

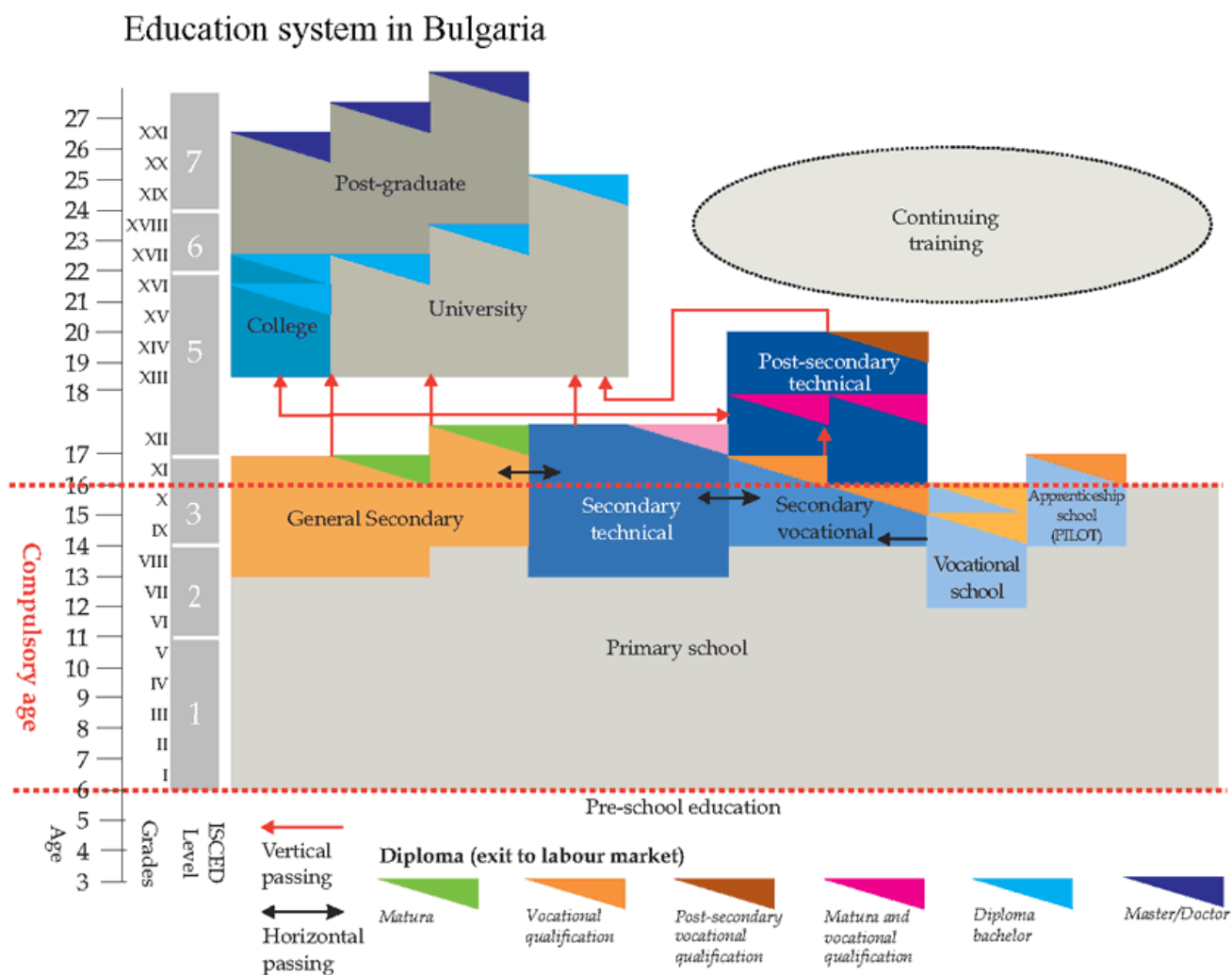


**AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN BULGARIA**  
**Centre for European Programmes**

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**HIGHER EDUCATION IN BULGARIA, LIFE  
LONG LEARNING AND VOCATIONAL  
EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN AN EUROPEAN  
PERSPECTIVE**

## STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN BULGARIA



### LEGAL FRAMEWORK – HIGHER EDUCATION

Since 1989, Bulgarian higher education has undergone several phases of reform. Two laws affecting higher education have been adopted: The Higher Education Act (1995) and the Amendment to the Higher Education Act (1999). These two sets of legislation legalized previous reform efforts initiated by higher education institutions since 1989. In particular, a new system of academic degrees was introduced, and an agency for quality assessment and accreditation of postsecondary school activities was created. Efforts were undertaken to impose major restrictions on educational institution finances and to develop and adopt new curricula, especially in the social sciences. The 1999 amendment abolished free education and introduced tuition fees at all

public universities, increased competition in admissions and started the process of bringing standards in line with Bologna Declaration. The European-related (Bologna) context of Bulgaria's legislative reform will be discussed below.

