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Principles and general objectives of education

The new educational laws approved in 1996 on the basis of the White Paper on Education in Slovenia are based on the principles of democracy, freedom of choice, autonomy and professionalism, quality and excellence, and equal opportunities. The general objectives of education are: the provision of equal educational opportunities for the optimal development of all individuals; the promotion of mutual tolerance; the development of life skills for a democratic society within the framework of lifelong learning; the promotion of equal opportunities for both sexes; respect of and cooperation with those who are different; respect of children's rights and human rights.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The new legislative framework for education in Slovenia was adopted at the beginning of 1996 and includes: the **Organization and Financing of Education Act** (last amended in 2007), the **Preschool Institutions Act** (last amended in 2008), the **Elementary School (Basic Education) Act** (last amended in 2007), the **Gymnasiums Act** (last amended in 2006), the **Vocational and Technical Education Act** (last amended in 2006), and the **Adult Education Act** (last amended in 2006). A different approach to school inspection has been implemented under the **School Inspection Act**, also approved in 1996 and last amended in 2005.

The Organization and Financing of Education Act contains a variety of provisions including among others: the aims of the education system, its organization and financing modalities; educational programmes, the process of definition, development and implementation of curricula, as well as those responsible for the implementation; textbooks development; the functions, structure and competencies of councils of experts; the supporting activities and tasks required for carrying out educational activities; the purpose, organization and functions of school councils; requirements for the provision of education; and the procedures for establishing private pre-school institutions and schools. The amended Act of 2007 stipulates that preschool institutions and schools shall self-evaluate the quality of programmes they provide every year.

The **Matura Act** of 2003 (last amended in 2007) determines the content of the general *matura* and vocational *matura* examinations, the rights and responsibilities of students, the responsibilities of *matura* bodies, and the procedures of the examination.

The **Higher Education Act**, adopted in December 1993, created a unified and academically autonomous university system and made provisions for the establishment of professional higher education institutions. The **Regulations on the Reorganization of Universities** were adopted by the National Assembly in December 1994, and the universities adopted their respective statutes in June 1995. The Higher Education Act has been amended in 1999, 2001 and in October 2003, progressively

adapting the system to the requirements of the Bologna process. Recent legislation includes the **Amendments and Supplements to the Higher Education Act** of June 2004, June 2006, and November 2009, and the **Postsecondary Vocational Education Act** of 2004. The **National Vocational Qualifications Act** adopted in 2000 (last amended in 2006) introduced a new certification system and enables the assessment and verification of vocational-related knowledge, skills and experiences acquired out of school.

The **Act on the Placement of Children with Special Needs** of 2000 (last amended in 2006) regulates special needs education and establishes that inclusion is the basic principle of education of children with special needs. The **Music Schools Act** of 2000 (last amended in 2006) regulates the functioning of public and private music and dance schools.

The **Decree on the Public Financing of Higher Education Institutions from 2004 to 2008** was adopted in 2004. The Decree governs public financing of higher education and provides for financial autonomy of universities. The provisions of the Decree also apply to private higher education institutions holding a concession and carrying out public programmes if they have acquired public funds.

Article 57 of the **Constitution** (1991 and subsequent amendments) guarantees equal rights to education to all citizens by stipulating that: “Education shall be free. Basic education shall be compulsory and shall be financed from public revenues. The State shall provide the opportunity for all citizens to obtain proper education.” Article 58 guarantees the autonomous status of universities. In accordance with the Elementary School (Basic Education) Act, basic education (grades 1-9) is compulsory and provided free of charge in public schools.

Administration and management of the education system

The education system is under the responsibility of the **Ministry of Education and Sport** (formerly the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport). This Ministry has the authority to decide on administrative matters related to pre-university education and education for ethnic minorities. At the beginning of 2005, responsibilities over science and higher education (universities) have been transferred to the newly created **Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology**.

The Ministry of Education and Sport is responsible for the development of pre-university education policies, inspection procedures, the allocation of funds, the implementation of laws and administrative decisions relating to pre-primary institutions, compulsory, upper secondary and postsecondary vocational schools. The Ministry of Education also allocated funds in compliance with the adopted standards and criteria.

The **Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs** performs some functions in certain areas of vocational and technical education and training, including the certification of national vocational qualifications and the definition of education policies with social partners. Other ministries involved in education include: the **Ministry of Internal Affairs**, responsible for the training of police, customs and

penal administration officers, the **Ministry of Public Administration**, which offers professional training and supplementary education programmes for civil servants; and the **Ministry of Defence** responsible for the training of military personnel under its jurisdiction.

The 210 **municipalities** (local self-governments), usually through their departments of social affairs, administer preschools, basic education and music schools, although it is the national government, particularly in the case of primary (basic) schools, that pays the salary of school employees and covers almost 50% of the operating costs.

The headmaster of a school is appointed by the **School Council**, which is also the administrative body of the school. The candidate is selected through a public tender and his/her appointment is subject to the approval of the Minister of Education. As a rule, the school council consists of eleven members, five of whom are teachers; the remaining six are representatives of the founder(s), parents and, in secondary schools, the students.

Councils of experts for individual education sectors have been established in order to develop curricula, syllabi, and examination catalogues. They also serve as consultative bodies to the government providing professional assistance in decision-making and in the preparation of legislation. The chairperson and members of the councils of experts are appointed by the government from the ranks of experts in the relevant fields of education, science and arts, as well as from relevant ministries, chambers and trade unions. The **Council of Experts for General Education** and the **Council of Experts for Technical and Vocational Education** deal with pre-university education. A **Council of Experts for Adult Education** has also been established to deal with issues in this area. Recently the Ministry of Education also established the **Council of Experts for Musical Education**, the **Council of Experts for Quality and Evaluation** (educational programmes and syllabi) and the **Council for Further Teacher Education and Training**. Overall responsibility for the Councils is vested in the Ministry of Education and Sport (MOES).

