The total enrolment was 223,186 children (of whom 107,919 were girls), including 51,104 children in rural areas and 7,375 children less than 3 years of age. Private kindergartens are an alternative for a very small number of parents. In 2010/11 out of the total number of institutions there were 48 licensed private kindergartens with an enrolment of 1,784 children, representing 0.8% of the total enrolment. The total number of staff (including directors, music instructors, methodologists and educators) was 19,579 (including some 1,200 directors without teaching functions) in 2010/11. In terms of qualifications, 13,760 kindergarten staff had a higher education degree (bachelor's or master's) and 5,675 had a professional bachelor's. The net enrolment ratio at the pre-primary level was estimated at 74.9% in 2010/11 (76.5% for the age group 3-6 years). The average number of children per full-time teacher was 12.2. (NSI, 2011).



Primary education (basic education)

As mentioned, basic education is compulsory and comprises two stages: primary education (grades 1 to 4) and lower secondary education (grades 5 to 8). The normal entry age is 6/7 years. Vocational or technical education courses can be attended after the completion of sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Basic education is completed without examinations. Successful pupils receive a certificate at the end of grade 4 (completion of primary education) and grade 8 (completion of basic education).

The social mission of basic education is defined as preparing young people for a full and active life in a democratic society under market economy conditions, in which a person's fulfilment includes taking responsibility for the current and future life of the nation and humanity in general. (Eurydice, CEDEFOP & ETF, 2009/10).

The National Programme of School and Preschool Education Development and Preparation (2006-2015) envisages a change in the structure of the education system. After its introduction, pupils will complete basic education at the end of grade 7, while the secondary school stage will consist of two levels: the first covering grades 8 to 10 and compulsory for all students (ending with a graduation/school leaving certificate), and the second including grades 11 and 12 leading to the upper secondary school certificate for students successfully completing grade 12, or to a diploma giving access to higher education for students passing the matriculation exams. (Bulgarian Eurydice Unit, 2010). It is planned that the process of implementing the new structure will start in 2015.

The official curriculum must be followed by all pupils and includes compulsory subjects, compulsory elective subjects and free electives/optional educational activities. Curricula for optional instruction are prepared by teachers and approved by the school principal, after consultation with parents. The weekly lesson timetables of basic education in 1996 and 2001 are 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 weekly lesson timetable implemented in 2006/07 is presented below:

Bulgaria. Basic education: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade							
	Primary				Lower secondary			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<i>Compulsory subjects:</i>								
Bulgarian language and literature	7	7	7	7	5	5	5	5
First foreign language	–	2	3	3	3.5	3.5	3	3
Mathematics	4	3.5	3.5	4	4	4	4	4
Information technology	–	–	–	–	1	1	1	1
Homeland	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Man and society	–	–	1.5	1	–	–	–	–
History and civilization	–	–	–	–	2	2	1.5	1.5
Geography and economics	–	–	–	–	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Surrounding world	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–
Man and nature	–	–	1	1.5	2.5	2.5	–	–
Biology and health education	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	2
Physics and astronomy	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.5	1.5
Chemistry and environmental protection	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.5	1.5
Music	2	2	1.5	1.5	1.5	2	1.5	1.5
Art education	2	1.5	2	1.5	2	1.5	1.5	1.5
Home economics and technology	1	1	1	1	–	–	–	–
Home technology and economics	–	–	–	–	1.5	1.5	–	–
Technology	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
Physical education and sports	2	2	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2	2
Compulsory elective subjects	3	2	2	2	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
Total periods (max.)	26	26	29	29	34	34	34	34

Source: Eurydice, 2006/07. Each teaching period lasts 35 minutes in grades 1 and 2, 40 minutes in grades 3 and 4, and 45 minutes in grades 5 to 8.

The pattern for organizing the educational process at the primary 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. In the

teaching and learning process special attention is also devoted to health education, environmental and civic education, traffic safety and civil defense, practical classes and the development of professional interests, ethics, physical education, and the arts. In grades 1 to 4, the teacher works with one class and teaches all subjects. There can also be teachers appointed to teach a foreign language or physical education and sports. In grades 5 to 8 there are subject teachers. Pupils can enter profile-oriented (specialized) schools for early mathematics (from grade 5) and language (after grade 7) instruction. Admission is subject to the results of entrance exams.

