

# **The qualification and carrier development of Bulgarian teachers – current status, issues, perspectives**

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## **1. Introduction**

During the last years and especially after the country has joined the European Union the Government of Bulgaria is implementing a series of reforms in the field of education with a special focus on teachers' qualification and carrier development. In October 2004 the National Pedagogical Centre (NPC) was created as an operating body attached to the Minister of education and science with main responsibilities – pedagogical aid and consultation of students, teachers and parents concerning the qualification of pedagogical staff, retaining of students in schools, prevention from dropping out from school and professional orientation and consultation. The NPC *inherited* a number of different institutions related to teacher training. It organises short-term qualification events and represents a network of 28 Regional Pedagogical Centres (RPC's), with the headquarters in Sofia. The NPC became fully operational in April 2005 and, in these two years, has been able to provide training in some priority areas to the entire teaching body in the country (for instance, 100,000 teachers have received training in ICTs).

In parallel, the MES created a new Institute of Directors in November 2006, devoted to the training needs of school directors, inspectors and other education administrators at the local and regional levels. Finally, and starting earlier in 2007, the MES presented an interim plan to introduce "differentiated pay" to teachers according to the evaluation of their performance. The 2007 budget allocated 15 million Bulgarian Leva for this purpose and an ad-hoc working group with representatives from all key stakeholders agreed on a set of criteria to evaluation teacher performance. A draft teacher evaluation card has been agreed and tried out in April and May 2007 with a group of 25 schools.

Taken together, these developments signal major changes in the teacher career development and in-service teacher training policy framework. In fact, the MES has started preliminary work on a draft strategy document in this regard. The goal is for a new teacher qualification/career development plan to be in place and operational at the beginning of the 2008/09 school year. The strategy should be in line with the draft requirements of the European Qualification Framework (EQF), which is still under debate in Brussels and should at least include: (1) a system for teacher training (qualification and continuous training), and (2) performance evaluation that both lead to (3) career development for teachers and is reflected in (4) differentiated pay.

## **2. European context and policies in the field of teacher education and professional development**

### **2.1. The European policy**

The Lisbon European Council in March 2000 stressed that people are Europe's main asset and that "investing in people ... will be crucial both to Europe's place in the knowledge economy and for ensuring that the emergence of this new economy does not compound the existing social problems."

The *Joint Report on Progress Towards the Lisbon Objectives in the Fields of Education and Training*<sup>1</sup> by the Commission and Council (Council of the European Union, 2004) offered a set of *common European principles designed to improve the competences and qualifications of teachers and trainers*. Specifically, it called for Member States to go further in developing *teachers' pedagogic professional*

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/jir\\_council\\_final.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/jir_council_final.pdf)

*development, reflective practice and research, to promote the status and recognition of the teaching profession and to support the professionalisation of teaching*<sup>2</sup>.

The Council in November 2006 stated that 'the motivation, skills and competences of teachers, trainers, other teaching staff and guidance and welfare services, as well as the quality of school leadership, are key factors in achieving high quality learning outcomes' and that 'The efforts of teaching staff should be supported by *continuous professional development and by good cooperation with parents, pupil welfare services and the wider community*'.<sup>3</sup>

“Ensuring a high quality of Teacher Education is also important, of course, to secure sound management of national resources and good value for money: approximately two thirds of expenditure on schools is allocated to teacher remuneration”<sup>4</sup>.

In August 2007 the European Commission (EC) announced proposals to improve the quality of teacher training in the European Union (EU), stating that *high-quality teaching is a prerequisite for high-quality education and training and a powerful determinant of Europe’s long-term competitiveness and capacity to create more jobs and growth*.<sup>5</sup> In a press release accompanying its Communication, Ján Figel, the European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth stated that

*Better teaching and learning are critical for the EU’s long-term competitiveness, since a highly educated workforce is a more efficient workforce. I believe we need to ensure that the EU has high-quality teachers if the Member States’ education reforms are to be a success. However, . . . there are worrying developments across the EU, with most Member States reporting shortfalls in teachers’ skills, and difficulties in updating them.*

It is not only the need to make Europe more competitive in the new knowledge-based economic environment that creates the urgency for fundamental changes in teacher education and training. The main motivating factors arise from the economic and social changes themselves. Their dynamism imposes still newer and higher requirements on the teaching profession.