### **1. Easily Readable and Comparable Degrees**

- Bulgaria has signed and ratified the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications.
- The procedures for the recognition of foreign credentials is carried out and organized by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, and decisions on recognition are made by a commission established by the ministry. The National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility (ENIC/NARIC) supports the activities of the commission on the recognition of higher-education study periods and qualifications.
- Activities related to the implementation of the **diploma supplement** are oriented towards the development of an adequate legal basis for its official use, as well as towards wide promotion of the document itself. There have been a number of educational campaigns on the use and introduction of the supplement, which were organized by the ENIC/NARIC office and targeted towards students and representatives from institutions of higher education and the ministry of education. Proposals for the implementation of the supplement and the recognition of foreign-issued supplements are currently being drawn up, along with the necessary legal framework.
- A majority of Bulgarian institutions have expressed their willingness to introduce the diploma supplement.
- The national Academic Assessment Commission recognizes doctoral degrees awarded by foreign institutions. The Bulgarian ENIC/NARIC is responsible for the certification of all national qualifications destined for external evaluation by foreign institutions.

### **2. Degree Structure**

- The 1995 Higher Education Act brought considerable changes to the structure of higher education in Bulgaria by introducing a two-tiered system. After the completion of 12 years of elementary and secondary education, students are eligible to enter the higher education system, which is organized as follows:

#### **Non-University Higher Education**

Colleges, which are generally incorporated into the structure of universities, offer relatively short, vocationally oriented programs (usually 3 years in length) leading to the award of *Spetsialist* (specialist). Holders of this qualification are eligible for bachelor-level studies or for entry into the labor market.

#### **University Higher Education**

**Stage I:** Four-to-five years of study is required at this level leading to the *Bakalavar* (bachelor's degree).

**Stage II:** The second level of higher education requires one-to-two years of additional study after the bachelor's degree, and leads to a **Magistar** (master's degree). The new *magistar* is currently offered in parallel with the traditional, integrated master's-level degree known as the **Diploma za Visshe Obrazovanie** (diploma of higher education). Both qualifications possess the same academic value.

**Stage III:** The third level requires a minimum of three years of study after the master's or four years of study after the bachelor's, and leads to the **Doktor** (doctoral degree).

- In developing the bachelor- and master-level qualifications, the ministry of education tailored the courses of study to increase both the adaptability and mobility of the system so as to be in compliance with the changing conditions of the market and the student. The curricula at the bachelor level provide for basic comprehensive training, thus facilitating direct access to the

labor market. Master-level programs are oriented towards profile-oriented studies in a given interdisciplinary specialty.

- Only universities and specialized higher education schools offer a master's degree of one year, building on a bachelor program of four to five years. There are still some long, integrated master's programs of five-to-six years in subject areas such as architecture, law, pharmacy and medicine.

### **3. Credit Transfer**

- The Law on Higher Education foresees the implementation of the modular structure of the curricula and of credits for the evaluation of study periods, although it does not explicitly require the implementation of ECTS (European Credit Transfer System).
- In Bulgaria, ECTS mainly facilitates academic harmonization and student mobility and functions less as a tool for assessment.
- The 2003 draft of the Higher Education Act foresees the adoption of ECTS by all higher education institutions.
- According to a 2002 report by the European University Association, ECTS has been implemented within the ERASMUS framework in 14 of 42 Bulgarian universities. The American University in Bulgaria and New Bulgarian University use a different credit system, although the both are also implementing ECTS.
- The credit system is student workload-based. It is not used as an accumulation system. Sixty credits per semester constitute a full-time workload; the system is fully compatible with ECTS for credit transfer.
- Although the ECTS grading scale is not used in Bulgaria, some institutions provide equivalencies with the Bulgarian scale for mobility purposes. The Bulgarian equivalency differs slightly from institution to institution. The table below displays grade equivalencies suggested by Plovdiv University.

| ECTS Grade | Bulgarian Grade | Percentage of Successful Students Normally Obtaining the Grade | Definition                                      |
|------------|-----------------|--|---|
| A          | 6               | 10 - Excellent   | outstanding performance, with only minor errors |
| B          | 5               | 20 - Very Good   | above the average standard, with some errors    |
| C          | 4.50            | 30 - Good  | generally sound work, with a                    |

|    |   |                   |  |
|----|---|-------------------|--|
|    |   |                   | number of notable errors                             |
| D  | 4 | 30 - Satisfactory | fair, with significant shortcomings                  |
| E  | 3 | 10 - Sufficient   | performance meets the minimal criteria               |
| FX | 2 | Fail              | extra work required before the credit can be awarded |
| F  | 2 | Fail              | considerable further work is required                |

