



European Secondary Heads Association

Magyarországi Középiskolai Igazgatók
Közhasznú Egyesülete

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Educational system in Hungary

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I. Description of Hungarian educational system

1. Education population and language of instruction

The population of the Republic of Hungary was 10,198,000 in 2001. The overwhelming majority (over 97%) of the population is Hungarian (Magyar, the official language is Hungarian. In the 2001/2002 school year, the number of people between 0 and 29 years of age was 4 036 000 (39.9% of the population). The number of children of compulsory school age was 1 360 000. The official language of instruction is Hungarian, but a number of ethnic and national minorities (e.g. German, Romanian, Slovenian, Serb and Croatian) have minority educational institutions with their own languages as first or second language of instruction at primary and secondary level of teaching. The provision of minority education - similarly to mainstream education - is the task of the maintainer, which, in most cases is the local government.

2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

Horizontally, the administrative responsibilities are shared between the Ministry of Education and other ministries (primarily the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Interior). Vertically, the administrative control is decentralized and the managing responsibility is shared among the central (national), the local (regional) and institutional levels.

The local governments administer pre-primary, primary and secondary education. The different establishments enjoy a fair degree of decision-making autonomy not only in terms of organization and functioning but also with regard to their budgets.

Most pupils attend public-sector schools, which are administered and organized by the public authorities, primarily the local governments. The financing of educational institutions is sector neutral. State and private institutions receive funding according to the same criteria.

3. Pre-primary education

This educational level is considered as a crucially important integrated part of the school system. It caters for children from 3 to 7 years of age. Participation in pre-primary education at this level (óvoda) is optional, except for the final year (beyond age 5), which is compulsory. Public-sector institutions may only charge for services additional to their basic tasks, including for example extra-curricular activities, meals, excursions, etc. In 2001/2002, 342 285 children attended nursery school. Currently, the attendance rate with regard to the age groups 3-5, is just above 86%. The average duration of participation of children aged 3-7 in pre-primary education is just over 3 years (3.3), which is the highest average value in Europe, reflecting the satisfaction of the Hungarian public with this area of educational services.

4. Compulsory full-time education

(a) Phases

Óvoda (pre-primary) - one preparatory year, compulsory (ISCED 0-1)	Age 5-6/7
Általános iskola (primary - single structure) (ISCED 1 + 2)	Age 6/7-14 (1st cycle: age 6-10; 2nd: age 10-14)
Gimnázium (general lower and upper secondary) (ISCED 2 + 3)	Age 10/12/14 - 18/19
Szakközépiskola - vocational secondary school (ISCED 3)	Age 14-18/19/20 (generally: 4 years)
Szakiskola[1] (C course) - vocational training school (ISCED 3)	Age 14-18 years (2+2 years)
Szakiskola[2] (A course / B course[3]) - remedial (ISCED 2) + vocational training school (ISCED 3)	Age 15/16-18/19 (1-2 + 2years)
Szakiskola[4] (D course) - post-secondary vocational course (ISCED 4)	Age 18-19/20 (1-2 years)

Education is compulsory up to the age of 18. Vocational studies may not be commenced before the age of 16, up to which pupils are to acquire fundamental education.

(b) Admissions criteria

Law imposes the provision of free compulsory education. Nevertheless, private-sector schools may charge fees. A declaration of school-readiness is required for admission to primary school. Schools are obliged to take in all acceptable pupils who live within the catchment area, but parents may seek admission for their children at any institution. Admission to upper secondary schools is based on the entrance procedures organised by the schools, and adhering to the guidelines set up by the Ministry of Education.

(c) Length of the school day/week/year

The school year comprises 185 days of teaching, traditionally, starting from the end of August/beginning of September to 31 August of the following year. As of 2004 there are three (approximately one-week period) school breaks in the autumn, the winter and in spring, with an additional 10-11 week summer break. There are five working days every week, the teaching lessons usually last 45 minutes. Law stipulates the maximum numbers of teaching lessons for the various grades.