The **National Curriculum Council**, a body of experts from different fields relating to education, was established in 1996 with the following functions: determining the fundamental aims of the change in the content of the curriculum taking into consideration the basic principles embodied in the White Paper on Education published in 1995 and the new legislation; appointing commissions for specific fields (pre-school institutions, primary schools, grammar schools, vocational education and adult education) and subjects; coordinating the work of the commissions and submitting to the councils of experts proposals on renewed and mutually coordinated programmes for the entire education system.

Inspection is carried out by the **Inspectorate for Education and Sport**, under the MOES. The Inspectorate supervises the work and operations of public educational institutions (with the exception of those in the sphere of higher education) and the implementation of state-approved programmes in private preschool institutions and schools. School inspection includes supervision of the implementation of laws and other regulations, allocation of public funds and performance of educational activities. School inspection also involves supervision of the implementation of laws and



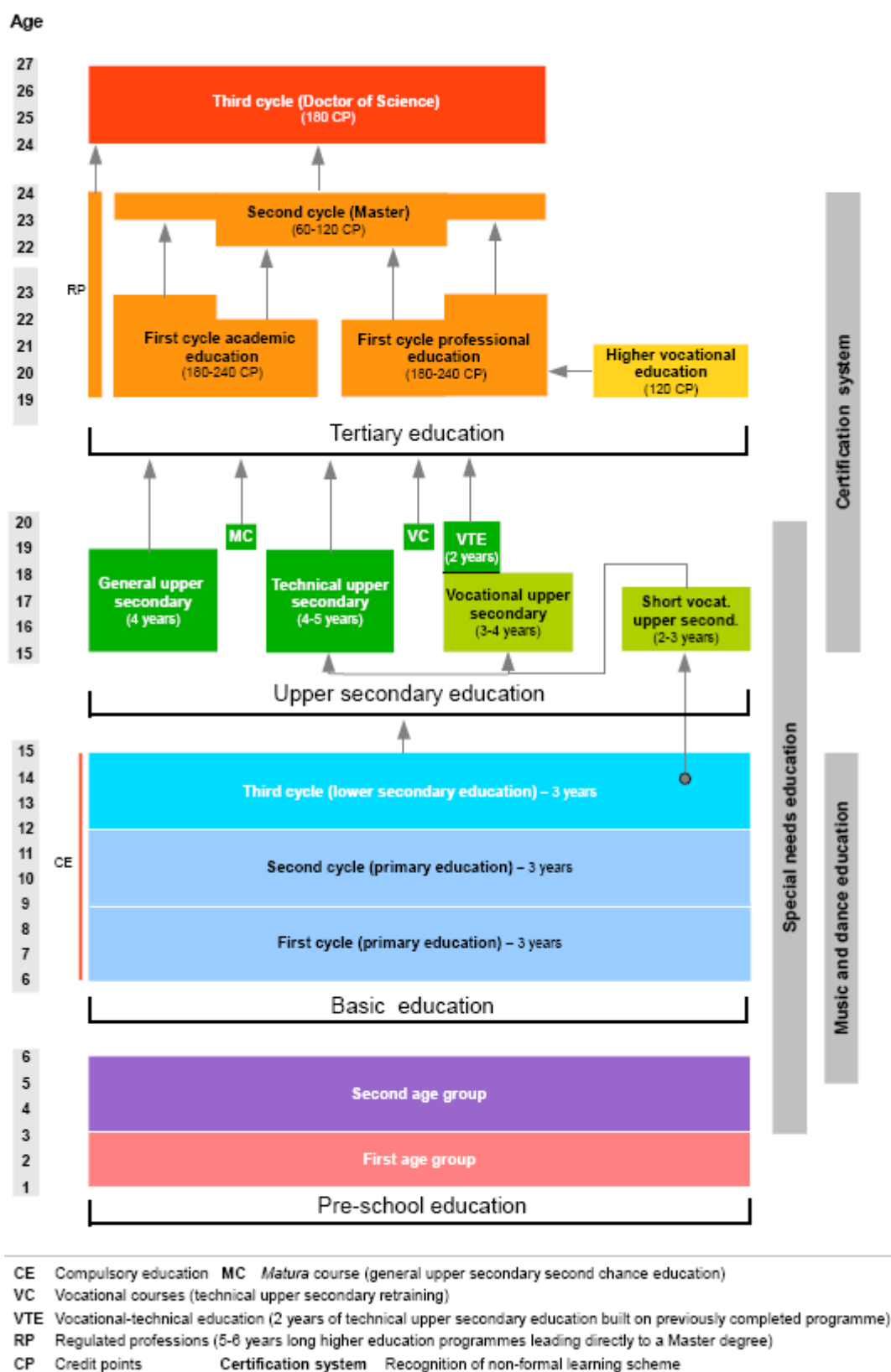
regulations regulating residential facilities for basic and secondary school students. (MOES, 2008).

The MOES is also supported by three national agencies providing consulting and advisory services, i.e. the **National Education Institute**, the **Institute for Vocational Education and Training** (established in 1996), and the **Slovenian Institute for Adult Education** (established in 1991). External examinations (including *matura* exams) are administered by the **National Examinations Centre**; evaluation procedures are defined by expert bodies such as **National Testing Committees** and **National Matura Committees**.