#### **4. Mobility**

- Bulgaria has been a participant in many of the different European mobility programs. Bulgaria first participated in the PHARE and TEMPUS programs, which promote institutional development and education quality. It also has been a recent participant in such programs as SOCRATES-ERASMUS, CEEPUS and the Leonardo Da Vinci program.
- The number of Bulgarian institutions of higher education participating in the SOCRATES-ERASMUS programs has risen from 10 in 1999-2000 to 29 in 2002-03.
- With its integration into many of the European education programs, Bulgaria recognizes the need to adapt its system of education to the changing European environment and to work towards eradicating barriers to mobility.
- In Bulgaria, very few courses are taught in a foreign language. Subsequently, there is an imbalance of outgoing/incoming students to/from Bulgaria in exchange programs because of a perceived language barrier. In 2001-02, the total number of outgoing students through the ERASMUS program was 605 while the number of incoming students was 51.
- Other impediments to greater mobility highlighted by the ministry are: insufficient financial resources and lack of adequate equipment; insufficient motivation to participate in educational and scientific development; and a lack of well-established mechanisms for the coordination of transnational activities at the regional and European levels.
- Bulgaria has stated its readiness – from the date of the country’s accession to the European Union (EU) in May of 2004 – to adopt the terms and conditions of the Bologna agreement to admit students from EU member states to institutions of higher education in Bulgaria.

#### **5. Quality Assurance**

- Institutional evaluation and accreditation was required by the Law on Higher Education (1995), but was first introduced in practice by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency in 1998. This was made possible mainly by the PHARE Program funding a one-year National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Project. For that project, several pilot institutional accreditation tasks were carried out, and national guidelines for developing quality assurance and quality management systems were developed. In July 1999, amendments to the Law on Higher Education were adopted, which require institutional accreditation to precede the accreditation of programs. The law defines 13 aspects of evaluation, which should be reflected in the evaluation reports but does not distinguish between program and institutional accreditation.
- The National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency is the governmental authority for quality assessment and accreditation of higher school activities. The agency develops and updates criteria and standards for accreditation; develops and approves the procedures and documentation for the accreditation process; evaluates projects for the establishment or transformation of higher schools; and assesses the conditions and activities of higher schools and their faculties on the basis of which accreditation shall either be given or refused.
- Institutional accreditation is valid for five years if a top rating is awarded and for a maximum three years if an “average” rating is awarded.
- Among the difficulties expressed by the ministry are: insufficient harmonization between the amendments to the system and administration of the system, slow adaptation of the staff and faculty toward new requirements of quality assessment and insufficient development of the system of information exchange.
- While setting specific qualitative criteria for the key structural units of universities, the law assigns institutional accreditation merely as a procedure for state licensing of higher education institutions, rather than being an instrument for encouraging the development of institutional systems for quality management. This is motivated by the dominant belief among academics and politicians that the current state of Bulgarian higher education results from the system’s structural inefficiency. It is therefore assumed that a refined structure would create better conditions for improving the quality of education and academic research.
- Over the last year, one of the main tasks of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education has been to establish reliable systems of internal assessment. Toward this end, the Center for the Competitive System for Training and Management of Higher Education was established. Focus is also being placed on the necessity for transparent qualifications, study courses and curriculums.

#### 6. Promotion of European Dimensions in Higher Education

- Bulgaria has no specific legislation concerning the development and award of joint degrees, meaning that bilateral partnerships, rather than multilateral joint degrees, result in the award of two separate degree certificates (“double degree”), in most cases.
- The Bulgarian/Romanian Interuniversity Europe Center (BRIE) in Rousse, Bulgaria, and Giurgiu, Romania, has been founded with Germany’s support. BRIE offers master’s programs in European studies and business informatics leading to a double degree awarded jointly by the University of Rousse and three German universities: the Center for European Integration Studies at the University of Bonn; Chemnitz University of Technology; European University Viadrina Frankfurt.

### **1.RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING (IVET AND CVT) IN A LIFELONG LEARNING PERSPECTIVE**

The National Statistical Institute published the results of the survey entitled Lifelong Learning in 2004. The study is based on a questionnaire as an additional method for observing the work force

in the second quarter of 2003. The study is based on a recommendation from Eurostat and is in compliance with Regulation ? 1313/2002 of the European Commission.