In the Commission’s Report “Improving the Quality of Teacher Education,” the changing roles of and requirements on today’s teachers are summarised as follows:

- To help young people become fully autonomous learners by acquiring key skills, rather than memorising information;
- To develop more collaborative and constructive approaches to learning;
- To be facilitators and classroom managers rather than ex-cathedra trainers;
- To act in classrooms which contain a more heterogeneous mix of young people from different backgrounds and with different levels of ability and disability.
- To use the opportunities offered by new technologies and to respond to the demand for individualised learning;
- To take on additional decision-taking or managerial tasks consequent upon increased school autonomy.

To respond to these changes and resulted from them demands the paper underlines: “teachers are required not only to acquire new knowledge and skills but also to develop them continuously. To equip the teaching body with skills and competences for its new roles, it is necessary to have both *high-quality initial teacher education and a coherent process of continuous professional development* keeping teachers up to date with the skills required in the knowledge based society.”

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<sup>2</sup> IP/07/1210, 6 August 2007

<sup>3</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/jir\\_council\\_final.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/jir_council_final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> OECD report Teachers matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers, 2005; [www.oecd.edu/teacherpolicy](http://www.oecd.edu/teacherpolicy)

<sup>5</sup> Council of the European Union: Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament Improving the Quality of Teacher Education, COM (2007) August 2007

Besides the traditional knowledge, skills and competences the teachers are confided with new roles and responsibilities. They are expected „to extend the boundaries of professional knowledge through a commitment to reflective practice, through research, and through a systematic engagement in continuous professional development from the beginning to the end of their careers.” This is why functions and responsibilities are confided to the systems of education and training for teachers which need to provide the necessary opportunities for the development of these competences.

## 2.2 Research on EU Member States practices

*Based on different research findings<sup>6</sup> the Commission comes to the conclusion that in EU member states there are still skills shortages and limited training provision.*

“However, systems for Teacher Education are not always well equipped to meet these new demands.” In a recent OECD survey, almost all countries report:

- shortfalls in teaching skills, and difficulties in updating teachers’ skills. Shortages relate especially to a lack of competence to deal with new developments in education (including individualised learning, preparing pupils for autonomous learning, dealing with heterogeneous classrooms, preparing learners to make the most of the ICT, and so on).
- In many Member States there is little systematic coordination between different elements of teacher education, leading to a lack of coherence and continuity, especially between a teacher's initial professional education and subsequent induction, in-service training and professional development; nor are these processes often linked to school development and improvement, or to educational research.
- Incentives for teachers to carry on updating their skills throughout their professional lives are weak.
- Investment in the continuous training and development of the teaching workforce is low across the European Union and the amount of in-service training available to practicing teachers is limited.
- In-service training for teachers is compulsory in only eleven Member States; teachers are not explicitly obliged to undertake it in all of these states<sup>16</sup>. Where it exists, training generally amounts to less than 20 hours per year. There is no Member State in which the minimum compulsory training exceeds five days per year, and in most countries only three days of training per year is compulsory. Furthermore, the fact that in-service training may be compulsory says little about actual participation rates.
- As regards new teachers, only half of the countries in Europe offer new teachers any systematic kind of support (e.g. induction, training, mentoring) in their first years of teaching.
- Explicit frameworks to assist teachers who experience difficulties in performing their duties adequately exist in only one third of countries.

Based on the research analysis and its close work with all Member States through different working groups and Community Programmes the Commission comes to a conclusion that the “The challenges facing the teaching profession are, in essence, common across the European Union. It is possible to arrive at a shared analysis of the issues and a shared vision of the kinds of skills that teachers require.” The vision of a European teaching profession shapes the *Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications*<sup>7</sup>, written on the basis of the experience of teachers and teacher educators across Europe and validated by stakeholders.

