



# World Data on Education

## Données mondiales de l'éducation

### Datos Mundiales de Educación

VII Ed. 2010/11



# Hungary

Revised version, March 2012.

## Principles and general objectives of education

As it is stated in the Preamble, in 1993 the Parliament enacted the Public Education Act: “in order to ensure exercise of the right to education based on equality of opportunity, a right laid down in the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary; in order to achieve freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and the nurturing of patriotism in public education; in order to make good the right of national and ethnic minorities to education in their mother tongue; in order to realize freedom of education and freedom of teaching; in order to define the rights and duties of children, students, parents and those of employed in public education; and also in order to direct and operate a public education system that ensures up-to-date knowledge.”

The *New Hungary Development Plan 2007-2013* focuses on two areas, i.e. increased employment and the promotion of long term growth. Among others, the Plan emphasizes that the basis for the renewal of society is the improvement of the quality of human resources. The social renewal strategy, besides strengthening social cohesion and reducing regional disparities, plays a decisive role in increasing employment and contributing to the long term growth of the economy. The most important elements of employability are suitable qualifications and skills, the foundations of which have to be laid by the formal school system. In order to make sure that the quality and efficiency of the education system improve, and that the employment chances of graduates increase, it is indispensable that the content and structure of education and training flexibly meet the social and economic requirements. Particular attention should be paid to the development of basic skills and labour market competencies, primarily foreign language skills, digital literacy, knowledge in mathematics and natural sciences and skills required for leading a successful life. Within this framework, the overall objective of the *Social Renewal Operational Programme 2007-2013* (as modified in 2009) is to increase labour market participation through the improvement of the quality of the human resources. Providing quality education and ensuring access for all imply: supporting the dissemination of competence-based education; improving the efficiency of the public education system; decreasing the segregation of severely disadvantaged and Roma pupils, promoting their equal opportunities in public education; and supporting the education of groups with different educational needs and the integration of pupils with special educational needs. Furthermore, promoting lifelong learning is a prerequisite for increasing labour market activity and employability as persons of working age should be able to improve their skills and knowledge on an ongoing basis. The aim is therefore to improve quality, availability and efficiency of education and training at each level of education and training.

## Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The **Public Education Act No. 79** of 1993 and subsequent amendments established a uniform framework for the education system. Asserting the principle of the freedom of education, the Act eliminated the State monopoly on schools and attempted to

dissolve the former rigid structure of the school system. The Act guarantees the right of every natural and legal person to establish and maintain schools. However, the burden and tasks of maintenance are primarily the responsibility of local governments, and their limited material resources are compensated by the state budget. This subsidy extends to churches and other entities maintaining schools and thus sharing the tasks of the state.

The Act stipulates that compulsory education lasts ten years as was the earlier practice (the 1996 amendment extended the end of compulsory schooling to the age of 18), but has linked its completion to a final exam. It has made the eight-year primary education school the basis of the school system, from which pupils may move to a secondary school offering eight-, six- or four-year programmes after the completion of the fourth, sixth, or eighth year. After the completion of the tenth year, a student may move from any of the institutions offering general education to vocational training institutions. The Act also introduced a two-tier system of national and local regulation of educational content. The mandatory application of centrally-defined programmes has been abandoned, and the teaching and learning process is organized in accordance to regulations issued at the local level. The 1995 amendment of the Education Act limited the hidden possibilities of state intervention and further strengthened the professional autonomy of the educational institutions and the role of the local governments. This amendment also made the approval of the National Core Curriculum (a set of competence standards providing guidelines for curriculum development) the task of the government along with the development or accreditation of framework curricula; schools then develop their local curriculum in accordance with the National Core Curriculum. What used to be a rigid and uniform structure may thus be gradually replaced by a more differentiated one, postulating a greater degree of autonomy and professional independence for schools and teachers. The Amendment also made in-service training of teachers compulsory and their career development subject to the results of this training.

The **Act No. 76 on Vocational Education and Training** of 1993 regulates the provision of VET both within and outside the formal education system. This Act defines: the training providers of VET; content requirements of the National Register of Qualifications which lists all state-recognized vocational qualifications at each available level; the administrative structure of VET with the tasks of each of the concerned ministries, public authorities, agencies and consultative bodies; content and examination requirements of the vocational qualifications and the general rules concerning the vocational examination; special regulations concerning the provision of school-based VET; and the financing of VET. Pursuant to the 2009 amendment of the Public Education Act, since 2010 VET can also begin in grade 9 of the vocational school offering three-year programmes to primary school graduates. The government adopted a decision in January 2011 supporting the referencing of the National Qualifications Framework (whose levels are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, autonomy and responsibility) to the European Qualifications Framework, and its introduction in 2013. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

The **Adult Training Act** of 2001 establishes general rules for all adult training providers (educational institutions, legal or natural persons, etc.) regarding the modalities of organizing and financing any adult training programme. It provides for a mandatory accreditation of all adult education and training programmes or training



provider institutions by a representative body, the National Adult Education Accreditation Board. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2008).

The Act No. 80 on Higher Education of 1993 expanded the autonomy of the higher education institutions. National independent bodies were set up with the view of strengthening the autonomy of higher education, in particular the Scientific Council of Higher Education dealing with issues related to development and finance; and the National Accreditation Committee ensuring quality control. After the entry of Hungary into the European Union (May 2004), and within the framework of the Bologna process, the higher education system is regulated by the **Act No. 139 on Higher Education** of 2005. The amended **Act No. 204 on Higher Education** has been endorsed by the National Assembly in December 2011.

Other important laws must be mentioned, such as: the **Law on Self-Government** of 1990, which conferred wide-ranging autonomy to local authorities and transferred to them the ownership of schools; the **Law on Public Employees** of 1992, which classified teachers as public employees paid in accordance with a fixed salary scale and introduced more rigorous employment regulations; the **1991 Act on the Return to Churches of their Properties** nationalized after the Second World War; and the **1993 Act on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities**.

Article 70(f) of the **Constitution** of 1997 states that: “(i) The Republic of Hungary guarantees the right of education to its citizens. (ii) The Republic of Hungary shall implement this right through the dissemination and general access to culture, free compulsory primary schooling, through secondary and higher education available to all persons on the basis of their ability, and furthermore through financial support for students.”

The final year of preschool education preparing 5-year-olds for primary education must be attended by all children for at least four hours a day. A child reaches the compulsory school age in the year he/she turns 6 years of age (and not later than the age of 8 if the child has reached the appropriate level of maturity). The 1996 Amendment to the Public Education Act extended the end of compulsory schooling to the age of 18 starting from the 1998/99 school year. Compulsory schooling can end at the age of 16 if the student has successfully passed the upper secondary school-leaving examination, has received a vocational certificate, or cares for his/her own children. In these cases the end of compulsory schooling is not automatic as the student has to address a written request to the school principal. (Eurydice, 2009).

## **Administration and management of the education system**

Public education in Hungary is characterized by shared responsibilities at the central, local and institutional levels, as well as among the different ministries. The overall responsibility for public education is assigned to the **Ministry of National Resources** (formerly the Ministry of Education and Culture). However, in the majority of fundamental issues affecting public education several other ministries are concerned.



The Ministry of National Resources is responsible for education, culture, social affairs, health care, youth and sport. The Ministry is headed by the Minister of National Resources, assisted by ministers of state in charge of health, welfare, education, culture, sport, and parliamentary affairs.