The conclusions from the study are as follows:

- in the second quarter of 2003, the population aged 15 and over amounts to 6.678mn. Out of these some 1.067mn (16%) are with a higher degree of education, 2.8438mn (42.6%) with a secondary degree of education and about 2.7672mn (41.4%) with primary or lower degree;
- the total number of people aged 15 and over who participate in at least one form of education is 1.3295mn, or 19.9% of the population in the group;
- the distribution of people in the various forms of education is as follows: formal education – 619,600 or 9.3% of the population in the group; non-formal education – 115,800 or 1.7%; independent education – 1.096mn or 16.4%;
- in the system of formal education the most people are educated in the field of social studies, business administration and law, technical studies, manufacturing and construction - 22.3% of those enrolled in a higher education programme and 65% of those enrolled in a secondary vocational institution;
- Non-formal education is primarily carried out in fields such as natural sciences, mathematics and information science – 19.6%, social sciences, business management and law – 18.4%, foreign languages – 14.6%, services – 11%, technical studies, manufacturing and construction 9.2%;
- independent education is the most popular form for improving the knowledge and skills – 1.096mn or 16.4% of the studies group and is implemented through reading magazines, books, information on the internet and others.

### **1.1. Policy development**

The policy on vocational education and training, including that for adults, is developed in accordance with the social and economic conditions and is in compliance with the European requirements.

The National Strategy for Continuing Vocational Training (2005-2010) was elaborated in 2004. The expert group elaborated the strategy included representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the National Educational Institute. The subject of the strategy is the process for training of people over 16 years of age for acquiring, expanding and improving their vocational qualification with a view to increasing their employability, supporting their career and individual development. The major priorities set by the strategy include:

1. improving the access to continuing vocational training;
2. achieving effective cooperation among institutions involved in continuing vocational training;
3. ensuring a high quality of continuing vocational training;
4. increasing investments in continuing vocational training;
5. scientific support for continuing vocational training.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy elaborated a Concept for Lifelong Learning with a view to improving employability. The concept was put up to discussion and recommendations at the national conference treating the issues related to labour force qualifications in July 2003. In the beginning of 2004, the concept was discussed by the National Council on Employment

Encouraging to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and will be further developed into a National Strategy for Developing Vocational Qualifications for Adults.

Several upcoming Phare 2003 projects envisage the development of a system for vocational training for adults – determining the needs, improving the skills of the trainers, improving the methodologies used in the training for adults.

The National Centre for Professional Development was established in July 2004. Its establishment fulfils the commitments of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in its function as the managing body of the Operational Programme for Human Resources Development (2007-2013). The National Centre for Professional Development will carry out training for elaborating and managing projects, which will be financed by the European Social Fund. It will study the needs for training and will elaborate the corresponding programmes and information materials. The centre will organise and carry out training courses for administrative staff related to the implementation of social policy, training for acquiring vocational qualification for both employed and unemployed people through certified vocational training activities.

Based on the National Strategy for Decreasing Poverty and Social Exclusion, adopted in 2003, the National Plan for Decreasing Poverty and Social Exclusion has been adopted in 2004. The strategic objectives of the plan have been determined to be encouraging employment, increasing incomes and avoiding the risk from social exclusion. In order to achieve these objectives it is necessary that a stronger relationship among vocational education, practical training and subsequent employment is established; the qualifications of the unemployed are improved in fields with stronger demand and in alternative professions; the opportunities of the Continuing Vocational Training are activated and utilized. In order to fulfill those objectives, the National Plan for Decreasing Poverty and Social Exclusion envisages the establishment of a National Council for coordinating and monitoring the policies and programmes for reducing poverty and social exclusion; preparing Plans for Decreasing Poverty and Social Exclusion on regional and municipal levels.

## **1.2. Adaptation of the legal framework**

The latest legislative amendments in the Vocational Education and Training Act, the Public Education Act and the Law on Level of Schooling refer to state exams and the exams for acquiring vocational qualifications. According to these amendments, the first compulsory state exams (which include two compulsory exams – Bulgarian language and literature and a subject of the student's choice, as well as an additional subject also chosen by the student) will be carried out in 2006 for the classes, which are taught according to the new curriculum. After the students sit successfully for the exams, they receive a secondary level diploma, which entitles them to the right to apply for higher educational institutions/Universities. In case of a failure at the exams (or failure to attend), students receive a certificate for a completed course of secondary education, which does not grant them rights to apply to a higher education institution but with which they can apply for positions, which require a secondary educational degree. The student still has the right to sit for the exams and receive a secondary education diploma in future years. In order to receive a certificate for a particular degree of vocational qualification, the student who has passed the respective course of education in a vocation school has to sit for state exams on the theory and practice of the profession. The exams can be scheduled either right after the completion of the course of study or at a later period. The right to sit for the exam in future years does not expire.



