

BULGARIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY
in cooperation with the National Center for Vocational Training (NCVT) within BCCI

NATIONAL VET POLICIES AND UE INITIATIVES

June , 2007

Bulgaria's transition to the market economy has not yet established matching qualification systems designed to meet the new economic conditions. Enterprises as well as foreign investors see increasing shortages for workers with appropriate qualifications. In turn, this is viewed as a substantial obstacle for investment decisions in Bulgaria, as are slow economic growth, the ageing population, and the slow pace of reform in education.

While unemployment is tackled through a number of government measures, they are often *ad hoc* and do not offer qualifications that meet the labour market's current and future needs. This is especially significant when considering the situation of ethnic minorities, and other socially disadvantaged groups.

The rapid spread of new technology has deepened the divide and has added to the pressure for urgent reforms in the systems and quality of education and training.

Nonetheless, the national economy is advancing and, due partly to EU accession, has begun to recognize the importance of defining in more detail its needs for increased levels of knowledge and key competencies.

Now is therefore the appropriate time to address these new skill needs through changes in the system of education and training, to ensure that it equips people with appropriate learning throughout life.

The former continuing lifelong qualification system requires entirely new objectives, target groups and quality indicators, as well as a new definition of the stakeholders.

Formal education meets the requirements for sustainable and upgradeable qualifications and training but there is a need to overcome weaknesses and inconsistencies and to create a coordinated comprehensive approach with a long-term perspective.

Among the targets of national development policy are high levels of knowledge, the ability to innovate, adaptability to changes in the nature of work, and full social inclusion

The context of this document takes account of the new learning aims and scopes, groups of learners, providers, learning/teaching methods, incentives for demand and supply of learning, supportive measures, public transparency and comparability, and quality assurance.

The concept of Lifelong Learning is defined within the European Employment Strategy and adopted by the Memorandum on LLL of the European Commission (2000). It is also included in the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning:

The six key messages set out in the Memorandum are defined, and the point is made that two groups of skills interact with each other. The first are technical skills and abilities needed by workers or analysts/scientists in their specific professional fields; the other encompasses transferable (core) skills, which are required for each employment or self-employment situation. The latter (communication skills,

ICT, team working, self learning etc) need their own methodology, time and place of learning, evaluation schemes etc.

EU strategic papers and Bulgarian policies and legislation

Education and training are the critical factors in achieving the Lisbon strategy objectives of raising economic growth, competitiveness and social inclusion, and the EU has issued many papers, memoranda and reports on LLL – several of which are mentioned above.

Concerning the LLL Strategy within the framework of the European Employment Strategy, LLL concerns improving VET skills and acquiring new knowledge, which are a successful prerequisite for labour market access.

A LLL Strategy is seen as one of the additional measures needed to achieve the horizontal objectives of the Employment Policy – in compliance with other objectives. Supporting the development of human capital is one of the 10 measures for achieving the goals of the Lisbon Strategy and one of the four priority areas of the Working Group on Employment, created in 2003.

Various Guidelines link LLL and HRD strategies within the Employment Strategy (Guidelines for Employment Policy) where increasing investment in human capital through better education and skills improvement is foreseen.

The main priorities of LLL in **Bulgaria** regarding employability are access to LLL opportunities to acquire and improve key competences validation of non-formal and informal knowledge, high quality and access to information, supporting social inclusion, training-the-trainer

Measures to achieve these priorities include development of a suitable legal basis for LLL, improvement of the resources for LLL – methodological, organizational, financial, human resources; adaption of good practice examples, and applying instruments such as defining adult training needs, quality assurance in training, and applying the results of training

The current situation in Bulgaria is as follows:

- Recent policy documents and strategies that have been elaborated for the programme period 2007-2013 can be seen as LLL measures for improving human resources, enterprise productivity, regional development. The LLL concept in Bulgaria will be implemented through measures and operations within the Human Resource Development, Competitiveness, Regional Development, and Administrative capacity Operational Programmes.
- At regional and local level, strategy implementation will be supported through the measures within the Regional Economic Development plans and plans for development of Municipalities which are already prepared for the period of 2007-2013 in compliance with the National Plan for Economic Development and National plan for Regional Development for the same programming period.
- The LLL concept is incorporated in national strategic documents/programmes being implemented
- Pre-accession programmes acted as an instrument for support of trans-institutional dialogue and partnership in the establishment of closer connections between education, training and research activities to labour market needs. In addition, successful participation of Bulgaria in the Community Lifelong learning programmes Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci under phase 2, as well as participation in the 2007-2013 LLL Programme, which has already started, will provide opportunities and instruments for Bulgarian stakeholders to exchange and share learning experience and good practices with other EU member states.

Legal basis / frame

- The legal frame for education and training and employment promotion in general is well developed but no specific Act for LLL exists. A further study on the points in the legislation that concern learner motivation, increase of employability through learning, flexibility of pathways from one to another learning stage or form, is needed for preparing a new law on LLL, or concept amendments to existing Acts relevant to LLL.

Objectives, overall tasks

The overall aim is to improve the competitiveness of the labour force in the country and thus the national economy's competitiveness by widening peoples' adaptability to accept economic and social change as well as by promoting equity and participation in all forms of professional and personal development.