The Council for Higher Education, established in 1994, was responsible for determining the criteria for accreditation and re-accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes. It also determined the criteria for the design and accreditation of joint study programmes, applying the principles for establishing a European higher education space, as well as other international principles and recommendations for the design of such programmes. Its functions have been transferred to the **Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**, which commenced its operations in March 2010. The Agency has revised the criteria for the accreditation and external evaluation of higher education institutions and programmes, for the transfer between study programmes, as well as the standards for the appointment of higher education teachers, researchers and faculty assistants. The amended criteria and standards entered into force in February 2011.

Structure and organization of the education system

Slovenia: structure of the education system (2009)



Version: 1.6 (2 July 2008)

Source: Ministry of Education and Sport, 2009.



Pre-school education

Preschool education is not compulsory and caters to children between 1 and 5 years of age. It is provided by preschool education institutions (on a fee-paying basis) and pre-primary classes in basic schools. The most widely implemented programmes of preschool education are full-time (more than six hours per day). Children aged less than 3 years are placed in crèche groups, while those between 3 and 5 years of age are placed in preschool groups. All children are expected to receive one year of preschool education before their entry in primary school.

Primary and lower secondary education

Until the end of the 1990s compulsory primary (elementary) education lasted eight years divided into two four-year cycles; children were admitted at age 7. The new nine-year primary (basic) education programme divided into three three-year cycles was introduced in 1999/2000 and fully implemented by 2003/04. Children now start attending primary school at age 6. Upon completion of basic education students receive a certificate showing the final grades in each subject. At the end of grade 9 a national assessment of students' achievements in mother tongue, mathematics and another subject is organized by the National Examinations Centre. The results of the assessment are intended to provide feedback information about students' achievements and should not serve as a selection criterion for admission to upper secondary school. The final school-leaving certificate also shows the results of the external assessment expressed in points.

Secondary education

Upper secondary education is offered in gymnasias (general, classic and professional), and the duration of programmes is four years, preparing students for further studies. Technical and professional schools offer four-year programmes mainly focusing on professional subjects and practical training. There are also vocational schools offering three-year programmes and lower vocational schools offering shorter courses for students who have completed basic education (one and a half to two years' duration). Graduates from three-year vocational schools can continue their studies in a programme lasting an additional two years leading to a qualification equal to those students who graduate from technical and professional upper secondary schools. Gymnasium studies end with the *matura* examination, an externally assessed exam in five subjects (three compulsory and two elective subjects), while students in technical, professional and vocational schools sit the vocational *matura* examination, a partly externally assessed exam in four subjects.

Higher education

Postsecondary vocational education colleges, established in 1996, offer vocationally-oriented programmes lasting two years leading to a professional diploma; graduates can enrol in the second year of a professionally-oriented higher education programmes if the higher education institution providing this type of study allows such arrangements. Higher education is offered in universities and professionally-oriented higher education institutions. University undergraduate degree programmes usually last four years (three years in the case of professional programmes); long-



cycle studies take five years (veterinary medicine, pharmacy) or six years to complete (in the case of medicine). Graduate programmes include specialist (one to two years of study), master's (two years) and doctoral (four years) degree programmes. In the framework of the implementation of the Bologna process, three-year programmes equivalent to a bachelor's degree were introduced; within this scheme, an additional two years are required for a master's degree. According to new legislation adopted in 2004, doctoral studies last three years.

At the basic education level, the school year consists of about 38 (five-day) teaching weeks divided into two terms (between 175 to 190 teaching days depending on holidays). The school year comprises a maximum of 188 teaching days in grades 1-8, and 183 days in grade 9. At the upper secondary level (gymnasium, four-year programme), the school year consists of about 38 weeks including 35 weeks of classes and three weeks devoted to compulsory elective contents. The school year in vocational and technical education normally comprises 42 weeks of coursework. The academic year is divided into two semesters (winter and spring), each consisting of 15 weeks.

The educational process

A comprehensive reform of curricular contents took place between 1996 and 1999, followed by a process of gradual implementation, monitoring and evaluation of new programmes and syllabi. This reform identified fundamental curricular problems that needed to be solved, including: the autonomy and professional responsibility of schools and teachers; the excessive fragmentation of disciplinary knowledge into school subjects; overloaded curricula and syllabi; a limited use of diversified approaches, forms, methods and techniques; placing too much stress on teachers as the sole agents of knowledge transfer; an excessive percentage of population without vocational qualifications; the inadequate quality of acquired knowledge; and the need to secure conditions for the implementation of educational programmes. The reform resulted in renewed national curricular documents (weekly schedules of subjects, syllabi, and knowledge catalogues) at the pre-university level.

The leading role in the curricular reform has been played by the National Curriculum Council (NCC) established in November 1995. The NCC was established in order to define the general and specific goals of the reforms and the methodological frameworks. The general and specific goals, methodology and logistics of the reform were set forth in the document 'Starting Points for Curricular Reform.' Other documents adopted by the NCC defined cross-curricular areas and their place in the curriculum, methodology for the testing of draft and proposed syllabi by teachers, and the criteria for the determination of electives.

In 1996, the NCC appointed field, programme and subject curricular commissions to prepare proposals for national curricular documents such as schedules and syllabi. Each curricular commission consisted of educational advisers and experts from schools and universities. Commission members were nominated by various institutions, following a call for proposals published by the NCC. While draft curricular documents were being prepared, procedures for assuring horizontal and vertical coordination of syllabi for the subjects taught at individual levels of education were defined, and the integration of cross-curricular contents and links verified.



In addition to the curricular commission members, more than 300 specialists, consultants and reviewers were invited to participate in the preparation of other national curricular documents, such as work concepts for talented and gifted students, after-school care, modifications of weekly schedules of subjects, and syllabi. The draft curricular documents were sent to teachers and were assessed in teachers' circles. Conclusions of discussions were recorded and submitted to the authors of draft syllabi. Teachers' personal opinions were noted in a special questionnaire. Filled-out questionnaires were returned by almost 80% of all teachers. The members of the curricular commissions had to prepare an analysis of how teachers' comments were integrated into syllabi proposals and disseminate it to teachers. The analyses formed part of the documents to be submitted for the discussion of syllabi proposals.