Early foreign language teaching is becoming more common during the first stage of basic education. The relative share of pupils in general education schools who study foreign languages in the primary grades (1 to 4) was 83.4% in 2010/11. The most preferred foreign language is English, chosen by 87.6% of pupils. (National Statistical Institute, 2011).

The assessment of pupils' learning achievement in grades 1-4 is expressed using the following scale: fair; good; very good and excellent. Grades 2-4 pupils are assessed during the school year by oral, written and practical tests and other forms of evaluation. Pupils receive term and annual marks in every subject. For those subjects included in the curriculum with only one class per week or every two weeks, there is no term mark. Upon successful completion of grade 4, pupils receive a certificate showing the annual score in the subjects studied in grade 4, as well as the score obtained in the optional subjects. There are no examinations at the end of grade 4, but there is nationwide external assessment in certain subjects. Pursuant to the amendments to the regulatory framework of 2009, grades 1-4 pupils who have received an insufficient annual mark in one or more subjects will not repeat the year. (Eurydice, CEDEFOP & ETF, 2009/10). In grades 5-8 pupils' learning achievement is assessed using the following marks: excellent (6); very good (5); good (4); fair (3) and poor (2). At the end of grades 5, 6 and 7, pupils sit nationwide written assessment tests in different subjects. Grade 8 students who study intensively a foreign language sit an end-of-year external assessment organized at the national level; certain schools organize oral language exams. Upon successful completion of grade 8 pupils receive the certificate of basic education. The certificate shows the annual score obtained in the compulsory subjects studied in grade 8, as well as the scores obtained in the compulsory elective subjects. The overall score is calculated as an average score of the marks in the curriculum subjects. For admission to general secondary school students have not to pass an entrance examination. Entry into profile-oriented schools after completing grade 7 or 8 (language schools, school of mathematics, technical schools, sports schools, art schools) is subject to the results of entrance examinations.

The National Statistical Institute reports that in 2010/11 there were 155 primary (grades 1-4) schools (of which 55 in rural areas), 1,360 basic (grades 1-8) schools (of which 843 in rural areas), and 12 lower secondary schools (grades 5-8). The total enrolment was 253,149 pupils in grades 1-4 (of whom 122,685 were girls), and 215,457 pupils in grades 5-8 (of whom 102,192 were girls); the total enrolment in rural areas was 56,357 pupils in grades 1-4 and 50,060 in grades 5-8. The total enrolment in 36 private primary/basic education schools was 2,598 pupils. The number of pedagogical staff (including teachers, directors and deputy directors with teaching load and excluding educators) was 14,425 in grades 1-4 (of whom 13,560 were female) and 19,255 in grades 5-8 (of whom 15,508 were female). In terms of



qualifications, out of 47,230 pedagogical staff in general education (primary/basic and upper secondary), 42,944 had a higher education degree (bachelor's or master's), 4,064 had a professional bachelor's, and 222 had completed upper secondary education. The net enrolment ratio was estimated at 91.5% in grades 1-4 and 80.6% in grades 5-8 (93.2% for the age group 7-10 years, 96.3% for the age group 11-14 years, and 94.4% for the age group 7-15 years). The average number of pupils per full-time teacher was 17.6 in grades 1-4 and 12.6 in grades 5-8. (NSI, 2011).

In 2010/11, there were 79 special schools in the country, including 15 hospital schools, 56 schools for pupils with special educational needs, four correctional boarding schools, and four socio-pedagogic boarding schools. The total enrolment was 4,575 students, of whom 3,343 in special education schools. The total number of pedagogical staff (including directors and deputy directors with teaching load and excluding educators) was 996, of whom 777 in special education schools. (*Ibid.*). Various organizations, including Save the Children, are working with the government to promote inclusive education. Increasingly, students are being mainstreamed in schools and the tolerance and acceptance is improving both in schools and society. (UNICEF, 2010). The number of mainstream kindergartens and schools integration children and students with special educational needs is increasing steadily: a total of 770 schools and 183 kindergartens (with 4,380 children and students integrated) in 2007 against 130 in 2004. In 2008, the number of children and students educated on an integrated basis in kindergartens and schools was 5,573 supported by 883 resource teachers, psychologists, speech therapists and hearing rehabilitators. (MOES, 2008).

School enrolment rates are extremely low for Roma children compared to their non-Roma peers (Roma comprise 10.4% of the country's total population). Only 47% of Roma children enrol in school and fewer of these children complete primary (basic) education. At the secondary level, only 12% of Roma aged 16–19 years old are enrolled, compared with 81% of the national population. Graduation statistics are even more discouraging: only 7% of Roma children complete secondary education. (UNICEF, 2010).