(d) Class size/student grouping

In the school year of 2001-2002, the pupil/teacher ratio had the following pattern at the various levels of school education: 10.6 in kindergartens (óvoda), 10.5 in general schools (általános iskola) at primary and lower secondary levels, 13.3 (in general secondary schools - gimnázium) and 15.0 in vocational secondary schools (szakközépiskola). The average class size in kindergartens (óvoda) was 22.1, whereas in the general schools (általános iskola) it was 19.8. The regulations define the maximum number of pupils per class as 26 (grades 1-4), 30 (grades 5-8) and 35 (grades 9-13). The classes are mixed and are made up of pupils of the same age. Integrated education is compulsory as of September 2003 in all public educational institutions and mixed ability groups are set up in all schools.

(e) Curricular control and content

A three level structure comprising the National Core Curriculum (1995), the Frame Curricula (2000) and local curricula (institutional level) provide a regulatory framework for teachers to develop syllabi. Based on a central definition of each discipline, the schools and the local teaching staff can define and adopt local curricula and syllabi for each class and each subject. The National Core Curriculum is under revision at the moment. The revised National Core Curriculum will have the special feature of giving priority to the improvement of skills and abilities. The choice of teaching methods is discussed by the teachers, the parents and all stakeholders of each educational institution. The choice of textbooks is the responsibility of the teaching staff; however the Ministry of Education approves the list of eligible textbooks.

It is important to emphasize that the recent rapid changes in the curricular system are not yet implemented fully. At this moment there are three curricular systems in existence (in parallel at different levels and type of education) in Hungary: the old central curriculum system of 1978 (amended several times until 1995), the system based only on the National Core Curriculum and the system of Frame Curricula.

(f) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Pupils are assessed by the teachers throughout the school year (written and oral tests). In grade one, pupils in difficulty cannot be made to repeat the year. As from September 2004, the revised Act on Public education stipulates that all pupils must be assessed in written, individual analysis, expanding the traditional numeric (scale 1-5) marking framework. It is possible to make the pupil repeat a year at each grade, however, during the first 3 years it is only possible with the consent of the parent and no numeric marking is done. All schools are required to elaborate a comprehensive evaluation and assessment regulation based on the consensus of teachers, maintainers and parents.

5. Post-compulsory education; upper and post-secondary education

(a) Types of education

Gimnázium (general lower and upper secondary) (ISCED 2 + 3)	Age 10/12/14 - 18/19/20
Szakközépiskola - vocational secondary school (ISCED 3)	Age 14-18/19/20 (generally: 4 years)
Szakiskola[5] (C course) - vocational training school (ISCED 3)	Age 14-18 years (2+2years)
Szakiskola[6] (A course / B course[7]) - remedial (ISCED 2) + vocational training school (ISCED 3)	Age 15/16-18/19 (1-2 +2 years)
Szakiskola[8] (D course) - post-secondary vocational course (ISCED 4)	Age 18-19/20 (1-2years)

(b) Admissions criteria

Most upper secondary schools organise entrance examinations. Law imposes free education at upper secondary level. If a school wishes to include examinations in their admissions criteria in the 6 and 8-year Gimnázium pupils must participate in a centrally organised exam, in other schools only the dates of examinations are set by regulations.

(c) Curricular control and content

The three different curricular sets exist for Gimnázium, Szakközépiskola and Szakiskola. The requirements of Érettségi Vizsga (maturity exam) define the exit criteria for Gimnázium and the criteria of the given profession(s) define exit requirements for the vocational schools. In case of the vocational courses, only Szakközépiskola will provide (without extra years) possibility to advance to Érettségi (and consequently to Tertiary Education).

(d) Assessment, progression and qualifications

The arrangements for pupil assessment are identical to those in primary education. At the end of upper secondary courses in Gimnázium and Szakközépiskola pupils may pass the national secondary school leaving examination (érettségi). This certificate is a prerequisite for admission to higher education. Vocational schools (szakközépiskola) may also award a vocational qualifying certificate.

6. Higher education

(a) Types of institution

In Hungary, higher education institutions are the public and private/denominational universities (egyetemek) and colleges (főiskolák) that are accredited and formally recognised by the state. These are specialised and organise courses in their particular field of specialisation. The range of higher education institutions includes non-university institutions (főiskola), university level institutions (egyetem) and some institutions provide higher vocational training courses.