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<sup>6</sup> *Teachers Matter*, OECD 2005; *Key data on Education in Europe 2005*, Eurydice, ISBN 92-894-9422-0; <http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/showPresentation?pubid=052EN>

<sup>7</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/testingconf\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/testingconf_en.html)

### 2.3 Characteristics of teaching profession and policy steps for improvement of the quality of Teacher education

- It is **well-qualified** profession: all teachers are graduates from higher education institutions (and those working in the field of initial vocational education are highly qualified in their professional area and have a suitable pedagogical qualification). Every teacher has extensive subject knowledge, a good knowledge of pedagogy, the skills and competences required to guide and support learners, and an understanding of the social and cultural dimension of education.
- It is a profession of **lifelong learners**: teachers are supported to continue their professional development throughout their careers. They and their employers recognise the importance of acquiring new knowledge, and are able to innovate and use evidence to inform their work. They should be encouraged to participate actively in professional development, which can include periods of time spent outside the education sector, and this should be recognized and rewarded in their own system.
- It is a **mobile** profession: mobility is a central component of initial and continuing teacher education programmes. Teachers are encouraged to work or study in other European countries for professional development purposes. Those who do so should have their status recognized in the host country. There should be also an opportunity for mobility for different levels of education and towards different professions within the education sector.
- It is a profession based on **partnership**: teacher education institutions organise their work collaboratively in partnership with schools, local work environments, work-based training providers and other stakeholders. Higher education institutions need to ensure that their teaching benefits from knowledge of current practice.<sup>8</sup>

“The Commission believes – says the Communication - that in line with these principles *policy steps* could be addressed to improve the quality of Teacher Education in the European Union.”

*The characteristics (common principles) of the teaching profession and the potential of a particular educational system to facilitate and ensure their development are a good basis for the analysis of the legal framework for teacher certification, qualification and career development of any EU Member states including Bulgaria. This will be the basis of our critical analysis of the existing legal system (legislation on teacher qualification and career development) as well as for the recommendations for its improvement in accordance with the EU policy and requirements.*

### 2.4. European Qualification Framework

The *European Qualification Framework* (EQF) is a common European reference framework which links countries' qualifications systems together, acting as a translation device to make qualifications more readable. It has two principal aims:

1. to promote citizens' mobility between countries;
2. to facilitate their lifelong learning.

The EQF was formally adopted by the European Council on 14 February 2008, following its adoption in October 2007 by the European Parliament. It is expected that it will be co-signed by the Presidents of the EP and Council in 2008. At the national level, the EQF will, and is indeed already doing this, promote the development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs). Qualifications frameworks promote lifelong learning by, for example, making it easier for people to move between different types of education and training institution, for example between higher education and vocational education and training. As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the EQF encompasses general and adult education, vocational education and training, as well as higher education. It applies to all types of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training.

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<sup>8</sup> These common principles are developed in more detail in the document Common European Principles for Teacher' Competences and Qualifications

The core of the EQF is its *eight reference levels* describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do - their 'learning outcomes' - regardless of where a particular qualification was acquired. The EQF reference levels therefore shift the focus away from the traditional approach, which emphasises learning inputs (length of a learning experience, type of institution). Shifting the focus to learning outcomes:

- supports a better match between the needs of the labour market (for knowledge, skills and competences) and education and training provisions;
- facilitates the validation of non-formal and informal learning
- facilitates the transfer and use of qualifications across different countries and education and training systems.

The EQF foresees that Member States relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010 and that their qualifications contain a reference to the EQF by 2012. It will therefore enable individuals and employers to use the EQF as a reference tool to compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems, for example vocational training and higher education. The EQF is therefore an example of a common European reference developed in close cooperation with the countries and for their citizens' benefit.