The **Educational Authority** was set up in 2006 to merge several public education and higher education government agencies. The Authority operates as a central office, under the control of the Minister responsible for education. It participates in the organization and coordination of control, assessment and evaluation tasks regarding all levels of education and participates in the organization of the national upper secondary school-leaving examination. The Authority also has functions related to the establishment of faculties and courses at higher education institutions, determining the maximum number of students to be admitted to higher education institutions, authorizing the operation of foreign higher education institutions in Hungary and keeping records of the courses they offer as well as the registration of certificates, diplomas and doctoral degrees conferred by higher education institutions. The **Hungarian Equivalence and Information Center** responsible for the recognition of foreign diplomas, certificates degrees, is also located within the Authority. (Eurydice, 2011). The **Department of Assessment and Evaluation** at the Educational Authority (formerly known as the Centre for Evaluation Studies), organizes national and international comparative student assessment studies. The Department has been coordinating the participation of Hungary in international studies such as the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). The Department is also responsible for reporting the results of the annual National Assessment of Basic Competences (ABC) in reading and mathematics. Prior to the National ABC, the Department implemented the national 'Monitor' surveys that assessed pupils' performance in reading, mathematics and science between 1995 and the end of the 1990s.

Public administration, comprising also public education, is the domain of competency of the **Ministry of the Interior**, together with the distribution of state support given to the local governments. The **Ministry of Finance** presents the estimates regarding the financing of education as part of the bill on the state budget. Institutions (nurseries) providing care to children up to the age of 3 years are not part of the public education system and are supervised by the **Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour**. Since 2010 the **Ministry of National Economy** regulates the provision of vocational education and training (VET) and adult training (which was under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour since 2006) in cooperation with the Ministry of National Resources. Other ministries are responsible for defining framework curricula and learning outcomes of vocational qualifications listed in the National Qualifications Register in their respective field of competence. The **Ministry of Public Administration and Justice** is responsible for defining policies and measures related to social inclusion and equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups including Romas.

In addition to the state and the municipalities, public education institutions can be established and maintained by local, regional and national minority self-governments, registered churches, economic organizations, foundations, associations or private persons (Sinka & Köpataki, 2008). Responsibility over education is shared



among four levels: national, regional, local, and institutional. The regional category includes three levels (regions, the counties and micro-regions), each having different administrative functions and institutional systems. Primary schools and secondary education establishments mostly fall within the competency of the **local governments**, which also function as educational and administrative authorities. It is the duty of the local educational authorities to provide primary and secondary education for all children living in their areas. The responsibilities and rights of local governments are wide-ranging. They decide the budget, appoint the heads of institutions, specify the profile of the school and define the vertical and horizontal structure of schooling. Rules of organization and operation, as well as pedagogical programmes, must be approved by these authorities. At the local level, **school boards** carry out advisory tasks. They consist of members elected from the teaching staff, the parents' organization, and the municipality.

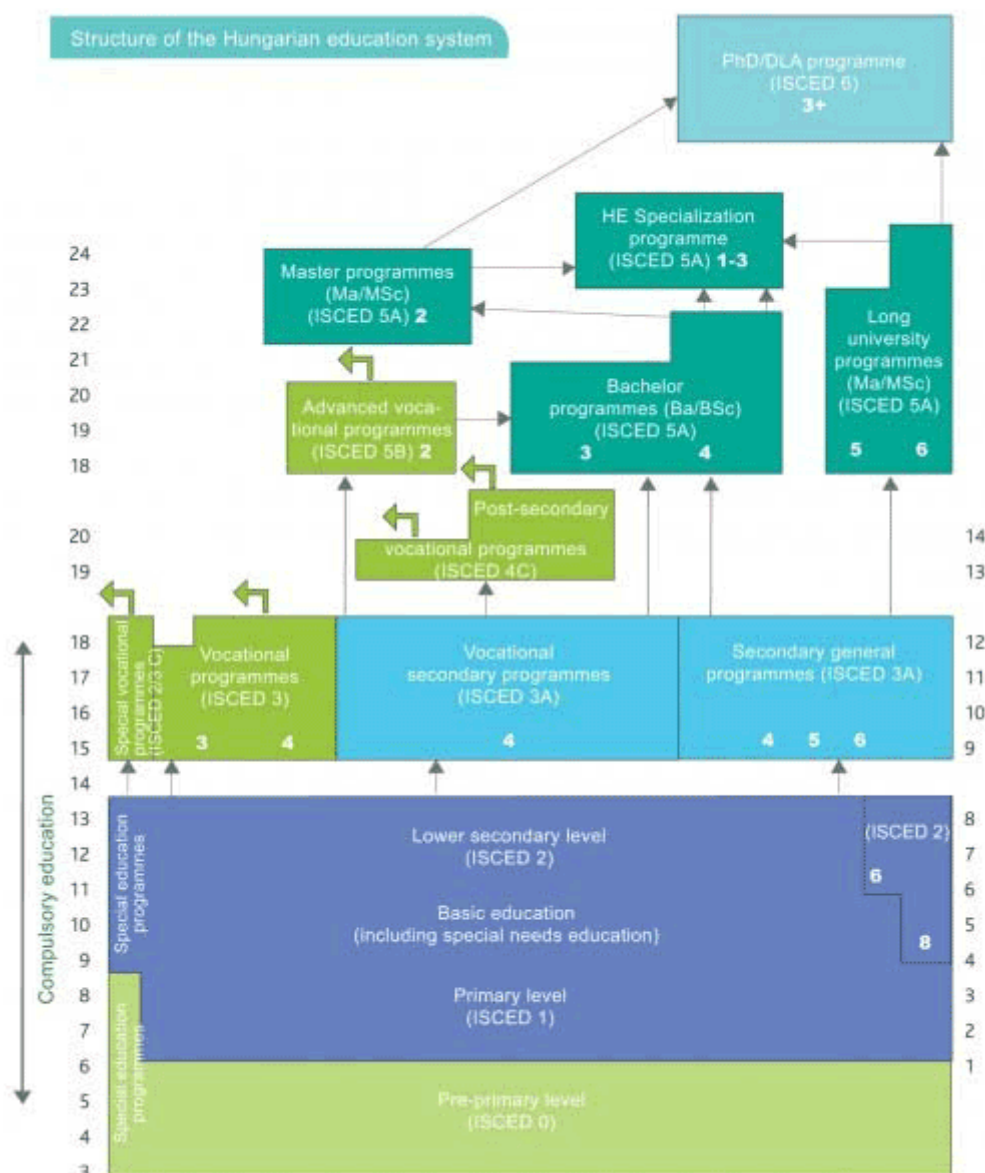
The **National Council for Public Education Policy** gathers the opinions of professional and social organizations interested in education, including all the concerned ministries. Other advisory bodies that have to be consulted before adopting regulations or a policy include the **National Public Education Council** and the **National Committee for Minorities**.

The **National Vocational and Adult Training Council** is a consultative-advisory and decision-making body to the Ministry of National Economy, comprising representatives of relevant ministries and various stakeholders and participating in the development of the National Register of Qualifications. The **National Institute of Vocational and Adult Education** assists the Minister responsible for VET and adult training in tasks related to development, coordination, research, information and counselling. The Institute also manages the registers of vocational examinations, accredited adult training institutions and programmes. There are also seven **Regional Development and Training Committees** which ensure coordinated development and provision of VET in line with regional labour market demands, decide on the goals of regional VET development, and define the regional demands for VET. Most of the VET schools belong to one of the 86 **regional integrated vocational training centres**. The consultative board of these centres comprises representatives from the different economic sectors; it makes recommendations on training programmes offered by schools and centres and encourages informal communication with important economic actors. (CEDEFOP, 2011).



## Structure and organization of the education system

### Hungary: structure of the education system



Source: Ministry of National Resources, *The education system in Hungary*, 2012.

### Pre-school education

Preschool education (kindergarten) is provided by a dual function (social-health and educational) institution catering to children between the ages of 3 and 6. Attendance is voluntary; the final year preparing 5-year-olds for primary education must be attended by all children for at least four hours a day. Institutional day care of children aged 0-3 years is provided in nurseries under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.