The two documents – secondary education diploma and certificate for vocational qualification are issued separately and independently.

The project for development in the field of higher education until 2010 is being prepared. An Ordinance for State Educational Requirements for the Introduction of Distance Learning is also to be approved, as well as an Ordinance for Implementing the European System of Credit Transfer. The Ordinance for State Educational Requirements concerning the basic documents issued by higher education institutions, including the European Diploma Supplement has already been adopted.

With amendments to the Employment Promotion Act in 2003 the existing actions, programmes and measures for encouraging employment and vocational training for adults have been improved and new ones have been introduced. The application of fiscal stimuli for employers who ensure employment, maintain and improve the qualification of their workers was also improved. The license for carrying out training in a particular profession issued to vocational training centres is a requirement for commissioning short and long term training courses for employed and unemployed which is financed by the state budget through the structures of the Employment Agency. In the training of unemployed a placement for a period of no less than one month has been introduced.

### **1.3. Governance and responsible bodies**

Along with the currently functioning bodies for tripartite cooperation on a national level, such as the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation, the National Council for Employment Promotion, the **National Consultative Council on Vocational Qualification of the Labour Force** under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was established in 2003 in compliance with the requirements of the Employment Promotion Act. The purpose of the Council is to coordinate the national policies and strategies for acquiring vocational qualification for both employed and unemployed people.

On a regional level, the Councils for Tripartite Cooperation and the permanent and temporary employment commissions under the district councils for regional development continue to function with the objective of addressing issues related the actions and measures for employment and for vocational training on a regional level.

### **1.4. Modernisation of the education and training system. Structure and organisation**

The optimisation of the VET schools system has recently improved according to current statistical data – for six years the number of schools has decreased from 553 in 1998/99 to 496 in 2003/04 school year.

- Programmes and pathways (horizontal and vertical permeability)

In relation to the modernization of the Vocational Education and Training system, the structure of vocational education, offered in the formal system has changed. The students in enrolled in vocational schools are given the opportunity after the successful completion of their XII grade to acquire a secondary degree and a second level of vocational qualification. Those who wish to acquire a third level of vocational qualification can advance to the next (XIII) grade.

- Adaptation of curricula and teaching and learning methodologies

Since the beginning of the 2004/2005 school year new curricula and study programmes are being introduced according to the List of professions for vocational education and training approved in 2003. Based on the new List, which includes 187 professions, 270 curricula for 172 have been elaborated. The curricula comprise three parts: general vocational (common to all professional directions), branch (common to all professions within the branch) and specific, which is being taught in the XII and XIII grade.

The curricula are elaborated in a way, which provides opportunities for acquiring first, second and third level of vocational qualification, which makes the system more flexible and accessible, corresponding to the student's capabilities and desires.

The curricula for all professions include subjects, which provide knowledge in economics, entrepreneurship and business communication. The number of school hours for subjects, which provide skills for using contemporary software applications relevant to the respective profession has been increased. The number of school hours for mathematics and first foreign language has been increased by 144. About 600 new study programmes have been elaborated based on these curricula. The teams which have developed the curricula comprised representatives of vocational schools, social partners and higher education institutions.

- Development of educational and occupational standards

In the Jan-Mar 2004 period, 24 State Educational Requirements have been published in the State Journal. According to the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training 48 new ones have been in the process of elaboration by the beginning of September 2004.

- Assessment and certification

In the 2003/2004 school year, state examinations for acquiring a second level of vocational qualification were carried out for the first time on national exam programmes. The theoretical exam is carried on a date common to all professional schools in the country and each vocational school determines its own date for carrying out the practical exam. According to data of the Ministry of Education and Science, in the beginning of next year, the national programmes for state exams for acquiring a third level of vocational qualification will be ready to implement.

For the first time the examination committees will include representatives of employers and trade unions in the respective sector.

- Quality assurance and accreditation

The accreditation of institutions in the system of vocational education and training – vocational schools, vocational high schools and centres for vocational training – is carried out by the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, using special accreditation criteria and indicators, such as the institution's legitimacy, management, sustainability of the quality of education, resources (human, financial and physical), domestic and international relations and events. The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training utilizes similar criteria in the accreditation of the centres for Vocational Education and Training. The accreditation of higher education institutions is carried out by the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation.