### **3. The Bulgarian context**

The period of transition towards market economy brought sufficient changes in all sectors of the political, economical and social life in Bulgaria including the professional and social status of the Bulgarian teacher. Unfortunately there has not been only a positive direction. This real picture is not only depicted due to reasons, which are a consequence of the educational situation but mainly due to reasons of political and economical nature.

During the period of transition in the regulatory framework for teacher qualification and career development co-exist two kinds of documents: the first group has been developed to reflect and regulate a social and economical reality of the post-socialist society and economy and the period of transition to market economy and democracy. The second group of documents represent recently developed Programmes and Strategies and which try to introduce the key ideas of setting up a new system in accordance with the current realities. Among these new realities of key importance are the transition to knowledge based market economy and democracy, and the country membership in the European Union. That first group of regulatory documents are often described as old-fashioned and contradictory to the current situation and the necessity of its change is among the first priorities of the Government. Object of the analysis are two types of documents:

1. Laws, decrees, regulations, instructions, related to the old educational system but still in use, on one hand
2. The recently developed documents – mainly programmes and strategies – which draw the key directions of the development in the field of teachers qualification and career development, but are still not operationalised at the level of regulatory framework.

#### **3.1. Existing laws, decrees, regulations, instructions**

The first group is presented by the following documents:

- The National law of education where the article 39, paragraph 2 focuses on the professional preparation of teachers and states that: 1) A teacher can be a citizen, acquired a teachers' certificate"; 2) Teachers' preparations take place at the institutions for higher education; and 3) Teachers and directors are provided with opportunities for the development of their qualifications.
- The Government Regulation №162 from 17 April 1997 - Requirements for the acquisition of the qualification "teacher".

- The Regulation No 5 from December 1996 – for in-service teacher qualification and obtaining a qualification degree.
- Exemplary job descriptions for teachers and other pedagogical staff at school.

Some issues rising from the analysis of the above-mentioned documents in the light of the EU principles *for improvement of the quality of Teacher education*:

A. Teaching is *well-qualified* profession: all teachers are graduates from higher education institutions. Every teacher has extensive subject knowledge, a good knowledge of pedagogy, the skills and competences required to guide and support learners, and an understanding of the social and cultural dimension of education.

- The abovementioned documents regulating teacher certification and the acquisition of qualification degrees fail to define or even discuss the specific knowledge, skills and competences that teachers will acquire in the course of their education. There is no concreteness regarding the subject area or concerning pedagogy, student support, the social and cultural dimensions of education. The acquisition of initial teaching qualification and an educational degree merely follows upon attending a given number of teaching hours and taking a content-based exam, often an oral exam based on a questionnaire. In the years of socialism all the sciences and especially the social ones were assumed to have a single source, which was the thinking of their founders. Therefore, all universities taught, for example, one and the same Theory of Education or any of the other courses which form part of the teaching qualification curriculum. This, to a certain extent, ensured that future teachers received a more or less similar education. But when knowledge is acquired in a democratic and pluralistic environment, the curriculum and the teaching hours are not a sufficient basis of quality assurance in teacher education. Moreover, when the whole emphasis falls on academic content and not on its outcomes – knowledge, skills and competences – the result is that the same transmission model gets reproduced in the school practice.
- The existing standard job descriptions for the various positions on the school teaching staff show an effort to place the teacher's chief functions under a sort of system in the shape of a list of competences (it is worth noting that they bear a close resemblance to the teaching qualification standards in Britain). However, the regulative function of these job descriptions is difficult to determine, either in the designing of teacher education and qualification programmes or in the evaluation and remuneration of working teachers. In other words, there is no clear connection between this competences-based document and the other non-competences-based documents in the regulative framework (the two Regulations for teacher certification and for further teacher qualification). These standard job descriptions need to be: a) brought *up-to-date* with regard to the new areas of competences, roles and responsibilities as formulated in the EU documents; b) their *role as a standard* in teacher certification and further teacher qualification must be *given legal status*, and c) their role as *instruments of evaluating* the work done by teachers, as well as of *determining each teacher's pay*.
- One result of the *absence of standards in teacher certification and qualification* (in terms of knowledge, skills and competences) is that beginner teachers go into the school system differently equipped for the job, depending on the quality of teacher education at the university they graduated from. A contributing factor here is the *absence of a quality assurance system for the evaluation of teacher certification and qualification programmes*. The normative framework in force at present submits the quality assurance of initial teacher education and in-service qualification to the higher education institutions themselves (internal evaluation) or to the National Accreditation Agency (external evaluation). It is not in the interest of the former to place