## Primary and lower secondary education

Children normally enter primary school at age 6, although starting school education is flexible and adjusted to their level of development. The general (single structure) school offers a eight-year programme (grades 1 to 8) divided into two four-year stages. After the completion of grade 4 or 6 pupils can transfer to a general secondary school (eight- or six-year gymnasium). Since 2006/07 the National Assessment of Basic Competences evaluates pupils' achievement (reading comprehension and mathematical abilities) in grades 4, 6, 8, and 10.

## Secondary education

In past decades, the general secondary school (gymnasium) offered a four-year programme. After the modifications introduced in 1989, there are three main forms of this type of school covering different age groups, i.e. the eight-, six- and four-year gymnasium (or five-year gymnasium for bilingual and other programmes including a foreign language preparatory year). The gymnasium offers a general education programme leading to the secondary school-leaving examination (the reformed examination at two levels—standard and advanced—was introduced in 2005); students have to sit exams in four compulsory subjects (Hungarian language and literature, mathematics, history, and foreign language) and at least one optional elective. Secondary vocational schools offer four- to five-year programmes leading to the vocational secondary school-leaving examination; graduates can enrol in postsecondary programmes lasting one to three years and leading to a vocational qualification or enter higher education. Two-year advanced (postsecondary) vocational programmes are also offered to secondary education graduates. A maximum of 60 credit points gained in advanced vocational education may be transferred into first-cycle (bachelor's degree) university or college programmes. Other types of vocational training can be regarded as part of the system of initial vocational training, which is shorter in duration and only qualifies for the practice of a profession, without entitling for entry to higher education. Vocational school programmes provide general and pre-vocational education and training in the first two years, followed by one to three years of VET to obtain a vocational qualification. In 2010, 'early' VET programmes were introduced which offer three years of vocational training to grade 8 graduates.

## Higher education

Higher education institutions include colleges and universities. The period of study for college undergraduate education is three or four years, and further specialized college postgraduate education can take a minimum of one year. In some cases the college programmes can be followed by university complementary studies leading to a university-level degree. In the framework of the implementation of the Bologna process, the new three-cycle degree structure was adopted in December 2004. Bachelor's degree programmes last three to four years (180-210 to a maximum of 240 European Credit Transfer System—ECTS), and master's degree programmes take one to two years (60-120 ECTS) to complete following the bachelor's degree. Doctoral degree programmes last three years (a minimum of 180 ECTS). Some long first-cycle programmes lasting five to six years (in the fields of medicine, pharmacy, architecture, law, dentistry and veterinary medicine) have been retained.





The school year normally consists of 185 teaching days (or 37 five-day teaching weeks), divided into two semesters. In 2011/12 the school year comprised 183 teaching days. (Eurydice, 2011). At the higher education level (colleges and universities) the academic year usually consists of two semesters, each lasting five months, of which thirteen to fourteen weeks are dedicated to teaching. In some universities the academic year is divided into three terms, with obligatory exams at the end of each.

## The educational process

The introduction of the National Core Curriculum (NCC) in 1995 and the curriculum designing process at school level have been a key element of the reform of public education. As a result, the former centrally-planned curriculum was replaced by a two-level regulation. Essentially, the NCC provides for a frame-type state control over educational content, whereas the key document regulating classroom processes is the school-level curriculum. Each school has to create such a curriculum as part of the pedagogical programme or adopt one elaborated by others. The NCC of 1995 defined the compulsory requirements common in every school, regardless of the type of the institution, for the first ten years of education. In the case of secondary education the common and compulsory requirements for grades 11 and 12 were included in the Secondary School-leaving Examination Regulations. What was new was that these requirements were formulated according to comprehensive cultural domains or fields of knowledge (i.e. learning areas) rather than for individual subjects. (National Institute for Public Education, 2000).

The development of the NCC began in 1989 and the government adopted the document in 1995. The preparation of the framework curricula was much shorter: the process started in 1998 and the Ministry of Education published the curricula in 2000. The introduction of the new system of curricular regulations was accompanied by a range of professional and political debates. Professional bodies established by the Ministry of Education and comprising numerous experts prepared the new national documents. The Ministry of Education coordinated the process of development of both the NCC and the framework curricula. In both cases the work begun with the drafting of a strategic concept, on the basis of which the committees, organized in accordance with the structure of subjects or fields of knowledge, could begin working. The work of these committees was in all cases supervised by a coordination body. In the case of the framework curricula the committees were organized according to school-types and subjects and operated simultaneously. A number of versions were prepared for both the NCC and the framework curricula. Together with the strategic concept these versions were sent to schools and professional organizations so that they could provide their opinion on these documents. Thus, the documents were prepared in the framework of intensive exchanges between the decision makers and the schools.

The preparation of school-based programmes was a completely new phenomenon in public education: neither teacher training nor in-service training had prepared teachers for either the local planning of pedagogical work or the design of curricula. Therefore, in the process of the implementation of the NCC the central governance of education had to take a significant role in developing teachers' competencies in this respect as well.



After the introduction of the NCC in 1995, the first task was to make the most important target groups (i.e. the teachers and school maintainers) acquainted with this completely new system of content regulation and the core curriculum itself, and to create the conditions of its utilization. Implementation required significant financial support, primarily because less than 10% of schools had individualized programmes, and institutions which were not familiar with the curriculum development process required a great deal of professional assistance. In the period of the implementation of the NCC, schools spent the largest share of this financial support for training courses on programme planning and the preparation of local curricula and on in-service training programmes, which focused individual fields of knowledge of the NCC. Most of these courses were organized by providers of professional services and pedagogical institutes operating in the counties, but schools, universities and private companies provided such training programmes as well. Educational experts evaluating the pedagogical programmes of schools before the approval of those (schools were obliged to request such evaluations) also required training during the three-year period provided for the preparation of local curricula.

One of the main problems was caused by the fact that the pedagogical cycles defined by the NCC did not fit into the school structure of the former system. Conforming to the age limit of compulsory education (extended to 16 years of age), the NCC regulated educational content until grade 10; however, there was no school where the tenth grade constituted the final year. In a curricular sense, this regulation 'split into two' the upper secondary phase of the 8 + 4 school system structure. The NCC offered no guidelines for the final two years (grades 11 and 12), so general and vocational secondary schools had to plan the local curriculum for these two grades on the basis of requirements defined for the school-leaving examination.

The second phase of the implementation of the curricular reform started with the publication of the framework curricula, issued on 30 August 2000 by a ministerial decree. In the course of professional discussions, the framework curricula were well received in most cases. The Ministry sent the basic principles of the framework curricula and the lesson plans to all schools and professional pedagogical organizations, requesting their opinions in the form of a questionnaire and informally as well. The opinions showed that teachers generally supported the concept of framework curricula, agreed with its subject structure and believed that their local curriculum would be adjustable to the framework curriculum proposed for their type of school. With the exception of mathematics and natural science subjects, relatively few teachers criticized the compulsory number of hours of instruction defined by the proposed lesson plans. At the same time most schools requested that the subject 'technology' (not included in the framework curricula) be restored for all grades. Similar to that of the NCC, the introduction of the framework curricula puts the greatest burden on vocational schools (especially for grades 9 and 10). (National Institute for Public Education, 2001).

The NCC was revised in 2003 (after having been implemented in all the grades of compulsory education), and further revised in 2007 in order to take into account the recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on key competences necessary for lifelong learning. Transversal key competences (e.g. digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, initiative and



entrepreneurship as well as cultural awareness) are all among the key competences emphasized by the NCC. (Eurydice, 2009 and 2010).

The 2003 amendment of the Act on Public Education completely changed the role of framework curricula. Framework curricula are no longer part of the central legislative control structure, and their use is not compulsory for the schools. From 2004/05 educational institutions may select from a set of framework curricula, based on the NCC 2003, instead of using the former single framework curriculum provided by the Ministry of Education for each school type. The new framework curricula are merely providing professional assistance to use the NCC 2003. Framework curricula contain recommendations regarding the aims of education, the system of subject matters, the topics and requirements of specific subjects and its requirements by grades, the available time frame, and implementation of health and environmental education and knowledge that should be acquired. (Eurydice, 2009).