The main objectives and priorities for implementation, for all groups of learners in the LLL system, are

- 1.1 Improving the legislative framework so as to remove all barriers to making LLL a reality and encouraging participation of different social groups in LLL activities;
- 1.2 Building new and effective coordination structures with defined responsibilities at national, regional and institutional level;
- 1.3 Creating diverse formal, informal and non-formal learning opportunities corresponding to changes in the labour market;
- 1.4 Establishing a transparent system to recognize all learning achievements, agreed by appropriate authorities, in knowledge, skills, competencies, including those in non-formal education and training;
- 1.5 Introducing a credit system for accumulation of qualifications and individualizing each individual's personal and professional profile as well as assuring learners' and workers' mobility;
- 1.6 Moving from centrally-organised schemes to decentralized ones, offering new effective coordination structures and activities – the organisation of training, quality assurance, validation agreements, lifelong guidance, information provision, etc.
- 1.7 Establishing a rational financing system as an instrument for assuring efficiency and quality of initial and continuing education and training with shared and balanced responsibility between the state, employers and learners.

Lifelong Learning for different age groups

4.1.1. Schoolchildren

The age characteristics of the group are defined as:

- Early childhood – (3-6 years old) to upper secondary (age 15).

One of the most important characteristics of the group concerns achievement of initial knowledge, skills and competencies that are needed for the world of work, employability, socialisation and active citizenship. Skills and competences acquired during the age of childhood and adolescence have a particular importance for further development throughout life.

The current situation of the school system is described

Summary of needs/gaps

Policy instruments are partly available through some of the existing strategies and programmes, but they are mainly related to formal education instruments; thus particular attention needs to be paid to encouraging alternative and supplementary non-formal and informal learning activities. **Non-formal learning and self-directed learning need to be “recognised” at system level as instruments for developing and/or improving learning abilities.**

The aim of the education portal (<http://www.e-edu.bg/>) is to provide access through a modern

medium to the process of school education. It will provide a breadth of possibilities to all participants in the education process – pupils, teachers, directors, parents – and allow for one million users to access the site simultaneously. The portal is expected to form the basis of a national electronic knowledge network.

Key competencies, such as ICT, languages, entrepreneurship, learning-to-learn need further development in formal (school based), non-formal (extracurricular initiatives) and informal methods (self-directed learning).

Good practical examples for training in entrepreneurship that exist in some VET schools could be applied at a system level. Training in **entrepreneurship** is one of the examples that make school life more attractive and help students to acquire employable skills.

Strengthening the exchange of information on best practice in schools, by means of active involvement in the e-portal is an important measure for developing ICT competences on the one hand and, on the other, for establishing informal educational community networks

Strengthening the role of parents and students in school life, **and the partnerships and cooperation between schools and other training centres, Chitalishe and NGOs is vital, as is** practical-based training in the monitoring of learning processes.

Bilingual foreign language schools (CLIL as a common EU priority in foreign language learning) could be multiplied into extracurricular activities in other general and/or VET schools

European partnerships should prioritise projects that actively involve students and aim to develop their learning abilities

Tertiary education (HE)

Characteristics of the group

Learners in tertiary education are students following study programmes leading to one of three qualification levels – Bachelor, Master or Doctor and the degree of professional higher education Specialist, as well as those following a higher education programme to acquire or upgrade qualifications under conditions set by the higher education institution. Tertiary qualifications are linked to skill abilities needed for analytical, leadership and management positions.

Summary of needs/gaps

Key Issues include:

Conceptual coherence – although different legal instruments are intended to eliminate the existing barriers to lifelong learning in tertiary education (Higher Education Act 1995) – e.g. no age or ethnic discrimination – there are considerable gaps between declared aims and actual implementation of lifelong learning.

The concept of LLL is not universally understood and accepted in academic circles. Widening access is in most cases understood to imply low quality; state restrictions over the number of students studying for Masters degrees have no understandable justification.

Programme organization - the cycle system is not understood in the labour market – employers often do not distinguish between qualification levels; much more should be done to convince them of the advantages of the cycle system. The main accent of HE programmes is still on the instrumental value of learning rather than the intrinsic value. HE programmes are still seen as sufficient to meet job requirements. There is little understanding of the real mission of HE – to provide a broad scientific base with greater focus on skill and competence upgrading, especially independent learning, research, collection and interpretation of data.

Course delivery - there are stated intentions to adopt new approaches (distance and e-learning) and there is some sound experience in this field. In practice, however there are strong preferences to use old and outdated approaches

Access policies - at present there are none which reflect the needed flexibility to participate in LLL, nor are there sufficient learning opportunities for different categories of learners. Entrance examinations are still directed to the group of young school leavers, and based on strict content and memory abilities instead of critical thinking and abilities to understand and interpret knowledge. There is no clear admission policy for foreign students – either EU citizens or those from other countries. There are no national policies for admission procedures for the handicapped, nor policy recommendations for widening access to the next qualification levels – the second and third cycle. Universal access to learning opportunities requires changes in the legal basis.