In order to be discussed, each such proposal had to include a report on international comparisons, the analysis of the integration of teachers' comments, and a report on the integration of cross-curricular contents and links. Syllabi proposals were assessed with a view to the goals and principles adopted by the NCC. All curricular documents prepared by curricular commissions were finally adopted by appropriate councils of experts. The National Curriculum Council and its commissions made sure that the proposals submitted to competent councils of experts for discussion and adoption were coherent and consistent.

During 2006-2008, a trial implementation of flexible schedules of subjects has been introduced in basic education schools, and vocational and technical education programmes have been reformed. Concerning the latter, the new national framework curricula have a modular structure, are competence-based, and around 20% of the curriculum can be defined on the basis of local requirements. Since 2005, the updating and revision of basic education school and gymnasium syllabi is carried out using the concept of key competences. (MOES, 2008). Before 2008, objectives and contents of the basic education curriculum were prescribed in greater detail. Teacher's approach and methods used in the past were more closely related to the textbooks and teaching aids approved by the Council of Expert for General Education. Starting from 2007/08, teachers autonomously choose additional teaching materials, aids and workbooks, while they select textbooks from a wide list of books approved by the Council for General Education. In 2005, a special committee was appointed to develop guidelines for further development of gymnasium programmes, and another committee was appointed in 2006 to further develop and reform the *matura* exam. In 2007, the Council of Experts for General Education adopted general guidelines for the gymnasium reform. (Eurydice, 2008/09).

Pre-primary education

Preschool education is not compulsory and caters to children between 1 and 5 years of age. It is provided by preschool education institutions, preschool units and pre-primary classes in basic schools. The general objective of preschool education is to ensure the well-rounded development of children in accordance with the principles of each developmental stage and the characteristics of each child, as well as make it possible for children to develop their own particular abilities and skills. Preschool education aims at: developing the ability to understand and accept oneself and the others; developing the capacity to negotiate, participate in groups and accept individual differences; developing the capacity to recognize the feelings and



encourage emotional experience and expression; fostering curiosity, inquisitive spirit, imagination and intuition and the development of independent thinking; encouraging language development for the efficient and creative use of language and also of reading and writing; encouraging artistic experience and expression; developing motor capacities and skills; developing children's independence in personal hygiene and in the care for their health.

The country has a well-developed system of preschool education, reflected in the extent as well as the quality of the effort. Preschool education institutions are established, financed and administered by municipalities. Parents pay fees.

The National Curriculum for Preschool Institutions was drafted and approved in March 1999 by the Council of Experts for General Education. The national curriculum defines six areas of activities: physical exercises, language, art, nature, society, and mathematics. For each area of activity, the overall goals and the objectives and activities for the different age groups are specified. The goals defined for individual activities areas provide the teachers with a framework for the selection of contents and activities. The importance of play is also emphasized. In terms of implementing the curriculum, the proposed contents and activities are linked, upgraded, and supplemented by teachers. Interdisciplinary activities, such as moral development, health care, safety, and traffic education, are infused in all parts of life and work in preschool institutions. Preschool teachers observe, analyze and direct the process of the child learning through play. The performance of children and their achievements are not assessed through grades. Teachers help, direct, stimulate, motivate and support children, and verbally inform the parents about the achievements of their children. (Eurydice, 2008/09).

Preschool education institutions provide different programmes such as day programmes, short programmes, and preschool education at home. The most widely implemented programmes for preschools are full-time (more than six daily hours), although the majority of children attend more than eight hours. Children under 2 years are placed in crèche groups, those between the ages of 2 and 5, in preschool groups. As a rule, groups are homogeneous in terms of age. The law permits the organization of mixed-age groups (children aged 3-5) only on an exceptional basis.

Part-time programmes can take place during the whole school year or be concentrated during a specific period. They are not necessarily scheduled every day and their duration is less than six daily hours. Children aged 3-5 may attend a part-time programme. Children aged 4-5 years not enrolled in full-time programmes may attend a part-time preschool. Short programmes for children aged 3-5/6 and lasting 240 to 600 hours per year are mainly offered in demographically threatened regions and remote areas.

One of the most important conditions for the high quality of preschool programmes is the size of groups and the children-teacher ratio. Personnel standards stipulate that there should be one teacher and one teacher assistant in crèche groups and an average of one teacher and 0.5 assistants in all other classes. This standard applies to the nine-hour working day of preschool institutions. Bearing in mind the fact that preschool teachers work in classes with children six hours per day, this means that both workers are in a crèche class five hours per day together, while in



other classes this time amounts to one hour only. In some municipalities (all Ljubljana municipalities, for example), eleven hours of working time is agreed upon and financed, so that there is an average of one teacher and 0.9 teacher assistants in classes with children over 3 years of age.

Generally, children with special needs attend special classes, although recently mainstreaming into the regular educational process is being promoted as much as possible. Special education is intended for children with mental disorders, learning disabilities, gifted pupils, the blind and the visually impaired, the deaf and the hearing impaired, children with speech disorders, motor impaired children, and children with behaviour and personality disorders. In nationally-mixed areas, preschool education is carried out in the mother tongue. Preschool classes for children of migrant workers and special forms for Roma children are also organized.

In 2005 there were 54,815 children enrolled in preschools, of whom 13,157 up to 3 years of age and 41,658 children aged above 3 years. In the same school year, the percentage of children enrolled at the pre-primary level was estimated at 61.4% (80 % in the case of 3-5-year-olds). (Eurydice, April 2007).