Currently, in primary and secondary education a three-level structure constitutes the overall framework for curricular matters. Firstly, the NCC is the central and highest level regulatory document obligatory for all schools. The NCC lays down the national objectives of public education, identifies the main areas of knowledge, provides guidelines on how to distribute this content over the various phases of public education, and defines the key development tasks (i.e. the cross-curricular fields) for the various educational phases (years 1-4, 5-6, 7-8, and 9-12). The NCC focuses on the acquisition of key competences for lifelong learning. In addition, in vocational education there is a centrally-defined programme of vocational subjects issued in accordance with the Act on Vocational Education. Secondly, framework curricula, centrally-accredited or published by the Ministry and based on the NCC serve as a basis for developing local curricula. Thirdly, pedagogical programmes including the local curricula are developed by the schools in accordance with the NCC guidelines. Secondary schools have to take into account the requirements of the secondary school-leaving examination in the process of designing their local curricula. Teachers have the right (after consulting the team of teachers of the same subject in the school) to choose the content, methods, textbooks as well as the teaching aids in accordance with the educational and pedagogical programme. The Minister responsible for education, having consulted the National Public Education Council, makes a decision whether a textbook may be included on an official list of textbooks, provides for publishing this list and also publishes the list of teaching aids obligatory for public education institutions. For the effective implementation of the NCC and the National Assessment of Basic Competences, a 'curricular support system' has been designed. This system includes not only a framework curriculum and guidelines, but also teaching-learning packages, methodological and assessment tools, textbooks, digital toolkits and in-service teacher training programmes. There is also a programme package for preschools. (Eurydice, 2009 and 2010).

## Pre-primary education

As mentioned, preschool education (kindergarten) is provided by a dual function (social-health and educational) institution catering to children between the ages of 3 and 6. Attendance is voluntary; the final year preparing 5-year-olds for primary education must be attended by all children for at least four hours a day. Institutional day care of children aged between 20 weeks and 3 years is provided in



nurseries/crèches under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. In recent years the number of nursery places decreased and in 2008 it was estimated that only 8% of the concerned age group can had access to this service as opposed to 15% in previous years. (Sinka & Köpataki, 2008). Children may be admitted to a day nursery at any time of the year. Day nurseries are open five days a week, usually eight to 10 hours a day, as required by the parents. (Eurydice, 2009).

On the basis of the Act on Local Governments and the Public Education Act as amended in 2003, providing kindergarten education is the duty of the local governments. The Act No. 77 of 1993 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities stipulates that upon parents' request, the local government must arrange for a minority class or group. Minority local governments are entitled to supervise and evaluate educational institutions in order to ensure a service of required standards. In 1997, the Minister of Education in agreement with the National Committee of Minorities issued the guidelines of kindergarten education of national and ethnic minorities.

Most kindergartens provide full day care with meals. Public kindergartens charge fees for extra services (i.e. meals, excursions), while private institutions normally charge fees.

The fundamental aim of kindergarten education is to ensure harmonic personal development, according to children's personal characteristics. Activities in kindergartens are regulated by the National Core Programme of Kindergarten Education of 1996 (revised in 2009). This is a framework programme providing guidelines for designing local educational programmes. It ensures the possibility to provide education on the basis of numerous principles taking into account local needs and demands. The local educational programmes include the educational concept of the kindergarten and the main pedagogical principles followed by teaching staff. The new competency-based kindergarten programme package reflects the principles of the Core Programme. The main objective of this pedagogical development is the elaboration of educational content that is suitable for enhancing the transitional learning period from preschool to primary education. Additional objectives include supporting the implementation of an inclusive pedagogy in preschool institutions, the recognition of play as an activity that is both the objective and the result of the development, and the acknowledgement that there is a methodological connection among play, morals and emotions. The content of the programme package can be seen as a preparation for lifelong learning which takes into consideration the age characteristics and main activities of children of kindergarten age. (Eurydice, 2009).

Play is the most important developing task in kindergarten education. The special importance of play must be reflected in the daily timetable and schedule of the kindergarten. The pedagogical development mostly builds upon the following activities: poems, tales; songs, music, sing-and-play; drawing, sculpting, craft; physical activities; and the active exploration of the surrounding world. Materials and methods used in kindergarten education are chosen by the teachers in accordance with the relevant regulations. Teachers may choose one of the evaluation systems available or they can use an approach in line with their local educational programme. They have to record the progress of each child from the first day they enter kindergarten until their entry to primary school. (*Ibid.*).



In 1999/2000, there were 4,643 kindergartens with about 365,700 children enrolled and 31,409 teachers. The children-teacher ratio was 11.6:1; 87.3% of children aged 3-5 attended kindergarten. (National Institute for Public Education, 2001).

The Hungarian Central Statistical Office reports that in 2010/11 there were 4,358 kindergartens and the total enrolment was 338,162 children (including 1,272 children in special education classes), of whom 48.3% were girls. The number of teachers was 30,359 and the children-teacher ratio was 11:1. (HCSO, 2011).

### **Primary and lower secondary education (basic education)**

As mentioned, children normally enter primary school at age 6, although starting school education is flexible and adjusted to their level of development. The general (single structure) school offers a eight-year programme (grades 1 to 8) divided into two four-year stages. After the completion of grade 4 or 6 pupils can transfer to a general secondary school (eight- or six-year gymnasium). Since 2006/07 the National Assessment of Basic Competences evaluates pupils' achievement (reading comprehension and mathematical abilities) in grades 4, 6, 8, and 10.

The main objective of the eight-year primary education is to develop the interests and skills of pupils and successfully prepare them for continuing their studies. Another important objective is to prepare for the effective integration in society. (Eurydice, 2009).

The National Core Curriculum (NCC) defines the values, the body of knowledge, and the concept of learning for the period of compulsory schooling. Its set of development tasks is also closely linked to the objectives of the national core programme of kindergarten education. The NCC helps schools operate in a way that the teaching and learning process is organized to promote the values of democracy, humanism, respect for the individual, the freedom of conscience, the development of personality, progress towards cooperation between key communities (family, nation, community of European nations, mankind), equality between peoples, nations, national minorities, ethnic groups and genders, solidarity and tolerance. The NCC seeks to strengthen a school system which promotes the achievement of equality of chances.

Education plays an essential role in enabling European citizens to acquire the key competences that are indispensable for flexible adaptation to changes, for influencing these changes and for shaping their own future. Key competences are those competences which every individual needs for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment. Each of these is equally important as each can contribute to a successful life in a knowledge-based society. The development of one's learning competence acquires greater value as human capacity for action increases in the process of lifelong learning. Many of the competences partially overlap and intertwine: elements that are necessary for one competence, support competences in another area. A similar interdependency exists between the key competences and key development tasks (cross-curricular fields). The development tasks of the specific cultural domains encompass the key competences in a complex system. There are several areas of development which





form part of all competences, such as critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem solving, risk assessment, decision-making, and constructive management of feelings.

The key competences are the following: communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competence; competences in natural science; digital competence; learning to learn; social and civic competences; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; aesthetic and artistic awareness and expression. The key development tasks of the NCC build upon the key competences. They include: self-image and self-knowledge; homeland and peoples; European identity and universal culture; education for active citizenship and democracy; economic education; education for environmental awareness; learning to learn; physical and mental health; and preparing for adulthood.

The NCC defines the content of public education in terms of cultural domains, while the subject system of individual schools is defined in the local curricula taking the various cultural domains into account. The 12-year compulsory education is a uniform process of development, broken down into four educational phases. From a pedagogical point of view, the first six grades are uniform. The educational phases defined in the NCC are: grades 1-4; grades 5-6; grades 7-8; and grades 9-12. (National Core Curriculum 2007, abridged version).