Secondary education

As mentioned, secondary education covers grades 9 to 12 and is offered in: specialized secondary schools (gymnasia) with admission after grade 8 offering four-year programmes (natural sciences and mathematical orientation, humanities, sports, etc.); specialized secondary schools offering intensive foreign language instruction (admission after grade 7 for a five-year programme); and general secondary schools (grades 9 to 11/12). Secondary vocational education is offered in: technical schools with admission after grade 8 (four-year programme); technical schools with admission after grade 7 (intensive foreign language studies, five-year programmes); and secondary vocational schools with admission after grade 8 (three-year programmes). Upon successful completion of the final year of secondary education students receive a certificate. Students passing the matriculation exams receive a diploma granting access to higher education. Students are allowed to switch from one school/profile after successfully passing equalizing exams.

The weekly lesson timetable of general secondary education implemented in 1996 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 weekly lesson timetable of general secondary education implemented in 2006/07 is shown in the table below:

Bulgaria. General secondary education (upper secondary school): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade			
	9	10	11	12
<i>Compulsory subjects:</i>				
Bulgarian language and literature	3	3	3	3
First foreign language	2	2	2	2
Second foreign language	2	2	–	–
Mathematics	3	3	2	2
Computer studies	2	–	–	–
Information technology	1	1	–	–
History and civilization	2	2	2	–
Geography and economics	1.5	1.5	1	–
Psychology and logics	1.5	–	–	–
Ethics and law	–	1.5	–	–
Philosophy	–	–	1.5	–
World and personality	–	–	–	2
Biology and health education	2	2	–	–
Physics and astronomy	2	2	1	–
Chemistry and environmental protection	2	2	–	–
Music	1	–	–	–
Art education	1	–	–	–
Physical education & sports	2	2	2	2
Sub-total	28	24	14.5	11
Compulsory elective subjects	4	8	17.5	21
Total weekly periods	32	32	32	32
Free elective subjects	4	4	4	4
Total periods (max.)	36	36	36	36

Source: Eurydice, 2006/07. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

Starting from the year 2000, the normative base of secondary education has been renovated and a series of changes were introduced. For the upper secondary stage new standards and syllabi for all the subjects have been developed and implemented. (MOES, 2004).

Students' learning achievements are assessed through oral, written and practical examinations and, depending on the number of hours allocated to the subject, there is a minimum number of continuous assessment marks for the term and the year. The control is performed by the teacher throughout the school year. Marks are recorded for each term and also for the school year. Students are promoted to the next grade if at the end of the school year they have passed all subjects. If they have one poor mark (i.e. poor = 2), they re-sit the exams under a procedure determined by the head teacher. If they do not pass the re-sit examination, they repeat the year.

Students who have successfully completed the last year of secondary school can choose whether or not to sit the state matriculation exams. If they do not pass the two compulsory matriculation exams (in Bulgarian language and literature and one subject of their choice), students receive a certificate of completed secondary education, which however does not entitle them to gain access to a university. Students who pass the two compulsory matriculation exams receive a diploma. The diploma must obligatorily mention the chosen branch of specialization. (Eurydice, CEDEFOP & ETF, 2009/10).

Vocational education is offered in the following types of schools:

- Technical and specialized secondary schools with admission after grade 7. The programme lasts five years. Technical schools offer intensive foreign language training. Specialized secondary schools, after grade 7, train their students in the field of culture.
- Technical schools with admission after grade 8. The programme lasts four years. Students receive secondary specialized education.
- Secondary vocational/technical schools (admission after grade 8). The programme 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 general school. Students are offered the opportunity to acquire professional qualifications and complete their basic education. The duration of the programme varies (one, two or three years), depending on the student's entry point.

Furthermore, vocational classes within comprehensive schools 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 the criteria established by the school. 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.

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 comprised 183 occupations in 22 professional fields. 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. The profile of occupations of the second qualification degree in secondary vocational-technical schools was also extended. Only the occupations of the first degree of qualification in vocational schools have increased in number. 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-size private enterprises. In 2003 a new list of occupations was approved.



The curriculum 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 optionally selected but compulsory within the framework of the compulsory number of hours per week); and (c) optional (subjects and activities, listed or not in the plan of study, optionally selected and studied in addition to the compulsory number of hours).