The Statistical Office of Slovenia reports that in 2010/11 there were 891 kindergartens and 4,483 preschool units. The total enrolment was 75,972 children, of whom 23,748 up to 3 years of age and 52,224 children aged above 3 years. The total number of preschool educators and assistant educators was 9,640 (9,166 on a full-time basis), of whom 9,475 were women.

Primary and lower secondary education (basic education)

As mentioned, until the end of the 1990s compulsory primary education lasted eight years divided into two four-year cycles. The new nine-year primary (basic) education programme divided into three three-year cycles has been fully implemented in 2003/04.

The main objectives of basic education are to: promote a well-coordinated cognitive, emotional, spiritual and social development of students; foster literacy and the ability to understand, communicate and express oneself in the Slovene language and, in the areas defined as ethnically mixed, also in Italian and Hungarian; promote awareness of individual's integrity; foster the national identity as well as the knowledge of history and culture of Slovenia; teach about general cultural values and civilization stemming from the European tradition; educate for mutual tolerance and respect for being different, willingness to cooperate, respect for human rights and basic freedoms and, consequently, develop the ability to live in a democratic society; acquire the knowledge necessary to continue studies; provide general and applied knowledge enabling students to face their social and natural environment independently, efficiently and creatively and to develop the capacity of critical thinking; learn about other cultures and languages; foster students' talents and artistic appreciation and expression; and promote a healthy way of life and a responsible attitude towards the natural environment.

The implementation of the nine-year primary (basic) education programme began in the 1999/2000 school year and was completed in 2003/04. Children now

enter primary school at age 6 rather than at age 7, and compulsory basic education covers grades 1-9. The basic education programme is divided into three three-year cycles, adapted to students' development level. The first three-year cycle is for classroom teaching; in the first grade, the teacher works together with a kindergarten teacher. In the second cycle there is a mix of classroom and subject teaching, while the third cycle is for subject teaching.

Pupils attend school from Monday through Friday. Classes are held in the morning and generally start at 8:00. Classes in shifts, that is, classes held in the morning one week and in the afternoon the next week, are still organized. After classes, pupils may take lunch at school, and day care is organized for grades 1-4 pupils until 15:00 or 16:00. Several other activities, such as optional, remedial and additional classes and extracurricular activities, generally take place immediately after school and, only rarely, later in the afternoon or early in the morning before school. Field activities include cultural, science and sports days.

The table below shows the weekly lesson timetable of the former eight-year primary (basic) education programme (1998):

Primary education: weekly lesson timetable (1998)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade							
	First cycle				Second cycle			
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Slovenian language	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4
Foreign language	–	–	–	–	4	3	2	3
Drawing	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1
Music	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1
Social studies	–	–	–	3	2	–	–	–
Geography	–	–	–	–	–	2	2	1.5
History	–	–	–	–	–	2	2	2
Civic education	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
Science and social studies	3	3	3	–	–	–	–	–
Science	–	–	–	2	2	–	–	–
Biology	–	–	–	–	–	2	2	1.5
Chemistry	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	2
Physics	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	2
Mathematics	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4
Design and technology	–	–	–	–	1	2	1	2
Home economics	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	–
Physical education	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2
Remedial and additional classes	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Extracurricular activities	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3
Home-class periods	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Total weekly periods	23.5	23.5	24.5	26.5	29.5	31.5	31.5	32.5

Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

The current weekly lesson timetable of the nine-year basic education programme (compulsory core curriculum subjects) is presented below:

Slovenia. Basic education (compulsory core curriculum subjects): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade								
	First cycle			Second cycle			Third cycle		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Slovene language	6	7	7	5	5	5	4	3.5	4.5
Mathematics	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4
Foreign language	–	–	–	2	3	4	4	3	3
Visual arts	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
Music	2	2	2	1.5	1.5	1	1	1	1
Social sciences	–	–	–	2	3	–	–	–	–
Geography	–	–	–	–	–	1	2	1.5	2
History	–	–	–	–	–	1	2	2	2
Civics and ethics	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	–
Environmental education	3	3	3	–	–	–	–	–	–
Physics	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	2
Chemistry	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	2
Biology	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.5	2
Natural sciences	–	–	–	–	–	2	3	–	–
Natural sciences and techniques	–	–	–	3	3	–	–	–	–
Techniques and technology	–	–	–	–	–	2	1	1	–
Home economics	–	–	–	–	1	1.5	–	–	–
Physical education and sports	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2
Optional subjects	–	–	–	–	–	–	2/3	2/3	2/3
Total weekly periods (min.)	20	21	22	23.5	25.5	25.5	27/28	27.5/28.5	27.5/28.5
Class units discussion period	–	–	–	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5

Source: Eurydice, 2008/09. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes. During class units discussion periods students focus on different issues that concern their school life and work with their teachers.

The National Curriculum Document, approved by the National Council of Experts for General Education, sets forth the general content of compulsory subjects and the general objectives which all students should achieve. Within this framework, schools and teachers specify the actual content of subjects. They are free to choose the most appropriate teaching methods and have the freedom to select textbooks and exercise books of their choice (although textbooks must be selected from a list of approved materials adopted by the Council of Experts). Basic school activities include the compulsory curriculum and (optional) extracurricular activities. Starting from 2008/09, a second compulsory foreign language is gradually introduced in grades 7 to 9; it is expected that in 2011/12 all students shall be obliged to study two foreign languages. In addition to compulsory subjects, pupils of the last cycle (grades 7 to 9) must choose two to three lessons of optional subjects. Extra activities consist of before-school and after-school classes, supplementary lessons (for underachievers), additional lessons (for talented pupils), extracurricular activities, and out-of-school classes (such as homework and participation in cultural or artistic activities and sports) (Slovene Eurydice Unit, July 2010).