Upgrading qualifications. There is a strong need to define qualifications in a National qualification Framework, describing them by learning outcomes and not by duration. The experience of several European countries in elaborating a National qualification register would be very useful in combination with a Qualification Framework.

Recognition procedures and practices – the recognition of all, or particular parts of, qualifications requires fundamental change. Recognition of learning achievements in institutions (parts of qualifications) and at national level (full qualifications) do not follow the same objectives. Future policy harmonization among institutions, and between the institutions and the state, would have a positive effect on transparency and opportunities for learning through life. In view of European trends, mechanisms should be seriously discussed for recognition of prior learning (non-formal, work-based etc.) for the purposes of higher education as well as recognition in diverse settings.

Quality assurance. – in general terms, at present, QA procedures reflect a professional preference to retain the *status quo*. In a comprehensive process of orientating all educational systems to LLL and educational outcomes, QA should be included as an indivisible part of this process, i.e. criteria must be introduced to assure competitiveness in LLL provision.

Credit accumulation and transfer – In the Bulgarian HE system, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has been adopted under the necessary legislation (Higher Education Act). However the credit system functions only as a compulsory instrument in international mobility. It gives no momentum to mobility within the national system or within the same institution. All components of the credit system should be rethought and a national dimension agreed in order to establish a credit system relevant to serving learners' real needs.

Lifelong Learning for Adults

Characteristics of the group

By “adults” we mean everyone from the age of 16.. Sub-groups include:

Young adults (16-25/29);

Those in the age group 24/29-45/50:

Those above 45/50: pre-retirement groups and retired/elderly people

Groups at risk: minorities, the unemployed, groups and people with special needs

According to Eurostat, only 1.3 % of the population between ages 25-64 takes part in any educational activities (EU average: 10.2%). The aim for Bulgaria for 2013 is 5 % (EU: 12.5%). Those forming this “gap” are potential participants for Adult Learning activities.

The educational level of the Roma population is seriously low, in comparison with the other parts of the population: According to the 2001 population census, ethnic groups in Bulgaria form 15,6% of the whole

population – 9,5% Turks, and 4,6 % - Roma. They experience an accumulation of risks, leading to long-term unemployment: illiteracy, low level of VET and education.

Summary of needs/gaps

Political and social attention focuses mainly on school age and universities. This especially concerns handicapped children and young people of “normal” school age – *instruments should be developed to extend provision of the care necessary, with a strong focus on professional qualifications through:*

Guidance and counselling should become one of the main priorities in continuing VET and Adult Learning. Providing flexible pathways between levels, sectors and forms of learning, which enable a more direct transition between adult general education through VET to the labour market, and from the professional world to university. Recognition of prior learning

Developing or adapting inexpensive distance learning programmes/virtual libraries/multimedia products without the need to leave the workplace or home

Primary and secondary legislation amendments introducing concrete provisions for continuing training opportunities for handicapped people;

Providing alternative educational programmes for drop-outs: courses aiming ultimately at the labour market and social integration

“Second Chance School” – enabling adult access to education. Elaborating strategies for **family learning** as a tool for integration in LLL; motivation of families by establishing family centres

Increasing the possibilities for work-based learning, with a special focus on opening more places for trainees in companies in all economic sectors

Improving adult training methodology, to conform with previous knowledge and experience of learners;

Identifying the educational needs of elderly people and elaborating strategies on meeting them (e.g. – using libraries and community centres as training centres). Providing learning in clubs, libraries, cultural houses, regional & local community centres, Chitalishtas, etc.

Providing elderly people with instruments and skills, developing schemes for shared workplaces between elderly & young people, to give on-the job training using the greater experience of the elderly.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning, motivating people to return to learning,

A culture of learning must be developed in Bulgaria – that supports knowledge transfer, facilitates learning throughout life and in different ways, by applying interactive method

The pre-requisites for Lifelong Learning

Lifelong Learning provision;

In Bulgaria vocational education and training is provided both by the **formal and the non-formal** educational system with different types of establishments.

Initial vocational training is provided mainly at school level by secondary vocational gymnasia (providing the second and third qualification stage as well as secondary education), vocational schools (providing the first qualification stage), vocational colleges (providing fourth qualification degree) and some vocational training classes in general and special schools.

Continuing vocational training, leading to a new qualification or updating of professional skills and key competencies, is provided basically by Centres for vocational training, licensed by the National Agency for vocational education and training (NAVET). Such Centres are established as VET departments in companies, branch associations and other social partners, NGOs or independent training institutions.

Graphics based on the Public register of Ministry and Science and Pilot Model of the Information indicate the number of VET schools and VET centres in different districts.

In general, the approach implemented is institution – centred rather than learner-oriented. The formal system of educational establishments needs to transform training to what will comply with LLL conceptual priorities.

Non-formal learning is comparatively new to the Bulgarian context, even including the Chitalishte cultural and social centres. The Chitalishe network is well-established, with potential for further development of non-formal learning provision

Participation in different cultural and training events – seminars, conferences, cultural events, etc, is still not considered as learning.