The NCC includes the following cultural domains or fields of knowledge (i.e. learning areas): mother language and literature (Hungarian language and literature, minority language and literature); modern foreign language; mathematics; man and society (social studies, civics, economics; humanities; history); man and nature (natural sciences; physics; chemistry; biology and health studies); our earth and environment; art (singing and music; dance and drama; visual arts; motion picture and media studies); informatics (computer studies; library use); life management and practical knowledge (technology; home economics; career orientation); physical education and sports.

Being a core curriculum, the NCC 2003 does not contain specific syllabuses, elements of cultural canons or detailed requirements. Rather than regulating school practices, it serves as a key reference for authors and editors of framework curricula and local curricula, as well as for the developers of pedagogical programmes. The modifications introduced in the 2003 NCC were incorporated into local curricula of eight-year primary schools by June 2005, of eight-year gymnasia by June 2007, and of six-year gymnasia by June 2009. The NCC does not prescribe mandatory specialized subjects except for cases where the specific subject area covers one specialized subject matter (for example mathematics or Hungarian language and literature). Furthermore, the NCC does not provide specific lesson numbers for the time to be spent on the ten learning areas. Instead, it provides approximate percentages (giving the minimum and maximum figures), with enough flexibility for schools in designing their own curricula. The suggested lesson ratios are shown in the table below:



**Hungary. Primary (basic) education: learning areas and suggested lesson ratios (minimum and maximum percentage) according to the National Core Curriculum 2003**

Learning area	Suggested lesson ratios (%) in each phase		
	Grades 1-4	Grades 5-6	Grades 7-8
Hungarian language and literature	32–40	17–24	10–15
Modern foreign language	2–6	12–20	12–20
Mathematics	17–23	15–20	10–15
Man and society	4–8	4–8	10–15
Man and nature	4–8	7–11	15–20
Our earth and environment	–	4–8	4–8
Arts	10–18	12–16	8–15
Information technology	2–5	4–8	6–10
Everyday life and practical knowledge/skills	4–8	4–9	5–10
Physical exercise and sport	15–20	11–15	10–15

*Source:* Eurydice, 2009.

As mentioned, framework curricula are no longer part of the central legislative control structure, and their use is not compulsory. Since 2004/05 educational institutions can select from a set of framework curricula based on the NCC 2003, instead of using the former single framework curriculum prepared by the Ministry of Education for each school type. New framework curricula developed by groups of professionals can be submitted to accreditation by institutions or maintainers. Until 2006 more than ten framework curricula were accredited, among which there are framework curricula for pupils with special educational needs as well as for the gifted. The most widely used framework curriculum for grades 1-4 and grades 5-8 is presented in the tables below.

**Hungary. Primary (basic) education, grades 1-4 (focus on humanities): annual number of teaching periods according to the most widely used framework curricula**

Subject	Annual number of teaching periods in each grade			
	1	2	3	4
Hungarian language and literature	296	296	296	277.5
Foreign language	–	–	–	111
Mathematics	148	148	129.5	129.5
Our environment	37	37	55.5	55.5
Information technology	–	–	18.5	18.5
Music and singing	37	55.5	37	37
Drawing	55.5	37	55.5	37
Technology and everyday life	37	37	37	37
Physical education	111	111	111	111
Lessons decided by the school	18.5	18.5	18.5	18.5
<b>Total compulsory annual periods</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>832.5</b>

Source: Eurydice, 2009. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

**Hungary. Primary (basic) education, grades 5-8: annual number of teaching periods according to the most widely used framework curricula**

Subject	Annual number of teaching periods in each grade			
	5	6	7	8
Hungarian language and literature	148	148	148	148
History, citizenship education	74	74	74	74
Foreign language	111	111	111	111
Mathematics	148	111	111	111
Information technology/library	–	18.5	37	37
Nature	55.5	74	–	–
Physics	–	–	55.5	55.5
Biology	–	–	55.5	55.5
Chemistry	–	–	55.5	55.5
Geography	–	–	55.5	55.5
Singing and music	37	37	37	37
Drawing	55.5	37	37	37
Technology and everyday life	37	37	18.5	37
Physical education and sports	92.5	92	74	74
Form master's class	37	37	37	18.5
Dance and drama	18.5	18.5	–	–
Our homeland and people	18.5	18.5	–	–
Anthropology, sociology & ethics	–	–	18.5	–
Motion picture and the media	–	–	–	18.5
Health science	–	18.5	–	–
<b>Total compulsory annual periods</b>	<b>832.5</b>	<b>832.5</b>	<b>925</b>	<b>925</b>

Source: Eurydice, 2009. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

The pupils' weekly teaching load is composed of compulsory and non-compulsory lessons. The former must not exceed four lessons a day in grades 1-3, must be between four and five lessons in grades 4-6 (4.5 on a weekly average), and five lessons a day in grades 7-8. The primary purpose of non-compulsory sessions is to meet pupils' needs and interests. The weekly timeframe of these may be no more than 10% of the compulsory lesson time in grades 1-4, 25% in grades 5-6, and 30% in grades 7-8. The weekly schedule may be 10% more in the education of national, and ethnic minorities, and 15-50% more in rehabilitation institutions for pupils with special educational needs. The school may offer further sessions (study circles, self-study groups, sports groups, school choir, etc.) in addition to the regular set of lessons to meet the needs and interests of its pupils, or if its pedagogical programme so justifies. Classes usually begin at 8:00 a.m. and finish at 2:00 p.m., and afternoon (non-compulsory) sessions usually begin at 3:00 p.m. For pupils staying on, there is a lunch break between the two periods. The length of the breaks, the schedule of lessons and extracurricular sessions are set by the school, and are laid down in its internal regulations. (Eurydice, 2009).

Schools and teachers enjoy total freedom as regards the methods to be used in the teaching and learning process. At the same time, the school's pedagogical programme determines the main principles of the educational process at that particular school along with its objectives, tasks, and their tools, methods, and procedures. The abundant availability of textbooks and teaching aids enables schools to choose those best suited to their needs. The selection of textbook is the right of the subject teacher but the decision is not made individually as the teachers teaching the same subject in a school have to provide their opinion on the basis of the local curriculum.

Pupils' performance and progress are regularly assessed during the school year. The most preferred evaluation tools include oral or short written tests and the checking of the written homework. The tools of the summative evaluation are the summary tests at the end of major sections of the material, and tests covering a number of lessons (less frequently internal examinations). On the basis of interim marks pupils are given a certificate at the end of the term and of the year except those in grades 1-3, who receive a narrative evaluation. End-of-term marks as well as final (end-of-year) marks are given in each subject. Most teachers use the a 1-5 scale for both formative and summative evaluation, where 5 stands for excellent. As for formative evaluation, in the lower classes it is usual to give red dots (entered in a special booklet) for good performance and black for bad, or giving small animal figures, while in the upper classes the evaluation of performance in percentages is more usual, and narrative evaluation is likewise gaining ground. Teachers are expected to evaluate every child at least once a month in every subject (in grades 1-4 narrative evaluation, in grades 5-8 mostly with marks), and inform parents about the results. As a general rule pupils in the first three grades cannot repeat the year even if they failed to meet the prescribed requirements prescribed. Pupils are given a certificate at the end of each academic year to document completion of the grade. The certificate on the successful completion of grade 8 is recognized as a lower secondary education qualification. (*Ibid.*).

In 1999/2000, there were over 3,800 primary schools (including primary school sites); the total enrolment was about 972,000 pupils and the number of teachers was about 89,000. The overall drop-out rate was estimated at 2.4%, and the transition



rate to further studies was 95.9%. About 90% of schools were run by local governments. (National Institute for Public Education, 2001).