The new Vocational Education and Training Act regulates both initial and continuing vocational training, the latter provided for people age over 16. Following the last developments concerning the system of vocational training, the apprenticeship system is under the responsibility of the employers and is regulated by the Labour Code. The theoretical and practical part of the apprenticeship is the responsibility of the employers. The training is provided in the company's training centres or in the schools of the formal vocational training upon the request of employers. Vocational schools will organize training programmes as follows: 3-year programmes after grade 6, 2-year programmes after grade 7, and up to 4-year programmes after grade 8. Vocational colleges will offer training programmes lasting up to two years after completion of secondary education. (Eurydice, CEDEFOP & ETF, 2009/10).

The National Statistical Institute reports that in 2010/11 there were 166 upper secondary schools (grades 9-12), and 403 general secondary schools (grades 1-12, of which 60 in rural areas). The total enrolment in grades 9-12 (including grade 8 of foreign languages secondary schools and other specialized secondary schools with selection after grade 7) was 146,948 students (of whom 83,264 were girls). The number of pedagogical staff (including teachers, directors and deputy directors with teaching load and excluding educators) in grades 9-12 was 13,550 (of whom 10,895 were female). The net enrolment ratio at the secondary level (grades 9-12) was estimated at 80.3%. The average number of students per full-time teacher was 12.2 in grades 9-12. (NSI, 2011).

In 2010/11, there were 484 vocational schools, including 422 vocational gymnasias, 21 art schools, five vocational training schools, and 36 (postsecondary) vocational colleges. The total enrolment in vocational education was 161,536 students (of whom 61% were boys). The total number of pedagogical staff in vocational education (including directors and deputy directors with teaching load and excluding educators) was 13,818, of whom over 92% had a higher education degree. There were also 60 VET establishments in the private sector (of which 26 art schools and vocational gymnasias and 34 postsecondary colleges), with a total enrolment of 4,044 students (mainly in colleges and representing 2.5% of the total enrolment in vocational education). (*Ibid.*).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The National Testing Centre (NTC) was set up in 1994 to organize and carry out national testing and examinations in order to evaluate the quality of education. In 1996, the NTC was incorporated into the then Institute for Research in Education (tests and examinations are now coordinated by the Centre for the Control and Assessment of the Quality in Education). The results of the assessment in Bulgarian



language and mathematics (grades 4 and 8) administered in 1998 in all the 28 regions of the country showed that 67% of grade 4 pupils successfully passed all tests and tasks, while 22% did not cover the minimum requirements.

The national external assessment after grade 4 was first introduced in 2007. Examinations after grade 7 were organized for the first time in a test format. To replenish the pool of test examination tasks, the MOES organized (on a monthly basis) national competitions for compiling tests and test questions on Bulgarian language and literature and mathematics with the participation of teachers and students from all schools. The first national test-solving competition for grade 7 pupils was organized in 2007. In 2008 an external assessment after grade 4 was carried out again and the knowledge and skills of pupils who have completed grade 5 were tested for the first time. At the end of the school year 2007/08, for the first time in decades, the state matriculation examinations (*matura*) were organized for all students having completed grade 12. (MOES, 2008).

In the 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Bulgaria scored 13th out of 19 participating countries in the CEE/CIS (Central and Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States) region in reading, mathematics and science. Overall, Bulgaria ranked 63rd out of 65 participating countries. The country's performance changed little between PISA 2006 and PISA 2009; about 4,600 students from 182 schools participated in PISA 2006, and some 4,700 students from 180 schools across the country in PISA 2009. Results from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) assessment 2001 and 2006 show that Bulgarian students achieved high learning outcomes in reading. In 2001, Bulgaria scored the highest out of the 12 countries in the CEE/CIS region that participated. It ranked fourth out of a total of 35 countries in reading, outperforming Canada, United States of America and Germany. In 2006, Bulgaria again scored in the top third in reading, ranking 14th out of 45 countries. However, between 2001 and 2006, the performance in the reading assessment dropped slightly, from an average score of 550 to 547. (UNICEF, 2010).

