

Education in Bulgaria

Education in Bulgaria is overseen by the Ministry of Education and Science. Since 2012, compulsory education includes two years of preschool education (usually starting at age 5), before children start primary school. Education is compulsory until age of 16. Education at state-owned schools is free of charge, except for the higher education schools, colleges and universities.

Structure of the educational system

The system consists of four levels:

Pre-primary education

Pre-primary education (preschool education) embraces children between 3 and 6/7 years old, who attend kindergarten optionally, with the requirement that prior to starting school, children must attend two years of pre-school education. These two years of mandatory pre-school education may be attended either at kindergarten or in preparatory groups at primary schools.

Elementary education

Elementary education (grades 1 - 7) includes primary school (grades 1 - 4) and junior high school/ middle school (grades 5 - 7). Children usually start primary education at age 7, but may be start from age 6 upon their parents' request. Certificate for Primary Education and Certificate for Elementary Education are obtained upon successful completion of grade 4 and 7 respectively. High schools use grades from the Certificate for Elementary Education as a major admissions criterion.

Secondary education

Secondary education comprises selective/comprehensive high schools and vocational school. The admission to comprehensive schools is based upon grades from entry exams, usually in literature and/or mathematics as well as grades in junior high school. Students can enroll in high school after the successful completion of grades 7 or 8. Usually, those who want to study languages, mathematics, or informatics in-depth apply to high school after 7th grade. Students graduating from high-school must take high school exit exams in Bulgarian language.

Higher education

The types of higher education institutions are Universities, Colleges and Specialized Higher Schools. Universities, as in most countries worldwide, have three stages: Bachelor's (undergraduate), Master's (graduate), and Doctoral degrees. Undergraduate stage lasts for at least four years and graduate stage lasts for five years after completion of secondary education or one year after obtaining a bachelor's degree. The third stage of higher education results in obtaining a Ph.D. Degree. Specialized higher schools offer degrees in one or more areas of science, arts, sports, and defense. Usually, the names of these institutions indicate the area of specialization. Colleges are former semi-higher institutes. Some of them are part of universities and use their equipment and facilities.

Structure and curricula of the school year

The curriculum of Bulgarian Educational system focuses on eight main subjects: Bulgarian language and literature, foreign languages, mathematics, information technologies, social sciences and civics, natural sciences and ecology, music and art, physical education and sports. The school year starts on September 15 and ends in May or June, depending on the grade level of the students. The school year is divided into two terms with Christmas, Easter and Summer holidays. Students usually spend half a day in school; with many schools operating in "shifts": either in the morning or in the afternoon, although younger students usually study in the morning. In some elementary schools there is the option of extended care, where students spend the other half of the day in school preparing their homework under the supervision of a teacher, upon the request of parents.

Grading

The grading system is based on numerals, where 6 is the highest and 2 is the lowest grade a student can obtain, where 6 is *excellent*, 5 is *very good*, 4 is *good*, 3 is *satisfactory*, and 2 is *poor*.