(b) Access

The secondary school leaving certificate (érettségi bizonyítvány) is required by all institutions for entrance to higher education. Certain higher education courses impose stricter selection criteria for admission. Additional criteria may be required (for example, a certificate in foreign languages, a specialisation, a qualification, etc.).

(c) Qualifications

Diplomas have a two-fold function and incorporate academic and vocational qualifications. Students who successfully complete non-university education courses in the főiskola (3 or 4 years) are awarded the főiskolai diploma. Universities and other university-level institutions award the egyetemi diploma to students who successfully complete a four to six-year course. A higher vocational qualification (felsőfokú szakképesítés) awarded at the end of 2 years of non-university vocational higher education to students who have passed the higher professional examination (felsőfokú szakvizsga).

7. Special needs

As the Hungarian special education services have a long institutionalised tradition (from the mid 19th century) there are separate institutions for the blind and for pupils with hearing impediments, physical and mental deficiencies in primary and lower secondary education. These institutions function as multiplier-training centres for the latest special educational methodologies and prepare specialists to introduce integrated educational and training modules. In the light of recent changes, integrated education is compulsory at all levels of school provision, with the exception of completely deaf, blind or semi-seriously, seriously mentally retarded pupils. A number of special education teacher training programmes are organised. After finishing general school, pupils with special needs may continue their studies in special vocational training schools as well.

8. Teachers

In 2001/2002 school year, the number of full time teachers in the public education sector was 162 149. Teachers who work in primary schools obtain their qualifications through a non-university higher education course lasting four-five years. Teachers at lower secondary level follow a four (five)-year training course. Teachers at upper secondary level obtain their qualifications through a general university course lasting four-five years, plus an additional year of general and professional training. Most teachers have civil servant status.

II. Ongoing Reforms and Topics of Debates in education

1. The general aims of educational policy in Hungary

Educational policy remains a priority field within the Government's programme. The Government regards educational policy as an essential tool for economic development, social cohesion and well-being. Hungary can only be successful in the future if a competitive and highly qualified labour force with modern knowledge and a capability of further improvement is present in the economy.

The priorities of the Government's educational policy

The success of future development greatly depends on how the Government will be able to harmonise the various lines of development within the different sub-sectors and to assert the principles that constitute the cornerstones of educational policy throughout the system. The main priorities are the following:

- The improvement of quality must become a cornerstone of Hungarian education;
- Equal opportunities must be provided for everyone through education;
- Education is a capital asset in a knowledge based economy and therefore one of the major prerequisites to economic development.

III. Objectives and measures in educational policy

1. Public education

- Raising the base remuneration by 50% in 2002 (including teachers working in non state maintained institutions and teachers of religion), dealing with bonuses as of 2004;
- Further improvements in the system of allowances (e.g. contribution to the cost of in-service training and books, 50% travel discount for public servants, 13th month salary, special promotion system, awards, grants for computer purchase at reduced price).
- Reducing the number of compulsory hours (through the withdrawal of the previous increase as of September 2002).
- Further development of the new system of in-service training for teachers.

- Further improvement of education management
 - Increasing the role of local decisions and ensuring the coherence of planning educational services at different levels of administration,
 - Strengthening the role of social and professional control in the preparation of educational policy decisions (National Public Education Council),
 - Modernizing vocational training and upgrading National Training Register,
 - Ensuring transparency, and stability in the school system,
- Revising the National Core Curriculum and strengthening basic skills and cross-curricular educational domains
- Developing the rules for a new, two-tier upper secondary school leaving examination
- Taking forward the Programme for the Improvement of Quality in Public Education
 - to establish educational resource centres and workshops in small regions
 - to provide support services for the self-assessment of schools.
- Strengthening core skills (as of 2003) by lengthening the phase of primary school education and extending the possibility of using primary school teachers until grades 5 or 6;
- Strengthening a child focused approach instead of a curriculum focused one (by reducing the study load and lexical knowledge and increasing personal and skills development);
- Strengthening the institutional system of educational and special educational services, facilitating the integration of children with special educational needs.
- Supporting disabled pupils (public foundation, in-service training), removing obstacles to movement from public institutions;
- Targeted programmes to help the schooling and social integration of Roma young people (scholarships, in-service training, grant-aid programmes);
- Reducing the drop-out rate of disadvantaged children in vocational schools, helping them learn a trade (vocational school development programme from 2000 to 2006, vocational secondary school development, training programmes with labour market focus).
- Bridging the digital gap in the society and establishing a framework for ICT-based education at all levels (SULINET-programme)
- Providing added funding and more time for foreign language teaching (VILÁG-Nyelv (World - Language) programme with strong support for related teacher training