Work-related/on-job training for quick updating/briefing for staff on new skills, techniques, technologies or processes, on an informal, almost instant, basis, is frequently used by companies. Not only is it time-efficient , but it “de-formalises” training into smaller “chumnks” to meet new learning needs on a “just-in-time” basis, as compared to formalised (but nonetheless important) training, that is planned weeks or months ahead.

Adoption of this type of training more widely should be seriously considered, by all organisations – large and small, public and private – to provide appropriate and rapid training responses for a fast-changing society.

A summary of the measures proposed follows:

A proposed “National framework for education and training providers”, setting recommendations for institutional capacity for quality in education and training provision. This could be a useful guide for all training providers to develop their institutions and offer high quality training;
Through effective Social dialogue in VET training provision, sector-specific and inter-sectoral communication to be offered organisational support, or new forms of VET provision, such as “educational parks” or “educational incubators” where different VET providers act together to cover company needs.
The private-public partnership schemes in both initial and continuing VET could improve the training infrastructure and equip it with up-to-date instruments and materials for practical training.

- Update the VET provision network at school education level, based on decentralisation through Regional and Municipalities Plans for economical development.
- Change in the legal basis with particular attention to the “alternative” forms of learning
- Projects under the OP Human Resource Development 2007-2013 operations targeted to employability and adaptability increase through better access to learning opportunities
- Implementation of measures under the Programme for development of Pre-schools and school education 2006-2015 related to encouragement of extracurricular learning activities
- Projects under the OP Competitiveness 2007-2013 that stimulate learning activities in SMEs both employers and employees

Access

For Lifelong Learning, **flexibility of access** is the key and fundamental priority. It is highlighted in all strategic papers at the European and national level, and Bulgarian national policy on access is to widen participation of all social groups in learning activities. The accent is on real, effective and equal access for all learners from all ages and all groups.

Pathways for education and training mobility are limited at present only to the formal education system. Government policies on this issue are set out in the Public Education Act (1991); the VET Act; the Educational degree, general education minimum and curriculum Act; Higher education Act /1995/ (as the key provisions are developed in secondary legislation).

Legislation provides equal treatment regarding state and private education and training institutions (equal programmes, status, value of diplomas and certificates, mechanisms of quality evaluation & assurance) – pupils students may change their choice of institution type;

Higher education ensures flexibility of the degree system by providing a broad focus of theory at first degree level, and narrow professionally oriented programmes in the second degree – there is no limitation on participation in these programmes except personal aptitude;

Programmes for professional qualifications which comply with the formal training standards are offered also after finishing secondary school; these programmes lead to certificates of professional qualification and consist only of theory and practical training related to a given profession – there are no other admission requirements except for school leaving certificate.

Flexibility in **vocational education and training** is provided through established forms of learning; not all of them are equally and effectively used but their existence gives access to flexible pathways to acquire qualifications, and to adults to participate in learning after compulsory education age. The Public Education Act states these recognized learning forms:

Daily – full-time, Evening, Extra-mural, Correspondence, Individual, Independent, Distance

Lifelong learners very often face the situation of overlapping modules and knowledge; this seriously affects the flexibility of learning pathways. There is no functioning system of recording learning achievements.

Access to education in Bulgaria therefore needs further improvement:

There is a challenge in at least two directions:

- to increase the rate of participation as a whole, and secondly
- to reduce the imbalance in participation – especially for adults, elderly people and groups with special needs and in a disadvantaged situation. This requires a targeted social investment towards the most disadvantaged in society.

To ensure a wide choice of entry levels to education and training for all groups of the population access must be made more flexible.

Steps that simplify educational mobility need to be implemented.

Better ways to meet the needs for adult education with more appropriate learning methods should be devised

Regarding overall learning systems, a key priority should be the development of a credit system for accumulation and building of learners' portfolios. Credit and evaluation systems need to be results - oriented by measuring the learner's capacity to implement different tasks rather than theoretical examinations.

Distance education and eLearning must in Bulgaria be exploited to the full, given its flexible delivery of knowledge and the open access it provides to learners to acquire competences. European and world-wide experience of implementing these techniques effectively is widely available on the internet. Much quality learning materials are also available on websites. The introduction of the education portal (www.e-edu.bg/) might well provide a foundation for rapid developments of distance learning and eLearning in Bulgaria.

Specific methodology on study skills, tutoring, communicating through IT, establishing specific criteria and procedures for examinations, etc. need to be devised in order to fully use this form of flexible learning. An important strategic goal for assuring flexibility for education and training provision will be the adoption of principles for recognition of prior learning.

There is still a deficit in the general legislative framework concerning adult education, non-formal and informal learning and the validation of results for groups at risk. Institutional development and social dialogue: All actors and stakeholders should take part in the process of increasing participation. There is a special role for national authorities in leading and shaping the activities.

Elaborating a financial system of motivating and supporting learners in general and especially those with special needs, is a key requirement;

Curriculum reform

a. Secondary Education

Starting in 2000, new curricula were gradually introduced into school education. For the new programme for development of pre-school and school education, 2006-2015, curricula need to be reformed. In this respect the current situation can be considered as a transitional period.

Existing programmes are rather more academic than practically-oriented; more knowledge-based than functional, and skills-oriented.

Some of the areas that are still not well-developed are related to bilingual students or students whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian.