the quality of the education they themselves offer under any doubt, while the latter evaluates the higher education institutions according to criteria and requirements that have nothing to do with the specifics of the teacher education and profession. Nor is the issue of quality assurance and control in teacher education and qualification a matter of discussion on the level of normative documents, and so the role of the state through the Ministry of Education and Science and its inspecting organs remains unspecified.

- Because the education and evaluation of students and in-service teachers is not based on concrete, measurable and verifiable competences, their level of professional competence is not commensurable either in the Bulgarian or in the European educational context.
- Another consequence of the lack of standards is that the other forms of qualification described in the “Regulation No 5 – Conditions for further development of teacher’s qualification” such as seminars, workshops, practicum’s, schools, group discussion etc. – don’t lead to any kind of recognition and promotions although they may contribute more for the quality of teaching than the training for obtaining a qualification degree.
- The variety of the quality in further qualification (in-service training) that doesn’t lead to obtaining of a professional-qualification degree. It is offered by a variety of providers such as government organizations (NPC), regional (RPC), institutional level and sometimes NGO’s, and there is not a body for the quality control .
- The normative framework creates a monopoly over the market of education services since it authorizes “the higher education institutions which comply with the requirements of the Higher Education Law” to offer education leading to the initial professional qualification of “teacher” and the specialised In-Service Teacher Training Institutes (Bulgaria has three) to offer continuing education enabling teachers to obtain further degrees of professional qualification. This, combined with the lack of standards (in terms of knowledge, skills and competences), makes it impossible to apply one of the fundamental principles of the market economy: improving the quality of education services through competition, especially in the area of professional qualification services. One significant consequence of the legally sanctioned monopolisation of the market, together with the lack of standards, is that it is impossible to apply the European Commission’s recommendation for the recognition of competences acquired by means of non-formal and informal education.
- The legislative basis in its present state does not stimulate the connection between the university (institution)-acquired education of students and in-service teachers with the specific needs of the school and the school educators. This education is too academic and disconnected from the educational realities. One reason is that the normative documents fail to stimulate this connection to the necessary degree and do not relate the results of the education with the practical results in the school.

B. It is a profession of *lifelong learners*: teachers are supported to continue their professional development throughout their careers in formal, non-formal and informal ways. They and their employers recognise the importance of acquiring new knowledge, and are able to innovate and use evidence to inform their work. They should be encouraged to participate actively in professional development, which can include periods of time spent outside the education sector, and this should be recognized and rewarded in their own system.

- Neither Regulation – for the acquisition of initial teacher qualification and for further teacher qualification – can serve as the normative basis for meeting one of the European Commission’s chief requirements – to stimulate continuing professional development through formal, informal and non-formal education. The present education and qualification system strictly defines the

places and the means of obtaining certification and qualification. An obstacle to the implementation of the idea to make use of all forms of improving the quality of educational work is, as already stated, the absence of a system standardizing teacher certification and relating these standards to further teacher qualification.

- In its present state, the normative framework not only fails to stimulate educators' professional development by not acknowledging experience outside the education system but places obstacles before the realization of such a goal. To give an example, when applying for a program leading to a qualification degree, the candidate must, among other requirements, have been in service for 4 consecutive years.
- The two best-known means of recognising the value of knowledge and competence acquired through lifelong learning (in any of its forms) are promotion and a higher pay. Under the existing system determining the conditions for promoting teachers and the amount they are paid for their work, there are no opportunities for an internal ranking of educators' staff positions. Although the first steps towards introducing differential pay are now being taken, the one qualification-related criterion still applied in raising a teacher's salary takes account only of professional qualification degrees acquired in an academic setting within the specialized institutions.