Bulgaria's performance in mathematics and science falls far below that in reading achievement. The performance in mathematics has declined over time. In 1999, Bulgaria scored above average in mathematics in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), scoring 17th out of 35 participating countries worldwide. This was on par with its neighbours' performance; Bulgaria ranked 6th out of 12 participating countries in the CEE/CIS region. In 2003, however, Bulgaria's average mathematics score showed the largest decrease in the region, dropping by 35 points, although the country still scored above average. In TIMSS 2003, Bulgaria ranked 25th out of 46 participating countries, and fourth to last in the CEE/CIS region. This downward trend continued. In science, Bulgaria scored about average for the region in both TIMSS assessments. In TIMSS 2003, Bulgaria scored 24th out of the 45 participating countries. In the CEE/CIS region, it ranked 8th out of the 13 participating countries. In the 2010 national *matura* exams, three fourths of students who sat the geography examination did not pass the basic competencies. (*Ibid.*).

Teaching staff

Preschool and primary education teachers are trained in specialized higher education institutions (three- to four-year programmes) or at university level (four- to five-year programmes). Lower and upper secondary school teachers (specialists) acquire their qualifications through university programmes lasting four or five years. General education teachers (grades 1-12), pre-primary education teachers and tutors must have at least a bachelor's degree, and holding a master's degree is considered an advantage. In general, the education system is provided with the necessary qualified teaching staff. Due to the growing international contacts of the country, the number of students studying English language considerably increased in recent years creating the demand for more qualified teachers in that language.

In 2003/04 in general education schools there were 60,338 educational staff (including directors and deputy directors), 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 (three-year programme), and 645 had completed upper secondary education. Some 21% of teachers were aged 50-59 years. (Kusheva, 2006).

Teacher training programmes include 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 teacher professional qualifications 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 training are offered: 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 education. 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, and backing up the achieved higher qualification level with higher remuneration

At the end of 1996 the Ordinance No. 5 was issued 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 status 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 defined in the Labour Code. The annual average is between 648 and 720 academic hours. Grades 1-4 teachers have a workload of 20 academic hours per week (over 32 weeks). In the case of grades 5-8 teachers, the amount of hours per year depends on the discipline taught and varies



annually from 648 (language and literature, mathematics, foreign languages, informatics, general-technical and specialized subjects), 684 (physics, chemistry, biology and astronomy), 720 (history, geography, philosophy, music, fine arts, physical education) to 792 (technology and non-specialized training hours), equivalent to 18, 20, 22 and 30 hours per week (over 34 weeks). Directors and deputy directors have from 72 to 216 hours teaching workload per school year. The workload of full-time secondary school teachers also depends on the subject taught and could be a minimum of 648, 684, or 720 academic hours annually. The maximum number of hours a year that can be taught by a teacher (if necessary and at the discretion of the head teacher) is obtained by multiplying the minimum by 1.5 (i.e. 972, 1,026, and 1,080 academic hours). (MOES, 2004; Eurydice, CEDEFOP & ETF, 2009/10).

In 2008, in line with the decentralization of the administrative and financial management of schools, a number of changes were introduced in the method of determining the salary of school system employees. As a result, the salary is no longer determined centrally. The average gross monthly salaries were eliminated as an external limit of the teacher pay in a school. The new ordinance on the salaries of the employees in the units within the public education system sets out only the general salary structure rules and minimum salaries by position levels. The mechanisms applied to determine individual teacher salaries are negotiated in the collective labour contract and/or in internal salary rules, and individual salaries are determined by the school principal. Mechanisms have been set up to pay for the additional teacher load above the minimum rate (the amount is either included in the basic salary or given as an additional pay). (MOES, 2008).

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Web resources

Centre for the Control and Assessment of the Quality of Education:
<http://www.ckoko.bg/> [In Bulgarian; some information in English. Last checked: December 2011.]

Human Resource Development Centre: <http://www.hrdc.bg/> [In Bulgarian and English. Last checked: December 2011.]

Ministry of Education, Youth and Science: <http://www.mon.bg/> [In Bulgarian and English. Last checked: December 2011.]

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy: <http://www.mlsp.government.bg/> [In Bulgarian. Last checked: December 2011. The site is being updated.]

National Agency for Vocational Education and Training:
<http://www.navet.government.bg/> [In Bulgarian and English. Last checked: December 2011.]

National Centre for Information and Documentation: <http://www.nacid.bg/> [In Bulgarian and English. Last checked: December 2011.]

National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency: <http://www.neaa.government.bg/> [In Bulgarian and English. Last checked: December 2011.]



State Agency for Child Protection: <http://sacp.government.bg/> [In Bulgarian. Last checked: December 2011.]

For more detailed and updated information consult Eurypedia and EURYDICE, the information network on national education systems and policies in Europe:
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

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