In the existing programmes, the importance of some of the key competences is not explicit, such as ICT, entrepreneurship, learning-to-learn.

In only a few schools, more flexible programmes based on a modular approach have been introduced

Extra-curricular programmes could form a larger part of school life, where they could represent non-formal and informal ways of learning.

Future developments will need to include:

- more flexible and decentralized curriculum reform based on local and regional needs
- curricula (re)design in compliance with the Programme for Pre-school and School education , with a change attitude towards the learning process – from simply reproducing knowledge to, instead, applying it to practical skills creatively
- introduction of modern programmes for ICT, entrepreneurship, learning-to-learn, at all stages of schooling
- Improvement of learning methods for children with special needs through flexible curriculum approaches – introducing credits, e-learning, distance learning and individual curricula and specialised extracurricular programmes
- partnerships among teachers, experts, parent associations, enterprises, local authorities
- dissemination of good practices for extracurricular programmes through the e-portal
- The Human Resource Development OP priorities 3 and 4
- A Programme for development of pre-school and school education
- Introduction of good models that have been elaborated through community-funded projects
- LLL Community programme

b. Higher Education

Curriculum reform in higher education stems from the new degree structure introduced by the Higher Education Act (1995) and developed in compliance with the requirements of the Bologna Reform. Higher Education Institutions have developed autonomously their own curriculum, except for the regulated professions.

Among the developments for the current situation are the following:

Adaptation of study contents to the concept of the new organizational structure – Bachelor, Master and Doctor degree; Special attention should be paid to the degree for Specialist - this degree is well-placed to

assure LLL and should be allocated its own official place in the framework certification levels. More transparency should be added through dividing two streams of Masters degree, with a professional and science orientation, and with all legislative provisions necessary.

Adaptation of the curriculum to meet labour market needs, and to achieve a balance between practical training and theory, basic skills and competencies while the guiding principle for reform oriented to LLL should be learner-centred learning.

There is a need for developed criteria and instruments for quality assurance , and modularisation is needed, but with the aim to give more freedom of choice to learners.

The existing credit system should be adapted so that it can also be applied to other study pathways, such as distance learning, self-preparation, individual plans, work experience etc. Transferability of completed parts of education or full education programmes.

c. VET - matching the demand for qualifications with an improved provision of training

Vocational training in Bulgaria is provided on the basis of a National List of Professions and Specialities for Vocational Education and Training, which is obligatory both for initial and continuing VET providers.

The Curriculum for vocational education and training at this stage is defined by the National Training standards (being developed for each profession) and the Framework programmes, which define the minimum requirements for training provision. Although this system appears output-oriented, its standards are more context-based than competence-based.

A National Curriculum, based on the National Training standards, is defined by the MES for each profession, and it is obligatory for the vocational training schools, gymnasias and colleges. The Licensed vocational training centres develop their own curricula, which have to comply with the National Training standards, and are approved by NAVET. In this way, the continuing VET sector is more flexible than the initial VET sector in adapting their curricula and training materials to the particular needs of the course, concerning both prior learning of trainees, and the changes in technological developments in the profession.

Curriculum reform in vocational education and training within the context of LLL needs to follow three general trends:

- Update the structure of the National Training standards towards competence-based output standards, which will open up the paths for curriculum change, for defining output evaluation standards, and for achieving better learning outputs.
- Promote curriculum reform to provide greater flexibility and a better match between the skills and qualifications demanded, with the training provision at all levels, by improving the procedures for updating the National List of Professions and Specialities for Vocational Education and Training, and the National Training Standards
- Also needed will be the support of training providers to update regularly their curricula and training materials, and provide mechanisms for adequate teacher training.

Key competences

The re-organisation of labour and the goals of the knowledge-based society demand different key competences, including personal, professional and social knowledge, skills and attitudes. These are: communication in one's mother/official tongue; communication in foreign languages, mathematics and natural sciences, digital competences, learning to learn, interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, entrepreneurship and culture.,

Key competences are important factors for: increasing competitiveness, productivity and innovations; increasing mobility, motivation and quality in employability, personal development, active citizenship and social inclusion.

Future developments should include:

Raising of awareness of the importance of key competences for individual development and social realization;

Legal regulations defining measures for promoting key competences and defining standards in training and assessment of key competences;

Targeted measures in all education and training forms and initiatives to develop basic skills and key competences;

Regulated provision and standards developed in the field of key competences, including licensing or registration procedures. Elaborated mechanisms for key competences' validation

Measuring achievements in key competences in quantitative and qualitative terms; regular analyses of achievements;

The inclusion of key competences in the development of the National Qualification Framework

Teacher Training and academic staff ability

Teacher training is one of the priorities in the new Programme for the development of pre-school and school education, but it is also an instrument for improving formal secondary education - which is a good base for further measures targeted to improving teachers' and trainers' qualifications.

Programmes for initial teacher training cover mainly bachelors and very few have accreditation as masters or doctoral programmes.

Programmes for in-service teacher training exist but not in a systematic and sustainable way

One of the areas not well developed is in the field of programmes for training of trainers

There are only a few programmes for teacher and trainer training based on enterprises and companies, relevant to their subject specialisms.