The Hungarian Central Statistical Office reports that in 2010/11 there were 3,306 primary schools (including primary school sites) and the total enrolment was 758,566 pupils (including 19,592 pupils in special education), of whom 48.2% were girls. The number of teachers was 73,565 and the pupil-teacher ratio was 10:1 (in 2008/09 female teachers represented 87.5% of primary school teachers). Out of the 756,569 pupils enrolled in full-time education, a total of 386,958 pupils were enrolled in grades 1-4. (HCSO, 2011).

## Secondary education

As mentioned, after the modifications introduced in 1989 there are three main forms of general secondary school (gymnasium) covering different age groups, namely the eight-, six- and four-year gymnasium (or five-year gymnasium for bilingual and other programmes including a foreign language preparatory year). The gymnasium offers a general education programme leading to the secondary school-leaving examination (the reformed examination at two levels—standard and advanced—was introduced in 2005); students have to sit exams in four compulsory subjects (Hungarian language and literature, mathematics, history, and foreign language) and at least one optional elective. Secondary vocational schools offer four- to five-year programmes leading to the vocational secondary school-leaving examination; graduates can enrol in postsecondary programmes lasting one to three years and leading to a vocational qualification or can enter higher education. Two-year advanced (postsecondary) vocational programmes are also offered to secondary education graduates; a maximum of 60 credit points gained in advanced vocational education may be transferred into first-cycle (bachelor's degree) university or college programmes. Other types of vocational education and training (VET) can be regarded as part of the system of initial VET (IVET), which is shorter in duration and only qualifies for the practice of a profession, without granting access to higher education. Vocational school programmes provide general and pre-vocational education and training in the first two years, followed by one to three years of VET to obtain a vocational qualification. In 2010, 'early' VET programmes were introduced offering three years of vocational training to grade 8 graduates.

The free choice of upper secondary school is an entitlement laid down in legislation. At the same time upper secondary schools may also set admission criteria and organize entrance examinations. Pupils should primarily be selected according to their educational achievements and results if they apply to classes lower than grade 9. Since 2008/09 the secondary school can decide on a given entrance application exclusively on the basis of the applicant's school achievement, or of the school achievement and of the results of a written examination administered with centrally developed, unified, competence-based task sheets. Entrance examinations organized for the ninth grade of secondary schools may also entail an oral part. The new regulations stipulate that a secondary school can administer a written entrance examination exclusively with the tasks sheets for written tests centrally developed and distributed by the Educational Authority. Following the reforms introduced in 2004, upper secondary education is further divided into two phases: the first phase starting in grade 9 and lasting until the end of grade 10/11 aims to build general knowledge;



the second phase starting in grade 10 or 11 and lasting until the end of grade 12/13 aims to deepen the gained knowledge and provides career guidance and orients and assists the students in planning further education and training. The phase of obtaining a vocational qualification begins after upper secondary education, and finishes in the vocational training grade specified in the National Register of Qualifications. (Eurydice, 2009).

As in the case of primary (basic) education, the National Core Curriculum (NCC) defines the values, the body of knowledge, and the concept of learning for the period of compulsory schooling. The suggested lesson ratios for upper secondary education are shown in the table below:

**Hungary. Secondary education: learning areas and suggested lesson ratios (minimum and maximum percentage) according to the National Core Curriculum 2003**

Learning area	Suggested lesson ratios (%) in each phase	
	Grades 9–10	Grades 11–12
Hungarian language and literature	10-15	10
Modern foreign languages	12-20	13
Mathematics	10-15	10
Man and society	10-15	9
Man and nature	15-20	10
Our earth and environment	4-8	–
Arts	9-15	5
Information technology	6-10	5
Everyday life and practical knowledge/skills	5-10	–
Physical exercise and sport	9-15	8

*Source:* Eurydice, 2009. Given the variety of educational and training programmes offered in grades 11 and 12, the suggested ratios refer to the minimum percentages covering 70% of the total timeframe.

The most widely used framework curriculum for grades 9-12 is presented in the table below:

**Hungary. Secondary education (gymnasium): annual number of teaching periods according to the most widely used framework curricula**

Subject	Annual number of teaching periods in each grade			
	9	10	11	12
Hungarian language and literature	148	148	148	128
History, citizenship education	74	55.5	111	96
Anthropology, sociology & ethics	–	–	37	–
First foreign language	111	111	111	96
Second foreign language	111	111	111	96
Mathematics	111	111	111	128
Information technology/library	55.5	–	–	–
Introduction to philosophy	–	–	–	32
Physics	55.5	74	74	–
Biology	–	37	74	64
Chemistry	55.5	74	–	–
Geography	74	74	–	–
Singing and music	37	37	–	–
Drawing and visual culture	37	37	–	–
Physical education and sports	74	74	74	64
Form master's class	37	37	37	32
Sociology	18.5	18.5	18.5	16
Dance and drama	18.5	18.5	–	–
Film and media education	–	–	18.5	16
Arts (defined in local curricula)	–	–	37	32
Lessons decided by the school	–	–	148	160
<b>Total compulsory annual periods</b>	<b>1,017.5</b>	<b>1,017.5</b>	<b>1,110</b>	<b>960</b>

Source: Eurydice, 2009. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

Compulsory lessons must not exceed five or six lessons (5.5 on a weekly average) in the grades 9-10 and in the upper secondary school from grade 11 onward, six lessons per day. In the vocational training grade the compulsory theoretical lessons may not exceed seven a day, and the total of classes in theory and practice may not exceed eight a day. Non-compulsory lessons are also arranged to meet students' interests and needs. The timeframe per week to be used for this purpose may be up to 45% of the compulsory teaching time in grades 9-10, 60% in grades 11-13, and 5% in the vocational training grades. Further extra lessons are available in schools of national or ethnic minorities or enrolling students with special educational needs. The practical training lessons in vocational training last 60 minutes. Classes usually begin at 8:00 a.m. and finish at 2:00 p.m. Afternoon (non-compulsory) sessions usually begin at 3:00 p.m. (Eurydice, 2009).

In upper secondary education formative evaluation of students' performance includes, in addition to marks (as in the case of primary education), also percentages, and narrative evaluation. Generally, teachers evaluate every student at least once every two months in every subject, and inform parents about the results. Marks are determined by the teacher, while in the case of end-of-year marks the ultimate decision lies with the whole teaching staff. Decision on whether the student may



progress to a higher grade is likewise made by the school's teaching staff following discussion of the end-of-year results. Students are given a certificate at the end of each academic year to document completion of the year. Only students who have successfully completed grade 12 may be allowed to sit the upper secondary school-leaving exam. Since 2005 the exams are to be organized at two levels, i.e. standard/intermediate and advanced level. The examination is organized nationally in accordance to centrally-defined requirements. The school-leaving examination must comprise of a total of five subjects, four compulsory and one chosen by the student. The examination consists of several parts: oral, written, and in case of some subjects, practical. From 2005 the examination is at the same time the entrance examination to tertiary education. The examination is arranged by the school, and, in case of the advanced level exam, by the Educational Authority. The assessment of the examination at the standard level is the task of the examination committee set up by the school, while at the advanced level there is an independent examination committee for each subject. In the case of the vocational secondary school-leaving examination, a certificate of vocational qualification can be issued after that the student had fulfilled both the professional and the exam requirements. Those who fulfil an exam part related to one professional requirement module can be granted partial vocational qualification. (*Ibid.*).

