

Bulgarian education system. Vocational education on a national and regional level



Neliana Valcheva, Bulgarian team

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CHAPTER ONE:

Gaps, challenges and goals of the educational system in Bulgaria

A few words about Bulgarian education

THREE STAGES OF SCHOOL EDUCATION:

- Primary (1st - 4th)
- Middle school (5th - 7th)
- High school (8th - 12th)

After each stage, there are national exams. Whereas after 4th grade, they are purely for evaluation objective, after 7th and 12th grade, the exams are also important to the next stage of education

After 7th grade:

- The mark from the exam is important when applying to a high school in addition to the grades from the diploma
- Different high schools have different criteria

After 12th grade

- There are two mandatory exams and one additional
- 1st exam: always Bulgarian language and literature
- 2nd exam: either personal choice (students usually align it with the specialty they aim at / e.g - medicine- biology/ chemistry/) or a qualification exam if they are in a VET school
- 3rd exam: students don't usually choose to have a third exam, but it is usually again either their choice or a qualification exam

Quality of education and goals

Goals of school education:	Quality guaranteed by:
Level 1 - common educational standards	Ministry of education
Level 2 - curriculums	Regional inspection of education
Level 3 - lessons	Schools

Common education standards - applicable for all regions on the territory of Republic of Bulgaria

Curriculums - designed on a regional level; applicable for the respective regions

Lessons - designed by the respective school

Goals by the ministry of education for 2022 for school education

Minimizing the administrative burden on educators

Support and development of teacher staff

Enhancing inclusive education

Ensuring more opportunities for psychological aid in institutions

Integration of more advanced technology

Improving the quality of VET education

Advancing methodology and teaching material

Reconstruction and construction of school facilities

Problems of Bulgarian education (summarized)

- Unequal access to quality education
- High dropout rates (increasing)
- Theoretically- oriented education
- Lack of well-qualified teaching personnel (ageing educational workforce; employment gaps)
- Educational malpractice
- Progressively worsening education according to the EU standards
- Lack of clear vision for the future

The problem of inequality and dropout rates

Equal education is expressed in:

- The same quality of education delivered to students in all regions, of all ages despite financial status, ethnicity, religious preferences and cultural status

Reasons for unequal education in Bulgaria

- Inaccessible education in secluded regions
- Socio-economic
- Lack of integrity among the Roma community

As a result of unequally delivered education, the affected students are less literate, have a hard time setting and achieving goals, perform worse than their peers, and are at a high risk of dropping out before reaching the final stage of school education

Dropout rates are expressed in:

The number of students quitting school without completing all required levels of education

Reasons

- socio-economic
- Migration/ immigration
- Cultural/ ethnicity - based

Consequences

- High unemployment rates in comparison to graduates
- Decreased workforce in the competitive labor market

Tackling the problem

The ministry is making continuous attempts to address, target and resolve the issues concerning education of all levels. It mainly does it through organizing professional development trainings, projects, social partners and programs. Two of the most successful programmes on national level are:



Science and education for intelligent growth
(2014- 2020)



Teach for Bulgaria
(2010- ongoing)



Science and education for intelligent growth (2014 - 2020)



The programme focuses on enhancing functioning mechanisms in both education and science as two of the most advantageous sectors in the country which contribute to growth and economy

Priorities

In terms of education, the main objective of the programme is to be a tool thanks to which Bulgaria will manage to be a successful part of the **Europe 2020 strategy**

1. Quality school education
2. Access to quality education
3. Lifelong learning
4. Professional education and relations to the labour market

Teach for Bulgaria (2010 - ongoing)

- Part of the **Teach for all network**
- Partners with the Ministry of education
- Qualifies teachers from all walks of life and supports them to make a difference in students' lives by delivering education, equal to their peers'
- Aimed at schools with fewer educational privileges, especially those in secluded regions and those with an increased number of Roma students
- Supports teachers, students, and whole schools by guiding them into more efficient educational process, management strategies
- Addresses and comes up with solutions regarding the achievement gap
- Shares and implements best practices from all over the country and the rest of the international network's members

CHAPTER TWO:

Vocational education on a national and regional level

General information about VET in Bulgaria

- Starts after 7th grade'; mainly school-based
- Lasts 5 years: from 8th to 12th grade
- 8th grade: zero year - intense language preparation
- 9th grade: introduction of vocational subjects and practice; introduction of a second foreign language
- 10/11th grades: Students become even more involved in professional education
- 12th grade: intense preparation for the qualification exam; increased classes for theoretical and practical knowledge;

Qualification exam and qualifications in VET

- The qualification exam consists of two parts: theoretical and practical
- Theoretical - a list of approx. 20 theoretical issues, the students write only on one, chosen by the committee on the exam day
- Practical - varies, depending on the specialty; a product of a long-term work (project; presentation) + short introduction on the first foreign language

QUALIFICATION LEVELS IN SECONDARY VET EDUCATION

- ❖ EQF/NQF 2 - routine activities
- ❖ EQF/NQF 3 - complex activities in a changing environment

Post - secondary VET education

- ❖ Comes after 12th grade
- ❖ EQF/ NQF 4 - Complex activities in a changing environment, HR possibility
- ❖ EQF / NQF 5 -

leading objectives

Encouraging more people from companies/ workplaces to mentor students

Prevention of dropout rates in the country

Reaching compatibility among curriculum, labor market and companies/ workplaces

Improving curriculums by letting companies be a part of the planning process

objectives

Establishing a stronger partnership between school institutions and companies

Advantages

- Exiting school with a professional qualification
 - Easier entrance into the labor market
 - Finding a job aligning one's specialty takes less searching and effort because the school is usually equipped with resources
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- Real life experience in a workplace
 - Balance between theory and practice
 - Lower dropout rates in comparison to general education

Disadvantages

One of the leading problems affecting both general and vet education in the country is the lack of motivated and young teachers. Therefore, the majority of the workforce in the sectors is older than 50

There isn't always compatibility between the labor market and the vocational educational institutions in theory. This is due to the dynamics of the contemporary market. Since it changes quicker than ever, it is hard to track the changes in the books. New books are produced every few years

Practice is not supported by mentors from the workplace. Usually the students go to a certain workplace and have to rely on a teacher from the school to give them instructions/ guidance. There is very little touch with the work staff

There are a lot of misconceptions about VET which create a negative image among society. The most common one is that only students with poor academic performance go to vocational schools since their candidatures will not be approved in other schools

Projects organized by the ministry: Vision for revision - quality assurance in learning content and vocational education modernization

Co-funded, by the “Erasmus+” programme, the project aims (to):

- Establish intelligible criteria in terms of designing curriculums
- Evaluate and formulate modern curriculums which fit into the requirements and are in relevance to the dynamics of economy and labor market
- Organize Good practice exchanges on a local, regional and national level
- Reinforce partnership with other EU members with the goal of acquiring and implementing mutual experience