Development of programmes is needed for initial and in-service training in accordance with Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (EC, 2005)

Introduction of flexible and open learning methods In this context, development of distance and e-learning requires highly qualified tutors in this form of learning; the scope of the requirements linked to this new category of teaching staff will need to be identified. Other needs identified are:

- Establishment of national TT Net
- Change in legislation to reduce the time between the stages of career development and levels of qualification; recognition, for career development pathway purposes, of non-formal and informal learning, and of training courses through EU programmes.
- The content of initial and continuous professional development programmes should reflect the importance of interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches to learning.
- Mobility projects for teachers should be facilitated and promoted as an integral part of initial and continuous professional development programmes.
- Study of European languages, including the use of specialist vocabulary, during initial teacher education and in continuous training, should be integrated into programmes

Future developments in terms of Academic staff and Higher Education include:

- At institutional level, learning plans with a special focus on younger academic teachers need to be developed, whose results can be compared in national surveys and political studies;
- Academic staff need regular updating on European, national and institutional developments concerning higher education and scientific achievements;

- The increasing numbers of foreign students in higher education institutions require teachers' special preparation & considerable adaptation of teaching resources for multicultural groups
- Special support should be provided for teachers in university departments of continuing education, where student groups are very diverse;
- The opportunities provided by the LLL programme and other international programmes should be used more effectively by academic teachers – participation in such learning should have visible institutional results and be seen as part of teachers' professional development;
- Hourly-paid lecturers should have the same qualification opportunities as full-time staff;
- Higher education institutions should appoint an appropriate qualified specialist, to plan and organise learning courses for academic staff with the approval of Academic Council.

Other important matters to be considered include the following:

- Change in the existing legal basis, with amendments that promote continuous teacher training in a systematic way, which provide options for recognition of non- formal and informal (self directed) learning, project experience as career development & qualification level improvement
- The Human Resource Development Operational Programme
- The Competitiveness Operational programme – measures for training in SMEs
- LLL Community programme
- Active involvement in CEDEFOP's TT Net
- Closer cooperation between educational institutions, enterprises, trade unions at local, regional and national levels in terms of design and implementation of flexible teacher training modules that respond to the education system's needs, and to regional development priorities

Lifelong guidance

Guidance and counselling are a compulsory element in the whole concept of LLL, and are one of the priority areas of the Copenhagen process.

In the last few years in Bulgaria there are several areas of education and training in which guidance and counselling activities, primarily on a project basis, have been carried out:

- Career Centres at Universities
- Guidance at the MES and the National Pedagogical Centre
- Employment Agency with its structures
- National Euro-Guidance Centre (NEGC) at the Human Resource Development Centre

The Rectors' Conference has now established the Association of Career guidance and development in higher education, to provide T"assistance to students and young specialists to find appropriate realization on the labour market."

Guidance at the MES and the National Pedagogical Centre with 27 Regional structures in October 2004 has the following main goals: career guidance and vocational counselling in education; identifying staff potential and a system of career guidance in secondary education; introduction of modular training on career guidance at the pre-school stage of basic education during the 2006/2007 school year

In 2005 **an international project** was launched for the establishment of a Network on career guidance at schools under the Socrates programme, which has the objective to shorten the distance between school and career fulfillment.

The Employment Agency has taken actions including the following in the last several years:

- Training programme, created according to a German model based on joint projects, in which many Employment Agency staff and its directorates & Labour Offices, are trained by German Bulgarian and German experts
- System for career guidance within the EA's structure
- Establishment and functioning of informational-counseling departments – vocational informational centres (VIC) and “Workclubs:

The main task of NEGC is to provide information on VET guidance and counselling and to support the educational counsellors - and in this way, the wider public – in responding to questions on studying, VET and working in Europe.

Counselling should become a compulsory element in the whole educational and training policy. But there is still:

a lack of a national system for guidance,

a deficit in information supply

weak coordination between institutions/stakeholders and providers

few specialists who are fully engaged with the system of guidance and counseling

Linking University Career Centres to community employment services, and guidance activities in rural and backward areas are badly needed. Coordination should take place of the activities carried out in NAVET, MLSP, Employment Agency, Universities, National Pedagogical Center and other structures of MES.

Recognition of qualifications; international relations; the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Lifelong Learning

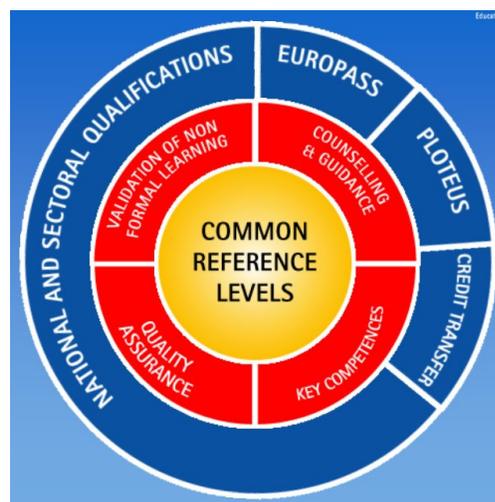
Lifelong learning has become a necessity in Europe because of rapid social, technological and economic changes. Lifelong learning can be impeded by lack of communication and co-operation between education and training providers and authorities at different levels, lack of transparency and recognition of qualifications, and by the lack of arrangements that allow citizens to transfer qualifications from one education and qualification level to another, qualifications frameworks are being established in many countries and sectors in Europe.