- Developments in formal and non-formal education and training

The development in the field of formal education is represented by the multifaceted effect of the module principle of training following the end of the PHARE BG9506 program, vocational

education and training. There are 33 projects from 18 towns included in the module training method for 18 vocations. During the 2003/2004 the method was adopted in 64 schools (288 classes, 7000 students). The number of teachers trained in 2004 is 594 (in 1999 - 217).

New possibilities for development of non-formal education have been available since 2004 with the initiation of projects and national programmes, which include a training component.

In 2004, a pilot phase of the project on “Vocational training and social realization of young individuals who have dropped out of the educational system” began. The project covers the whole territory of Bulgaria and is realized by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, The Ministry of Education and Science, the Regional Inspectorates of MES, the Employment Agency, including its regional structures, the Bulgarian-German centers for vocational training in Pleven and Stara Zagora, vocational schools and gymnasia.

The project “Apprenticeship based on the dual system (pilot project - 2004)” is a typical example of ensuring training for young individuals/older than 16/ with primary education. The project includes development of training programs for 4 professions, training of masters, apprenticeship and employment of the unemployed young individuals.

- Links between initial and continuing training, formal and non-formal training (including accreditation of prior learning)

The connection between secondary and continuing, formal and non-formal vocational education is stipulated in the VET Act, the state educational requirements and the list of regulated professions. The links between secondary and continuing, formal and non-formal vocational education and training are secured by:

- General criteria for vocational qualification acquisition as stated in the state educational requirements, irrespective of the institution where the training takes place;
- Implementation of a unified list of VET professions and specialized courses, connected with the professions and job descriptions in the National Classification of Professions in the Republic of Bulgaria, 1996.
- Legal frame regarding the vocational training as stated in the VET Act and the Employment Promotion Act
- General standards for quality of training that are required for the issuing of a vocational qualification certificate;
- Dividing education into two parts- theoretical and practical.

At the end of 2003, six VET frame programmes were approved; they could be applied with both initial and continuing VET. The programmes include the training frame and stipulate the conditions for the acquisition of a primary, secondary, third and fourth level of qualification, for the acquisition of certain vocational qualification skills and the improvement of the acquired qualification.

### **1.5. Delivery**

- Network of formal and non-formal education and training providers

Schools, which provide vocational education and training, can be divided into the following categories:

**Art schools offer** a five-year course, leading to the acquisition of a third level of vocational qualification and a secondary education diploma. The interest in art schools is constant; students

in these schools comprise 1.8% of the total number of students in the IVET system from the 1999/2000 school year up to the present.

**Vocational gymnasias offer five or six-year programs** for vocational training which leads to the acquisition of third vocational qualification level and a secondary education diploma. Vocational gymnasias have been attracting a greater number of students during the past few years– 66.8% in 1999/2000, 75% in 2003/2004 out of the total number of students in the IVET system.

**Vocational gymnasias or four-year vocational schools offer** four-year programs, leading to the acquisition of a secondary vocational qualification level and a secondary education diploma. Interest in these types of schools is decreasing- from 26.3% in 1999/2000 to 20.7% in 2003/2004 out of the total number of students in vocational schools.

**Vocational schools that offer one, two or three-year vocational programs,** leading to the acquisition of a first vocational qualification level and basic education diploma. The number of students in vocational schools with admission after 6-th or 7-th grade and three or two-year programs is decreasing from 1.2% in 1999/2000 to 0.9% in 2003/2004 out of the total number of students in the system.

**Vocational schools with admission after the 8-th grade,** offering one-year training programmes, leading to the acquisition of basic education diploma and a first vocational qualification level, play an insignificant role - only 0.2% in 1999/2000 and 0.4% in 2003/2004.

**Vocational colleges** offer training only for acquisition of fourth vocational qualification level and two-year programmes. The percentage of students in these schools is decreasing- from 3.5% in 1999/2000 to 1.3% in 2003/2004.

Vocational schools and gymnasias can offer vocational education and training as well as continuing vocational training. The process of decentralization of the formal system is most advanced with the organization and realization of continuing vocational training at vocational schools and gymnasias. These schools can develop their own vocational training curricula and school syllabus for individuals older than 16 in accordance with the legislation requirements.

A positive aspect of the formal VET system is the possibility of choosing among different programmes with different continuity, not only at different schools, but at one school, for example- a vocational gymnasium can carry out a five or six-year training for the acquisition of a third vocational qualification level and at the same time a four-year training programmes for the acquisition of a secondary vocational qualification level.