Students are assessed by their teachers on the basis of the learning objectives laid down in the curriculum and the assessment regulations. Learning outcomes are assessed continuously in written, oral and practical forms and by tests set by teachers. Teachers use descriptive marks in the first cycle (grades 1-3) and numerical marks



only in the second (grades 4-6) and the third cycle (grades 7-9). Marks are given on the basis of a 5-point scale, where '2' is sufficient and '5' is excellent ('1' means that a student failed). Students and their parents are regularly informed about the results throughout the school year. Beginning 2008/09, pupils in grades 3-6 who receive fail marks have to repeat the year if the Teachers Assembly takes such decision (even without the consent of their parents). In the third cycle, students who receive fail marks in three or more subjects have to repeat the year.

At the end of each school year students receive a report which shows the grades awarded in individual subjects. National assessments of learning achievement are organized at the end of the second and the third cycle. At the end of grade 6 (non-compulsory) written tests in mother tongue, mathematics, and a foreign language are administered. At the end of the ninth year, the (compulsory) external assessment focuses the mother tongue, mathematics and a third subject selected every year by the Ministry of Education upon consultation with the Council of Experts for General Education. The results of the assessment are intended to provide feedback information about students' achievements and should not serve as a selection criterion for admission to upper secondary school. Upon completion of basic education students receive a certificate showing the final grades in each subject. The final school-leaving certificate also shows the results of the external assessment expressed in points. Students who fulfilled their compulsory education obligation but failed to complete the basic school education programme receive a certificate (compulsory education obligation fulfilled) and can enrol into short-cycle vocational education programmes.

In 2000/01, the gross enrolment ratio at the basic education level was about 100%, and the pupil-teacher ratio was 13:1. The share of basic school graduates continuing their education at the upper secondary level was 98% in 2003/04. (Ministry of Education, 2004). More than 98% of the graduates from compulsory basic education enter upper secondary education: more than 40% of students continue their schooling in gymnasias, just over 35% in technical schools and just under 25% undertake shorter vocational courses. (Eurydice, 2008/09).

The Statistical Office of Slovenia reports that in 2009/10 there were 786 basic education schools (central schools and subsidiary units) with a total enrolment of 160,252 students (of whom 48.5% were girls), including 468 students enrolled in private basic schools. The total number of teachers (full-time equivalent) was 12,995 and the pupil-teacher ratio was 12.3:1. (Statistical Office, 2011).

Secondary education

As mentioned, upper secondary education is offered in gymnasias (general, classic and professional), and the duration of programmes is four years, preparing students for further studies. Technical and professional schools offer four-year programmes mainly focusing on professional subjects and practical training. There are also vocational schools offering three-year programmes and lower vocational schools offering shorter courses for students who have completed basic education (one and a half to two years' duration). Graduates from three-year vocational schools can continue their studies in a programme lasting an additional two years leading to a qualification equal to those students who graduate from technical and professional upper secondary schools. The main objectives of upper secondary education are to:



provide general education and vocational qualifications; enable the highest possible number of learners to achieve the highest possible level of education; and facilitate the development of the highest possible level of creativity and innovation of the learners.

The four-year gymnasium is the main (upper) secondary education programme preparing students for further studies. The gymnasium also offers classical programmes, the International Baccalaureate programme, and the programmes of private Catholic establishments. The general objectives of the gymnasium programme are to: develop knowledge, capacities and skills for further studies; achieve internationally comparable levels of knowledge; ensure a global, holistic approach to education based on the complexity of the world and interdependence of knowledge in various fields; encourage the interest in theoretical knowledge and develop the capacity for independent critical thinking and judgment; develop communication skills; develop the capacity for forming one's own world view; develop awareness of belonging to a common culture; and develop committed responsibility to oneself, the others, and the natural and social environment.

The gymnasium syllabus adopted by the Council of Experts was modified for schools with Italian as the language of instruction, those in nationally-mixed regions with Slovene as the language of instruction, and for bilingual schools in Prekmurje (Hungarian minority). The syllabus consists of three basic parts: (i) compulsory subjects, for which the number, contents and scope are defined on national level; (ii) a certain number of undetermined periods (14% of the entire programme), allocated independently by each school and intended to deepen the knowledge in fields more familiar to students, and prepare them for the *matura* examination; and (iii) some compulsory electives (6.6% of the entire programme) covering various fields of knowledge not (or only partially) included in school subjects but meeting students individual interests.

The table below shows the weekly lesson timetable of the general education gymnasium in 1998:


General secondary education (gymnasium): weekly lesson timetable (1998)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each form			
	I	II	III	IV
Compulsory subjects:				
Slovenian language and literature	4	4	4	4
Mathematics	4	4	4	4
First foreign language	3	3	3	3
Second foreign language	3	3	3	3
History	2	2	2	2
Physical education	3	3	3	3
Art education	2	–	–	–
Geography	2	2	2	–
Biology	2	2	2	–
Chemistry	2	2	2	–
Physics	2	2	2	–
Psychology	–	2	–	–
Sociology	–	–	2	–
Philosophy	–	–	–	2
Computer science	2	–	–	–
<u>Undetermined periods</u>	1	3	3	11
<u>Compulsory electives</u>	3	3	3	1
Total weekly periods	35	35	35	33

Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

The current weekly lesson timetable for the four-year gymnasium is presented below:

Slovenia. General upper secondary education (four-year gymnasium): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade			
	10	11	12	13
Slovenian	4	4	4	4
Mathematics	4	4	4	4
First foreign language	3	3	3	3
Second foreign language	3	3	3	3
History	2	2	2	2
Physical education	3	3	3	3
Music	1.5	–	–	–
Arts	1.5	–	–	–
Geography	2	2	2	–
Biology	2	2	2	–
Chemistry	2	2	2	–
Physics	2	2	2	–
Psychology	–	–	2	–
Sociology	–	2	–	–
Philosophy	–	–	–	2
Information science	2	–	–	–
Core optional subjects	–	1–3	1–5	8–12
(Compulsory elective contents)	(90)	(90)	(90)	(30)
Total weekly periods	32	32	32	29–33

Source: Eurydice, CEDEFOP & ETF, 2009/10. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes. Concerning music and the arts in grades 11–13, some additional lessons are included in compulsory elective contents. Psychology and sociology can be introduced in grades 11 or 12, while philosophy can be introduced in grades 12 or 13.