Initial vocational training and education (IVET) curricula are developed by VET schools in line with requirements and guidelines defined at the central level. The first years of vocational school and secondary vocational school programmes (excepting 'early' VET programmes introduced in 2010) focus on general education and pre-vocational training combined with career orientation. They are referred to as general education grades. General subjects are taught in compliance with requirements of the NCC and recommendations of framework curricula issued by the Minister for National Resources. Pre-vocational training is in line with the framework curricula developed for each of the 21 occupational fields. Secondary vocational schools must also adhere to the requirements of the school-leaving examination. Curricula for vocational training (in VET grades) are based on the vocational and examination requirements and the framework curricula for the respective qualifications. Key competences are allocated a prominent place in the regulations for general as well as vocational education, but the competence-based or learning outcome-oriented approach has been more central to VET. Teams of VET professionals and practical experts defined competence profiles for each occupation. These specify not only the professional knowledge and skills necessary to perform the various tasks of a given occupation/job, but also the methodological (thinking, problem-solving and work style), social (communication, cooperation and conflict-management) and personal (flexibility, creativity, independence, personality traits and capabilities) competences. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

Secondary education has witnessed a rapid and dynamic increase. Between 1988 and 1995 the number of general secondary schools increased by 43%, secondary schools with mixed (general and vocational) courses grown by 97%, the number of vocational schools increased by 20%, and the number of technical schools by 13%.

In 1999/2000, there were 503,617 students in secondary education, of whom 145,210 students in general secondary schools. The total number of teachers was 40,667 (of whom 14,155 in general secondary schools). The average number of



students per class was 27.8 and the student-teacher ratio was 12.4:1. In 1999, about 54% of schools were run by local governments and 22% by county self-governments. (National Institute for Public Education, 2001).

The Hungarian Central Statistical Office reports that in 2010/11 there were 802 vocational schools (including vocational school sites) and the total enrolment was 147,340 students of whom 139,237 students in full-time education (including 10,161 in special education). The number of teachers was 10,832. Out of the students enrolled in full-time education, 55,739 were enrolled in general training programmes and 83,498 students in vocational training programmes. In the same school year, there were 876 secondary general schools (including school sites) with a total enrolment of 241,872 students of whom 198,700 in full-time education (including 115,188 girls); the number of teachers was 18,292. Furthermore, there were 939 secondary vocational schools (including school sites) with a total enrolment of 273,596 students of whom 240,364 in full-time education (including 115,769 girls). The number of teachers was 19,829. Out of the students enrolled in full-time education, a total of 172,421 were enrolled in general training programmes and 67,943 students in vocational training programmes. (HCSO, 2011).

### Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The new government programme passed in 1998 explicitly drew up plans to establish a system of quality assurance. The issue received special attention in the 1999 amendment to the Public Education Act. On the basis of this amendment, the Ministry of Education created its own administrative authority, the National Public Education Evaluation and Examination Centre. The Ministry of Education initiated an independent quality assurance development scheme called 'Comenius 2000' in 1999.

Surveys on student performance based on standardized testing methods have been conducted in several examination centres for years. Data gathered from surveys based on sampling procedures are available retrospectively for several years, making it possible to analyze changes and trends. Previously, surveys using standardized testing primarily provided information on the extent to which students had mastered the body of knowledge in a specific subject. Recent investigations, however, tend to target the sizing up of general competences, i.e. they put the emphasis on instrumental instead of factual knowledge. Such series of surveys, called 'Monitor', have taken place on a regular two-year basis.

The most important conclusion of the 1999 Monitor survey, as already indicated by 1997 data, was that the steady fall of reading comprehension results since 1986 had stopped. In the case of mathematical abilities the 1995 and 1999 Monitor surveys made comparison relevant in two domain parts, both in connection with applied mathematics: in performing algebraic-calculation and text-based tasks. In contrast with reading comprehension results, the 1999 results in this domain were behind the 1995 results. In the case of ICTs, the 1999 survey made 1995 data comparable in two domain parts: in software-related and applied knowledge. Both domains presented a significant improvement in performance, i.e. the standard scores of 1999 were 62.8 points higher on average than the 1995 scores.



Civic education and attitudes have been surveyed for the first time in the 1999 Monitor samples. The survey conducted with 14-year-old students included 202 multiple choice questions. Of all the items, there were 38 cognitive questions on democracy and the economy, and 164 attitude questions on democracy and politics, national identity, social cohesion and divergence. Of all cognitive items, 26 were based on factual knowledge (correct answers ranged between 40.1 to 88.9%) and 12 measured abilities (correct answers ranged between 46.3 to 74.8%).

Overall, these surveys showed that student performance largely depends on non-institutional factors, such as the place of residence, family background and the socio-economic features of the students' environment. Their impact on student achievement is particularly significant. The settlement-type variable received special attention in the 1990s, since its analysis reflects the fact that the gap between urban and rural schools is widening. The results of the 1999 Monitor survey indicated that the discrepancies between different settlement types had grown further towards the end of the decade. Apart from this, the differences in the performance of student groups may be explained by the educational level of parents. The difference between the performance of eighth graders with parents of the lowest and the highest educational attainment, measured in standard scores, reaches 20%. (National Institute for Public Education, 2000).

Several national and international performance assessment studies were carried out between 2003 and 2006. These surveys identified the following major problems regardless of the area studied: (i) 20-40% of pupils lack or barely have the fundamental skills necessary for orienting themselves in everyday matters, i.e. their achievements are weakest at level 1 or below in the various grades and cultural domains; (ii) PISA test results indicated that the achievement of pupils in mathematical and reading literacy was below the international average, whilst they scored at around the international average in natural sciences and problem solving; (iii) Hungary ranked second after Turkey from among the countries participating in the PISA survey in terms of the size of the difference between the achievements of schools; (iv) it is in Hungary that the educational level of parents and other features of family background have the largest impact on a pupil's educational achievement at school. (National Institute for Public Education, 2006).

Students in Hungary achieved high results on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS); they had higher than the average achievement results in each assessment cycle. In mathematics and in science at fourth grade Hungarian students were usually at the end of the first one third, whereas in science at eighth grade Hungary was, as usual, among the top-performing countries. Hungary achieved similar results in the TIMSS 2007 assessments as well. Although Hungarian students had slightly lower results than in previous assessment cycles in mathematics, fourth grade students with 510 score points on the mathematics achievement scale and 536 score points on the science scale were close to the results of top-performing countries, whereas the eighth graders were only outranked significantly by the four Asian countries on the top. Trend data for Hungary indicate that average achievements in mathematics have slightly decreased, by 12 and 10 scale scores at each grade since 1995. In science there has been a 28-point improvement at fourth grade, whereas average achievement has remained the same at eighth grade compared to the results in 1995. Hungarian students' achievements in mathematics



and science are strongly determined by their parents' educational level. It is obvious that it is the most influencing background factor overall, however Hungarian students' performances were, as it can be concluded from PISA and TIMSS survey results, more influenced by this background factor than usual. In countries that participated in TIMSS 2007 and achieved high scores the differences between the results of students with the lowest and the highest educational levels of their parents were 42-104 score points. This difference in Hungary was significantly higher, 129 score points in mathematics and 112 in science. In Hungary, the differences in the educational level of parents are usually accompanied by significant differences in the families' socio-economic status. Consequently, Hungarian students' results are more closely linked to other background factors affecting achievements, such as computer availability at home, Internet access, as they are also indicative of the parents' socio-economic status. Due to the differences in skills of students developing at a relatively young age, the students of schools with higher percentage of students from economically disadvantaged families find themselves in a more disadvantaged situation in Hungary than in many other countries. Consequently, in Hungary, partly due to early school selection, selectivity is rather dominant in secondary schools, which is shown in the results of the national assessments of competences as well as the international PISA survey. (Educational Authority, 2008).

The National Assessment of Basic Competences (ABC), modeled on the PISA assessment, was developed and introduced at the beginning of 2000s. It is organized by the Department of Assessment and Evaluation at the Educational Authority (formerly known as the Centre for Evaluation Studies). The National ABC administered in 2003 for the second time measured the level of progress of basic skills (reading comprehension, application of mathematical methods) of each pupil of selected grades. The assessment (carried out each year since 2003 onward, and through the evaluation in grade 4 starting in 2006/07) covering the entire population in grades 4, 6, 8 and 10 provides valuable information concerning the effectiveness of whole system of public education, the individual public education institutions, and of the progress of individual pupils. The Educational Authority informs all maintainers of the results of the national assessment and is required to notify the maintainer if the results show that measures are to be implemented by the maintainer. (Eurydice, 2009; Sinka & Köpataki, 2008).