There is no division of vocational and general higher education institutions. Many of the humanitarian higher education institutions offer training based on pedagogical, methodological and practical specialized course for acquisition of teaching qualification in respective subject, related to general educational profile in the faculty. Some of higher education institutions /HEIs/ offer vocational training for medical staff, engineering, etc. There are 51 accredited higher education institutions, 35 of which are state schools and 9 colleges. (Information available from the State Register of HEIs, MES: [www.minedu.government.bg](http://www.minedu.government.bg)).

It is most common that non-formal vocational training is organized by institutions- providers of vocational training for adults. Organizations for vocational training of adults who can issue certificates are in fact the Centres for Vocational Training, licensed according to the stipulations of the VET Act. Two hundred and twenty Centres for Vocational Training have been licensed; they are presently functioning.

The quantity distribution in regions in the country, as well as the distribution according to professions and specializations, is uneven. In some cases, this presents difficulties for the provision of an effective vocational training.

- Modernization of Infrastructure and Equipment

The envisaged modernization of the educational system includes the establishment of a secondary education network based on a special infrastructure, where each school will have a computer classroom and each computer will be logged on to the net of computer classrooms in the country. The implementation of the Informational strategy for the establishment of all school informational net, will be carried out in three stages. During the first stage, 50 informational study centres will be set up where teachers will be trained. The second stage is planned to begin in 2005; 700 computer classrooms in vocational and general secondary schools will be set up. During the third stage, primary schools will be equipped. Sixty million BGN are planned for the project implementation.

- Training for unemployed (including specific target groups: long-term unemployed, early school leavers, young graduates, disabled, Romany)

The training for unemployed is organized according to the provisions of the Employment Promotion Act. In 2003, the Employment Agency through the Labour Office Departments organized 1482 vocational training courses (in 2002 they were 1016). Over 29 thousand unemployed individuals have been trained.

Based on the type of the training the highest percentage belongs to the acquisition of additional qualification and prequalification- almost two third of the organized courses.

The initial vocational training mostly involved courses in the traditional jobs such tailors, cooks, hairdressers, beauticians, construction engineers, drivers, etc.

The most popular course includes computer training and language courses, which enhance the general employability. Specialized economics-oriented courses such as accounting, finances, management, small business management and accounting are also organized.

Motivational training and individual vocational information and guidance of unemployed as preliminary measures preceding the vocational training and the employment measures, are also carried out.

Young unemployed individuals and long-term unemployed individuals comprise an important target group. Apart from the training courses organized by the Employment Agency, these target groups are also included in a number of national and international projects and programs (Labour Market Initiatives, Phare 2001, the JOBS project and Beautiful Bulgaria Programme of UNDP, etc.).

Dropouts from the educational system comprise a group with specific problems; they are included in a special project for vocational training in the 2004 National Employment Action Plan (description available on page 12).

Specialized programmes and measures for people with disabilities are also carried out.

Vocational training courses are also available for young individuals, who have graduated without having acquired a vocational qualification.

People with low level of education, with low or without qualification from ethnic minorities are trained according to the individual method principle, by including these in initial and additional vocational qualification courses, as well as in different programs and measures. The national program "From Social Cares to Employment" is of great importance, which offers when necessary adequate vocational training. The literacy, qualification and employment programme directed towards these groups is also of great importance. A stable base for employment is achieved through the three modules of the programme - literacy, vocational qualification and employment.

- Management training and business education

Management and business training is quite popular; It is realized through specialized courses in the relevant subjects, as well as through different national programs or specific modules included in these.

- Training in enterprises

The study on vocational training organized by enterprises<sup>1</sup> (initial and continuing), carried out by the NSI in November 2003, points to the conclusion that staff training at enterprises does not reach the necessary dimensions and does not support effectively vocational development. Training is most often connected to the introduction of new lines of production, new products and services. This is the reason why most enterprises do not carry out regular assessment of qualifications and skills of employed individuals; they do not develop a training plan/program and do not ensure financial resources for staff training<sup>2</sup>. It can be noted that mainly bigger and economically stable enterprises have developed their own systems for human resource development and provide the necessary training. Most of the enterprises in the private sector voice the opinion that responsibility for continuing vocational training lies within the employees and do not consider the money spent on training an investment, rather an additional load for their budget.

In 2002 only 34,5% of the enterprises have organized vocational training for their employees. The preferred forms of training are at work, usually accompanied by self-learning, as well as short-term courses inside or outside the company, participation in courses, seminars, etc. More attention is paid to the training of directors and specialists; less attention is paid to the training of technical and low-level staff. Very few of the enterprises that have organized training courses, have also carried out monitoring and evaluating activities on the training effects.