The curriculum of general education gymnasias promotes creativity and ensures the provision of the knowledge and skills which are the common basis for all university studies. Elective subjects are those aimed at students' special preferences and/or in preparation for the *matura* examination. Elective subjects may include a third foreign language, history of arts or any other subject according to the national core curriculum. Compulsory elective contents aim to equip students with knowledge and skills, according to their own interests and wishes and can be completed either at school or externally. Between 81 % and 93 % (as in an arts specialisation) of the programme courses is compulsory, while the remaining part is chosen by the student. Students can also participate in additional extra-curricular activities (for example, choir, artistic workshops, literature group meetings, etc.). Schools also organise extra foreign language courses and courses for gifted students preparing them for various competitions. Schools may adapt the number of hours to be devoted to core curriculum options according to their specific profile and the preparation of students for the *matura* exam. (Eurydice, CEDEFOP & ETF, 2009/10).

The professional gymnasium offers general education with a certain vocational orientation such as engineering, business, or art. In addition to general courses, students are offered a choice of profession-specific electives to be taken at the *matura*



exam. The engineering gymnasium develops technical thinking, stimulates understanding of complex interrelationships between the development of sciences, engineering, and society, and qualifies its graduates for engineering studies at universities. The business-oriented gymnasium has been designed to meet the interests of students seeking to gain some knowledge in economics. Students obtain liberal education along with the fundamentals of economics and business and develop analytical thinking, organizational and management skills, capacity for teamwork, and entrepreneurial and managerial skills. The art gymnasium offers programmes in the fields of music, dance, fine arts, drama, and theatre.

At the end of each school year students receive a certificate showing the grades achieved in individual subjects as well as the overall grade (using the same 5-point grading scale as in the case of basic education, i.e. satisfactory, good, very good or excellent, satisfactory being '2'). The overall grade is decided by the Teachers Assembly. Gymnasium studies end with the *matura*, an externally assessed exam in five subjects; three are compulsory (mother tongue, mathematics and a foreign language), while the other two are chosen from the approved list of *matura* subjects. Students' performance in the *matura* is measured in points and converted into grades according to the 5-point grading scale. Students in technical, professional and vocational schools sit the vocational *matura*, a partly externally assessed exam in four subjects, of which two are compulsory (mother tongue and one technical-theoretical subject) and the other two are chosen by the student.

Technical and professional schools offer four-year programmes mainly concentrating on professional subjects and practical training. There are also vocational schools offering three-year programmes and lower vocational schools offering shorter courses for students who have completed basic education, usually lasting two years. Three-year vocational education programmes are intended to provide qualifications for work in the industrial, crafts and service sectors. These programmes can be offered by vocational schools or in cooperation with employers as a dual system of apprenticeship and school education.

Technical and vocational education programmes are prepared by education experts, schools in cooperation with social partners, the Institute for Vocational Education and Training, councils of experts, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour. Vocational standards, which serve as the basis for courses, are adopted by the Minister for Labour based upon the proposals of the Council of Experts for Vocational and Technical Education. Programme courses may lead to a single or several vocational qualifications. If they are based on a higher number of vocational standards they are divided into several modules. The course structure includes general subjects, technical-theoretical subjects, practical training and extracurricular activities. Practical training includes practical lessons at school, in school workshops or in specialized school classrooms or laboratories, or within school estates or workplaces, while in some courses practical training also includes work experience. The compulsory part of the technical education curricula includes approximately 50 % of theoretical subjects. Objectives and general contents in the initial years are the same for all curricula. In the later years of study, there is a range of available elective subjects and specifically-oriented contents which allow vocational orientation and specialization in a particular field. In the final year the course is completed with practical training. (Eurydice, CEDEFOP & ETF, 2009/10).

Graduates from three-year vocational schools can continue their studies in a programme lasting an additional two years leading to a qualification equal to those students who graduate from technical and professional upper secondary schools. At the end of their studies, students in technical and professional schools as well as vocational schools sit the vocational matura exam. Vocational courses are also available in order to provide a bridge between general and vocational education. They are based on the principle that applicants who have completed a secondary school programme (general, classical, or technical gymnasium) can achieve a high level of vocational or professional qualification by enrolling in a shorter, suitably planned vocational education and training course. The basic aim of vocational courses is to make it possible for graduates from general, classical, and technical gymnasium to obtain initial vocational qualifications.

In 2000/01, the gross enrolment ratio for general secondary education was 106%, and the student-teacher ratio was 13:1.