Since 2003¹ European policy makers have repeatedly called for the development and implementation of a European Qualifications Framework to strengthen the links between frameworks at national and sectoral level and thus to support lifelong learning. A European Qualification Framework was adopted to support lifelong learning and to ensure that the outcomes of learning are properly valued and used.

The EQF offers a set of common reference points, linked to learning outcomes, and described in a structure of eight levels.

The EQF is developed and implemented on a basis; its instruments - an integrated European transfer and accumulation system for lifelong the Europass instrument, the Ploteus database learning opportunities, as well as the other Frameworks – the Common European Framework concerning Languages, and the Quality Assurance Framework, open many possibilities for countries to harmonise their qualifications through National Qualifications Frameworks, using the EQF as a translation

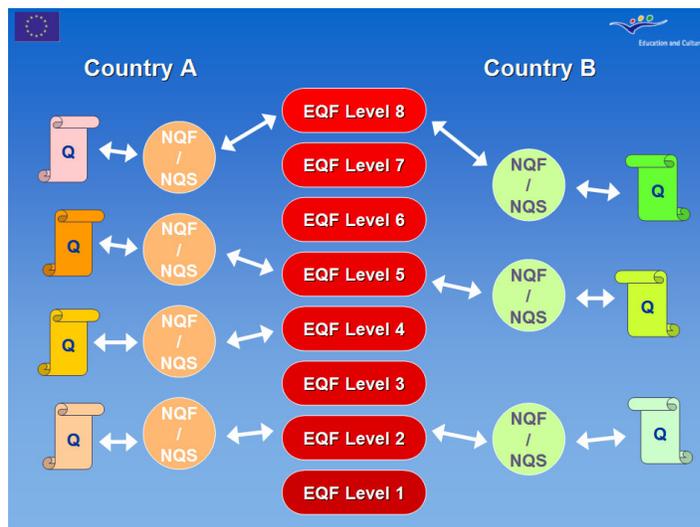
In Bulgaria, the system for recognition of qualifications is still quite fragmented:



voluntary credit learning, on European Common device.

¹ “Commission staff working document - Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning - Brussels, 8.7.2005

- In general education, the recognition of prior learning covers mainly the formal education system, and is based on content-oriented learning outcomes - the outgoing standard at one educational level is accepted as the incoming standard for the next, but only within the educational stage (basic education, secondary education, tertiary education). This covers mainly the learning content; the flow between the educational stages is not so smooth, due to the fact that because of the lack of an individual assessment system at national level, individual results of learners are not recognised, so they have to pass additional exams between the stages (with some exceptions for non-profiled classes in secondary education), which are defined by the upper stage;
- In vocational education, the recognition of prior learning is limited to the use of Article 40 from the VET Act, which describes a procedure for certification of skills obtained by non-formal or informal learning, or in the workplace. In continuing vocational training, many vocational training centres have established their internal procedures for recognition of prior learning concerning single modules in their learning curricula, but this is not based on any national agreement;
- There is almost no recognition of professional skills between secondary and tertiary education, even in the cases when the learner continues his tertiary education in the same economical sector as his qualifications from secondary education;
- With the exception of tertiary education, the European instruments are rarely used.
- Although EQF is implemented on a voluntary basis, the commitment to link the national qualifications to EQF by developing a National Qualifications Framework is an important step towards transparency in qualifications in a European context using the EQF as a translation device. This could be a part of the general reform process, focused on the facilitation of transfer of qualifications and credits, for which the state borders, the education sectors and even the economical sectors are not limitation:



- In the
define
of the
- The

process of its development, it is important to the added value National Qualifications Framework to the already existing structure of qualifications and qualification levels;
National Qualification

Standards have to be further developed.

- The description of the national qualifications and their correspondence to the Qualification stages has to be refined in order to present more clearly the links to the EQF competencies, and to show the internal links between the levels within the qualifications.
- The NQF should also clearly define the place of the general education outcomes within the EQF levels.
- In the field of certification, the NQF will introduce the possibility of accepting the Certificate Supplement as a tool for the transparency of qualifications at all levels of vocational education and training provision.

- The process of recognition and transparency of qualifications in the European context could also be supported by development of a national programme for credit transfer, at both secondary and tertiary level. Credit transfer is one of the European priorities in Lifelong Learning, improving mutual trust and cooperation amongst the Member States. A programme for credit transfer will also improve the mobility of learners and workers, and will open new flexible pathways for training provision by an accumulation of learning outcomes.