As stipulated in the Employment Promotion Act, the Employment Agency can organize training for employees in micro and small enterprises, as well as in restructuring enterprises, which is followed by change in qualification requirements.

- Training to promote labour market and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups

The new Strategy on Social Policy in Bulgaria (2002) envisages different activities directed towards support of socially disadvantaged groups and their social integration. Employment of socially disadvantaged individuals accompanied by vocational training activities and an individual approach method with every unemployed individual, especially the discouraged ones and individuals belonging to certain risk groups, creates suitable conditions for their labour and social integration. The mechanism of subsidy employment is implemented; it is directed towards these individuals (long term unemployed, young individuals, individuals with low working capacity, women, single moms, women with children younger than 3, orphans, individuals with no qualification and with primary or lower education, unemployed over 50, etc.).

The Employment Promotion Act stipulates the measures, directed towards employability improvement of disadvantaged groups. The National Employment Action Plan includes programs and measures for disadvantaged groups on the labour market in order to improve their access to the labour market and ensure their social integration.

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<sup>1</sup> "Continuing vocational training", National Statistical Institute, Sofia, 2004

<sup>2</sup> In 2002 ¼ of the enterprises (32,7% in public sector and 22,9% - in private) had staff assessment, 8,8% - had staff training strategy and 5,2% had special budget for training.

## 1.6. Participation in education and training

- Formal/non-formal

In 2003, 90844 students have completed their basic education, 33331 students- general secondary education, 30283 students- secondary vocational education in vocational gymnasia /third level of vocational qualification/ , 13355 students- vocational gymnasia and schools (secondary level of vocational qualification), 674 students- art schools.

In 2003/2004 51711 students were admitted to vocational schools (in 2002/2003 they were 51284), 36374 of which in vocational gymnasia (third vocational qualification level), 10546 in vocational gymnasia and schools (secondary vocational qualification level), vocational schools and classes after the 6-th and 7-th grade – 655, vocational schools and classes with admission after the 8-th grade- 421 and in vocational colleges- 1851.

Participation in non-formal education is characterized mainly by individual initiative for training or learning outside the formal system. This type of vocational qualification acquisition is a form of Life-long learning, which has certain traditions in Bulgaria. Surveys<sup>3</sup> show that during the period second quarter of 2002 – the second quarter 2003 almost 20 % of the population older than 15 have participated in formal and non-formal education. Non-formal and informal learning is carried out from 18.1 % of individuals. Young persons have a significant participation in non-formal and individual learning.

- Young people/adults

Young individuals and adults up to the age of 45 are more active in educational and training activities than persons in the rest age groups. Training connected to preserving employment, high-tech courses, entrepreneurship and foreign language courses are preferred.

- Employed/unemployed persons

In 2003 the number of unemployed persons, participating in different forms of training, organized by the Employment Agency was the most significant for the past five years. Thirty-eight thousand unemployed persons participated in training courses, which is twice more compared to 2002. The increase in the number of unemployed involved in training courses is due to the abolition of the requirement that participants must have a job guaranteed in advance as a condition for participation in training. Participation in training for a specific working place is prevailed (57.9%). 41.6% have participated in different training measures, programs and projects including a module for vocational training. A positive fact is the increased participation of individuals with basic and lower levels of education.

The increased participation of unemployed persons in motivational training is evident. In 2003 some 4536 individuals have completed a motivational course; this number is the biggest for the past five years- compared to the previous year it has increased 2,5 times.

In 2003, almost 9 thousand individuals have participated in training, organized by the Employment Agency; for the previous year, they were only 554. In this respect the improved co-

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<sup>3</sup> Life-long learning, NSI, 2003

operation between the Labour Office Departments and the social partners should be pointed out; it is being improved methodically and in terms of legislation.

According to the NSI survey on Continuing Vocational Training out of 1 610 390 individuals in the enterprises observed in 2002, 176 030 individuals or 10,9% out of the total number of employed, have participated in VET courses (which is the predominant educational form). It is evident that enterprises do not realize the benefits from higher qualification with regard to the enhancement enterprise competitiveness.

### **1.7.Guidance and counseling**

Vocational guidance and counseling of young people, adults and students is organized mainly through the Employment Agency system. It is carried out individually or in groups in the Labour Office Departments, Centres for vocational information, and in the Job clubs. In 2003, there were 11 Centres for vocational information, 4 Guidance Centers and 39 Job clubs. They provide information on vacancies in the local labour market, the requirements of employees, specific characteristics of the job, as well as vocational guidance regarding the enhancement of possibilities on the labour market through training for the acquisition of vocational qualification. Vocational information and guidance has been provided for 208 512 individuals. These activities are provided with a priority for the risk groups.