- Open source initiative to gap the digital divide and support the entire teaching profession

2. Vocational training

In June 2003 a modified Act on Vocational training has been passed by Parliament. The vocational training as before shall be provided by schools is part of public education. Current policy measures and objectives include the following:

- The development of VET includes several objectives: modernization of vocational curricula, institutional building programs, the training of teaching staff, support for multiply disadvantaged students, raising the efficiency of the existing vocational and career orientation, guidance and counselling system.
- The modernization of content and qualification requirements according to the current needs of the labour market.
- The development of the vocational training infrastructure
 - Improving the material conditions of vocational training, the acquisition of modern educational technology, setting up students' workshops and offices to facilitate practical training.
- The development of the career orientation, guidance and counselling system
 - The objective is to create a national system of institutions and an IT base, continuing the professional training of staff involved in career orientation, guidance and counselling.
- The development of the network of vocational training institutions catering for the disadvantaged
 - It is important to close the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged young people by creating a second chance institutional framework for dropouts.

3. Higher education

Meeting the challenge of the EU-accession in 2004

The challenge of creating a knowledge-based society in a European accession context is constantly posing a set of new functions and related packages of requirements to the domain of Hungarian higher education. Hence, the reform initiatives of the Hungarian higher education administration is inseparable from the principles of the Bologna process: the overall objective of the current reforms is the access to the European Higher Education Area, through the provision of EU-harmonisation and EU-compatible higher educational services to the teachers and students at all higher education institutions.

Principle policy objectives include:

- transparency in the higher educational institutional framework and financing
- provision of the EU diploma-recognition principles
- provision of ECTS-based academic programming and tailor-made credit system in each and every higher educational course
- strengthening incentives for student mobility (both international and domestic, in geographic and academic dimensions)
- supporting quality management policies in the framework of European higher education cooperation
- enhanced co-operation with social partners and the representatives of the labour market (employers)
- the modernization of the content of education giving more focus to the interactive relations of education, research and the economy.
- as a result of the integration of higher education institutions, universities and colleges with several faculties have taken the place of the previous scattered institutional system. With this one of the intended goals of institutional integration, i.e. offering a wide range of academic branches for students has been achieved. A further goal is to diminish regional differences in the chance of participation in training.
- introducing transparency in the structure of training and a standard system of admission into higher education. Ensuring learning pathways which can be planned better as well as a flexible choice of specialisation through the completing the development of the ECTS-compatible credit system, which provides the possibility of both vertical and horizontal transition from one institution to another.
- creating a true normative financing system in higher education. Standardization of the management and administration within the institutions, creating an IT background.
- expanding the framework for the national students' loan system of low interest credit with various terms of expiration and methods of repayment.

4. Adult education and training

Within the new governmental structure the Ministry of Employment and Labour Affairs has taken over the responsibility for adult education and training outside the school sector from the Ministry of Education. The two ministries act together in the field of life long learning. Their aim is to create a comprehensive policy framework for different training measures in order to make life long learning reality for all.

[1] This new type of Szakiskola effectively replaces the former Szakmunkásképző Iskola. It consists of 2 years general studies and a 2-year vocational course. (Course 'C')

[2] The new type of remedial Szakiskola consists of a general (basic) remedial course of 1-2 years, and a short vocational course of 2 years. These schools mostly accept students who could not finish Általános Iskola, or have difficulties with basic skills (reading/writing/calculus).

[3] Course 'A' and 'B' differs only in the level at which they start remedial training. (for students of different level of extra basic education needs).

[4] Supplementary, post-secondary vocational course of 1 or 2 years organised in Szakiskola. (Course 'D')

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[7] Course 'A' and 'B' differs only in the level at which they start remedial training. (for students of different level of extra basic education needs), while Course 'C' is the type mentioned in footnote 4.

[8] Supplementary, post-secondary vocational course of 1 or 2 years organised in Szakiskola. (Course 'D')