Concerning the strategic place of a National Qualifications Framework in the future development of Lifelong Learning processes in Bulgaria, a National Coordination Body could be established, in order to coordinate the involvement of all stakeholders,

Quality assurance

A number of institutions are involved in the monitoring and evaluation of training provided in the formal system (National Accreditation and Assessment Agency, National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, Centre for Control of Quality in Education). Furthermore a new Programme for the development of pre-school and school education, and the OP Human Resource Development, identify as a specific priority quality assurance in all methods and types of training and learning. But more needs to be done:

- ***Measuring quality through the 15 EU LLL indicators.***
- Change of legal basis with emphasis on the requirements and responsibilities of stakeholders for QA in education, training and learning
- Regular updating of teachers' and trainers' competencies through flexible and open learning methods, and exchange of good practices - both national and EU.
- Regularly measuring learning results, by internal assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes
- Measuring the quality of learning outcomes through external evaluation and strengthening the capacity for monitoring/measuring the quality of education and training of the respective responsible organizations for school education, VET and Higher Education. This could include using models from other EU countries.
- Elaborating a quality measurement system in non-formal and informal learning achievements by adopting the results of pilot projects
- A system to recognise and validate prior learning.
- Involvement of employers' organizations in curriculum development at all education levels and forms, as well as in quality assessment criteria for learning content.
- Establishment of a Lifelong Learning Council (LLC), which might work on the basis of a signed Memorandum of understanding with clear responsibilities for stakeholders to make LLL a reality
This organisation might be an instrument for a "bottom – up" consultative approach to policy makers and decision takers, and have very wide representation of LLC at national, regional and local level, including parents' associations, employers organisations, employee organisations/trade unions, research organisations, universities, national agencies and others.

Transparency and publicity must be ensured for all aspects and processes of quality. This can possibly be achieved through further development of the (currently school-level) educational portal

- A public-private partnership for control of QA should be considered, and possible funding sought for QA in different education and training forms, stages and target groups through:
 - National Scientific Research Fund under the MES
 - Programme for Pre-school and School Education
 - OP Human Resource Development
 - OP Competitiveness
 - 7th Framework programme
 - Lifelong Learning Programme
 - Transfer and development of innovations under the Leonardo programme; Erasmus networks; Transversal programme

– Policy developments and actions in ICT, on dissemination and on valorisation

- Implementing internal Quality Management systems in the institutions providing adult education and training. Also implementing the internal quality management system considered by the organization as the most appropriate to improve their quality of services.
- Implementing systems for evaluating training programmes that measure ROI - the Return on Investments in Training (demonstrating to what extent the costs incurred in training produce an economic benefit to the enterprise in the long run) could be a strong motivating factor for managers to invest in the training of their personnel.

Work-related training

Work-related training used to be associated mainly with the systems for training of staff in multinational companies. It has now entered a new stage, as more and more smaller companies as well as the public sector realise its importance:

- To meet changes in the requirements of employee performance resulting from changes in technologies in the company, ICT innovations or new production lines:
- For better business results
- professional improvement of personnel resulting in enhanced performance, career advancement and reduced staff turnover; encouraging enhancement of the knowledge and skills of company employees by creating positive attitudes towards Lifelong Learning.
- improved team-building and establishing a corporate culture which increases motivation for efficient fulfilment of professional duties;

The forms of work-based training may vary significantly depending on the specific conditions.

The large enterprises and companies usually have their own systems for work-related training, standardised for all branches.

In small and medium-sized companies, two basic models of training delivery are usually applied:

- Training organised by the employer himself, with the active participation of the heads of departments or experienced staff members as trainers;
- Training organised by a training institution, in the role of an “in-company training department”, organising the training in close interaction with company managers.

Work-based training could be non-formal, formal or informal.

Knowledge and skills obtained during work-based training even in non-formal and informal ways may subsequently be validated by a licensed training institution according to Article 40 of the Vocational Education and Training Act and ascertained with a certificate.

For effective work-based learning, several types of schemes could be developed:

- Work-related training schemes to fit between development of key competences and professional training.
- Work-related/“on-job” training, for quick updating/briefing for staff on new skills, techniques, technologies or processes, implemented in the company on an informal, almost instant, basis.
- Pre-employment work-related training schemes. These schemes could relate to increasing places for trainees in the companies, which helps new workers to gain work experience and be more prepared for their real job. These schemes also rely on simplifying the regulations for offering trainees places, and promotion of this idea amongst the companies.
- Work-related training schemes for better adaptability of the company. These schemes reflect the facts that in certain periods, each company has to update its production profile in order to

follow market trends. So instead of releasing the employees whose qualifications are no longer needed, and employing new people with the required qualifications, the company would proactively re-qualify current employees so that their skills correspond to the new requirements. Such a training scheme gives more flexibility to the company and in the same way more stability of the labour market.

- As a result, work-related training, singly or combined with other possible educational paths, leads to “lifelong employability” of the individual, because it keeps his skills updated to the latest work environment developments, both in the profession and in the key competencies of the individual.

New Legislation – brief summary

Almost all areas of education and training activities in Bulgaria are covered by legislative and normative acts. At the same time, nearly all Acts have been created without taking into account the philosophy and priorities of the LLL concept. A much better situation is evident in labour legislation, where the main principles of LLL are in coherence with the basic guidelines of employment policy. Another reason for LLL’s lack of visibility is its overlap with VET, or that between education and learning. Although VET is one of the main aspects of LLL, it is still seen as mainly involving general education, training in key competences, civic education, etc.