The Statistical Office of Slovenia reports that in 2009/10 there were 129 upper secondary schools (not including schools for adults). The total enrolment at the upper secondary level was 85,030 students (of whom 48.6% were girls), of whom 32,812 students in general upper secondary, 36,561 in technical upper secondary, 13,416 in short-term vocational and vocational upper secondary education, and 2,241 students enrolled in general upper secondary education in the private sector. The total number of teachers (full-time equivalent) was 6,423 and the student-teacher ratio was 13.2:1. (Statistical Office, 2011).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

In 1999, the Ministry of Education approved some projects aiming at assessing and self-evaluating the quality of the teaching-learning process. The Ministry appointed a special commission in charge of drafting the national concept of school self-evaluation, designing the relevant criteria and mechanisms for the measurement of quality, and in particular setting up the tools necessary for ensuring quality assessment. The assessment and quality assurance project, based on the concept of self-evaluation, was introduced in preschool education institutions in 2002/03, and in primary (basic) and secondary schools in 2003/04. This is in line with one of the most important goals of the curriculum reform, i.e. the development of autonomy and professional responsibility of schools and educators.

Since 2005, the national assessment of student learning achievements is carried out in basic education schools; it is voluntary for grade 6 pupils and compulsory for grade 9 students (in 2006 it was taken by 98% of all students). The tests are designed to facilitate analysis of achievement in terms of curriculum goals and expected outcomes. (MOES, 2008).

Slovenia participates in international assessment studies such as PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study). Concerning TIMSS 2003, the results showed that the highest knowledge level of mathematics for Slovene primary school pupils was four times lower than the international standard, seven times lower than the corresponding level

in Great Britain, and five times lower than in the Russian Federation, Belgium, Lithuania, Latvia and Hungary. (See: *Operational Programme for Human Resources Development for the Period 2007-2013*, October 2007).

Teaching staff

Teachers in public preschool institutions and schools must be properly qualified and must have completed a higher education programme. Teacher qualifications are regulated by the Organization and Financing of Education Act of 1996 and subsequent amendments, according to which preschool teachers and school teachers as well as preschool and school support staff must graduate from a higher education study programme of an appropriate profile (first degree), be proficient in the Slovenian language, and pass the State Teacher Certification Examination. After graduation and before sitting the certification examination and entering professional life, prospective teachers receive practical training in a preschool institution or school. The teaching practice period includes support and supervision from a mentor, some form of compulsory training and formal evaluation of teaching skills.

In the mid-1980s, a debate on the upgrading of teacher education programmes was launched and since 1986/87 teachers for all schools (primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels) have been trained in four-year university programmes. At the same time, the first cohort of preschool teachers enrolled in two-year tertiary programmes while in 1996 the first cohort enrolled in the new three-year, professionally-oriented higher education programmes. At the beginning of the 1990s, academies were transformed into faculties of education, while in 2003 a third one was established within the new University of Primorska in Koper. (Zgaga, 2006).

Teaching qualifications can be obtained through teacher education study programmes (concurrent or integrated model, mainly for preschool and classroom teachers in the lower grades of basic education) and non-teaching study programmes (consecutive model), which provide appropriate knowledge in the subject of teaching but does not provide professional training. Subject teachers in basic schools and teachers of general subjects in upper secondary schools usually follow the consecutive model. Prior to the implementation of the Bologna process, teacher education programmes usually took four years to complete. After the full implementation of the Bologna reform, programmes will last five years (3+2 or 4+1), that is a bachelor's plus a master's degree. (Eurydice, 2008/09).

Vocational college lecturers (tertiary level) must have at least a higher education diploma in the appropriate field of study, a non-degree (*credential*) teacher training programme, three years of relevant work experience, and outstanding achievements in their field of education. School counsellors must complete a four-year university programme in psychology, pedagogy, social pedagogy, special education or social work. In certain cases, they must also complete a non-degree (*credential*) teacher training programme. In 2002/03 a total of 37,940 people were employed as professional staff in education institutions in Slovenia. Over two-thirds of them were women (68.7%); only institutions that provide continuing education as well as higher educational institutions employ more men than women. The training of higher education faculty members is self-regulated by higher education institutions.



The law only stipulates the general conditions for awarding titles to teaching and research staff. (Ministry of Education, 2003; Zgaga, 2006).

Preschool and school teachers, as well as support professional staff (counsellors, librarians, etc.) can be promoted if certain requirements are fulfilled, i.e. a certain period of employment, teaching performance, additional qualifications acquired through in-service training programmes and various extra-professional activities (for example being a mentor to prospective teachers during their teaching practice). With such a promotion, the candidate is awarded the title of mentor, adviser or consultant. The promotion significantly and positively affects the teacher's salary.

Teacher education programmes (in various subjects or areas) leading to a university degree usually include the study of the subject discipline, educational sciences and pedagogical training. In the four-year teacher education programmes educational sciences and pedagogical training last a minimum of one semester. The duration of practice in schools ranges from a minimum of two weeks (single-subject programmes) to four weeks (double-subject programmes). According to the Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Teacher Education Programmes (1998), higher education institutions can adapt the content and extent of educational sciences and pedagogical training to those students who already possess pedagogical experience (in principle part-time students, acting teachers).

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Web resources

Educational Research Institute: <http://www.pei.si/> [In Slovenian; some information in English. Last checked: November 2011.]

Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia for Education and Sport: <http://www.iss.gov.si/> [In Slovenian and English. Last checked: November 2011.]

Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training: <http://www.cpi.si/> [In Slovenian and English. Last checked: November 2011.]

Ministry of Education and Sport: <http://www.mss.gov.si/> [In Slovenian and English. Last checked: November 2011.]



Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology: <http://www.mvzt.gov.si/> [In Slovenian and English. Last checked: November 2011.]

National Education Institute: <http://www.zrssi.si/> [In Slovenian; some information in English, Italian and Hungarian. Last checked: November 2011.]

National Examinations Centre: <http://www.ric.si/> [In Slovenian and English. Last checked: November 2011.]

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education: <http://www.nakvis.si/> [In Slovenian and English. Last checked: November 2011.]

Slovenian Institute for Adult Education: <http://www.siae.si/> [In Slovenian and English. Last checked: November 2011.]

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

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