There has been a systemic move away from assessing factual knowledge towards assessing basic and specific subject-based competences. The National ABC, a national, centrally organized testing system for the assessment of mathematic and reading competences is designed to test every pupil in every school at grade 6, 8 and 10 (and in grade 4 individual learning needs are identified). This assessment system is summative in nature and allows schools to compare their students' achievement to the achievement of students in other schools with similar and different socio-economic composition. (Eurydice, 2010).

## Teaching staff

Prior to the implementation of the Bologna process and the introduction of the three-cycle degree structure, teacher education programmes were offered by both teacher training colleges and universities. Normally kindergarten teachers were graduates of three-year college programmes, primary school teachers (generalist teachers, grades



1-4) and special education teachers graduated from college programmes lasting four years, primary school teachers (subject teachers, grades 5-8) were graduates of four-year programmes offered by colleges or universities, and secondary (general and vocational) school teachers were trained at the university level (four- to five-year programmes).

Since 2006, the pre-service training of teachers is organized as follows:

- early childhood educators (nurseries): three-year programme—launched in 2009—equivalent to 180 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) leading to a bachelor's degree;
- preschool (kindergarten) teachers: three-year bachelor's degree programme equivalent to 180 ECTS;
- primary school teachers (generalist teachers, grades 1-4): four-year bachelor's degree programme equivalent to 240 ECTS;
- subject teachers of general subjects (grades 5-8 and secondary education): three-year bachelor's degree (180 ECTS, subject knowledge, specialization in at least two subjects) plus two-year master's degree programme (120 ECTS, pedagogically oriented) with a compulsory school practice equivalent to an additional 30 ECTS at the end of the master's programme;
- arts and vocational subjects teachers: bachelor's (180-210 ECTS) plus master's (120 ECTS) degree programme (specialization in at least one subject);
- special needs educators and therapists: four-year bachelor's degree plus master's degree programme (90 ECTS).

The Decree 15/2006 on the training and learning outcome requirements of bachelor's and master's programmes specifies the training and learning outcome requirements, the number of credits required, and the teacher's competences to be acquired (specialized knowledge, competence, professional commitment). Taking into consideration those provisions, the institutions concerned draw up curricula to determine the concrete form, content and methodology of the training programmes. According to the Decree, it is possible to proceed from a bachelor's programme to a master's programme specialized in teaching. A 50-credit module of a bachelor's programme (which is compulsorily selected by students) can lay the foundations for the second cycle, where the prospective teacher may specialize. In the new teacher education system practical training is an important component of the programmes. It takes place at the end of a training programme as an uninterrupted six-month internship at a public education institution. A work group, set up by the ministry responsible for education and the Institute for Educational Research and Development, in 2009 has worked out recommendations about the principles and organization of practical training. The objectives of the practical training period are to promote cooperation between higher education institutions and the institutions of public education and for the prospective teachers to gain field experience with the assistance a mentor from the public education institution and a methodologist from the higher education institution concerned. (Eurydice, 2009).

Generally, in the training programmes for kindergarten teachers the ratio of general subjects, pedagogy, and psychology is 32-35%, while courses preparing for





kindergarten education have a share of 45-48%. Practical training represents 30% of the total training time. Graduates may continue their pedagogical studies enrolling in a master's degree programme. In the case of the programmes for primary school teachers, the ratio of general knowledge of pedagogy, psychology, sociology, foreign language, IT, and subjects required to prepare for teaching in grades 1-4 is 83-85%; the ratio of the area of learning chosen preparing for tasks in grades 5-6 equals 15-17%. Practical training represents 15-20% of the total training time. Graduates may continue their studies in pedagogy enrolling in a master's degree programme.

The general recruiting procedure is an open competitive recruitment. Vacancies are advertised by the institutions themselves, and the head of the institution will select the most suitable applicant. If working in a school maintained by the local government, teachers can only be employed in a public servant legal arrangement. This status gives them relative job security as their employment, as soon as they sign the contract of appointment, has an indeterminate duration. If a teacher teaches in a school maintained by the local government, but not full-time, then he/she may be employed as a part-time public servant or with a part-time contract. The latter is usually a service contract. If the teacher does not teach in an institution maintained by the local government, he/she must be employed on the basis of a working contract full-time or part-time. In such a case the working contract specifies the position, the wages, and the location of work. The teacher is less protected than in a public servant legal arrangement. The law on the legal status of public employees includes the rules for their evaluation, wherever they work. Evaluation is a comprehensive, fact-based appraisal of the work of a public employee and plays a pivotal role in the way the work of a public employee is recognized morally and in financial terms. The teacher performance evaluation systems of public education institutions usually include formative assessment of the activities of teachers. Institutions can define the cycle of assessment and consider the special characteristics of their institution. (*Ibid.*).

In the mid-1990s the structure of in-service training was transformed, and the main elements of the new system are the following: i) it is mandatory for teachers to participate in in-service training for at least 120 hours every seven years as part of their continuous professional development; ii) in-service training programmes and training institutions have to be accredited; iii) schools have to draw up a plan for in-service training taking into account local needs and teacher competences that need to be enhanced; iv) in-service training activities must be regularly assessed. (Sinka & Köpataki, 2008).

The salaries of teachers working in an institution maintained by the state are based on the wage matrix of public servants. The weekly load of teachers consists of compulsory lesson time, and time to be spent on related activities related. In practice, 40 hours a week is regarded as full-time employment, and in case of teachers more than 50% of time, i.e. 22 lessons, are compulsory lessons to be delivered. (Eurydice, 2009).

The relative income position of teachers kept deteriorating each year between 1992 and 1998, except for a single year. Conditions improved between 1998 and 2000, but the salary of teachers in public employment rose only to half of the national average of the salaries of degree holders despite the improvement. The rise in basic salary in 2002 brought the payment of qualified teachers employed in general





education to 80% of the average pay of degree holders, while the salaries of qualified teachers employed in secondary institutions surpassed the average income of degree holders. By 2004, teachers' salaries as compared to the salaries of degree holders had by and large replicated the levels seen in 1989. (National Institute for Public Education, 2006).

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## Web resources

Department of Assessment and Evaluation at the Educational Authority (National ABC, PIRLS, PISA and TIMSS): <http://pirls.hu/english/national-center.php> [In Hungarian and English. Last checked: March 2012.]

Hungarian Accreditation Committee: <http://www.mab.hu/> [In Hungarian and English. Last checked: March 2012.]

Hungarian Institute for Higher Education Research: <http://www.hier.iif.hu/hu/index.php> [In Hungarian; some information in English. Last checked: March 2012.]

Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development: <http://bitangtibi.ofi.hu/home> [In Hungarian; some information in English. Last checked: March 2012.]

Hungarian Rectors' Conference: <http://www.mrk.hu/> [In Hungarian and English. Last checked: March 2012.]

Ministry of National Resources: <http://www.okm.gov.hu/main.php> [In Hungarian; some information in English. Last checked: March 2012.]

Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour: <http://www.szmm.gov.hu/main.php> [In Hungarian and English. Last checked: March 2012.]

National Assessment of Basic Competencies Website: <http://kompetenciameres.hu/> [In Hungarian. Last checked: March 2012.]

National Institute for Public Education: <http://www.ofi.hu/national-institute-of> [In Hungarian and English. Last checked: March 2012.]



National Institute of Vocational Education: <http://www.nive.hu/index.php> [In Hungarian. Last checked: March 2012.]

*For more detailed and updated information consult EURYDICE, the information network on national education systems and policies in Europe:*

[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index\\_en.php](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>*