C. It is a *mobile* profession: mobility is a central component of initial and continuing teacher education programmes. Teachers are encouraged to work or study in other European countries for professional development purposes. Those who do so should have their status recognized in the host country. There should be also an opportunity for mobility for different levels of education and towards different professions within the education sector.

- Now existing regulatory framework doesn't not create any opportunities for teachers' mobility mainly due to a lack of standards as a bases for make their leels of qualification comparable nationally and internationally.
- The content of teacher education, as described in Regulation No 162, is another serious obstacle to teacher mobility. It does not provide for any serious foreign language education and training of *all* future teachers. In addition, the development of skills in using information and communication technology is allocated a scarce 15 teaching hours (minimum) in a course which goes under the title "Audio-Visual and Information Technology" – an old-fashioned name which in itself is an indicator of old-fashioned content.
- Internal mobility within the education system is also given little provision in the normative framework. It doesn't legalize the part-time teaching position (with half or other proportions of the teaching load), which is not the same as hiring teachers for a given number of teaching hours. This makes it impossible for teachers to be mobile within the system and to combine various professional activities, which could improve the quality of their teaching.

D. It is a profession based *on partnership*: teacher education institutions organise their work collaboratively in partnership with schools, local work environments, work-based training providers and other stakeholders. Higher education institutions need to ensure that their teaching benefits from knowledge of current practice.

- The only legal provision for the collaboration between the higher education institutions engaged in teacher education on the one hand, and schools on the other, is made in the requirement included in Regulation No 162 for a total of 150 hours of various kinds of practice in schools. In Regulation No 5, however, this connection is already blurred in that the acquisition of only some qualification degrees is related to the teacher's performance at school. As for partnership between teacher education institutions and the other stakeholders, it is in no way subject to specification in the existing regulative documentation.



- One consequence of the absence of regulation in and requirement for stronger collaboration between universities and teacher education institutions on the one hand, and schools and other stakeholders on the other, is that teacher education and qualification remain disconnected from the current practice and the needs of schools, teachers, local communities, employers, etc.

### **3.2.Recent Programmes and Strategies**

The second group of state legislative documentation charting the development of secondary education and in-service teacher qualification and career development comprises the National Programme for the Development of Secondary and Pre-school Education 2006 – 2015 and Decision No 541 of the Council of Ministers on the setting-up of a national programme for introducing differential teacher pay (August 2007).

A key policy document shaping the strategy of the Government in Secondary education for the next years is the “*National programme for the development of the secondary and pre-school education (2006 – 2015 y.)*”. Special attention in this programme is paid to the new teachers’ status and the main directions for its improvement. The accent in one of its parts - “Promoting the teacher’s prestige and social status”, is put on the qualification of the in-service teachers and their career development. An introduction of a “career development system” linked to “the teacher’s pay system” aiming at the development of “competition among teachers and increase of their motivation for participation in the educational process” is envisaged. It is stated, “Raising the teachers’ qualification plays an important role for the introduction of quality insurance and evaluation system of teachers’ performance, which for its part will turn into a basis for the new model of differentiated pay of teachers”. The main aim, says the Programme, is that the teachers payment is a function of her/his career development on one hand, and the achievements of her/his students, on the other.

It is also stated that some of the reasons for the low status of the profession ‘teacher’ are “the disintegration of the society and its values as well as in the regulatory systems, a lack of a direct interrelation between the level of one’s education and the success in her/his life and career”. It is also recognised that this situation reflects on teachers’ motivation and the quality of their performance in the classroom. The Ministry admits that one serious issue in this context is the lack of adequate payment and reward as well as a system for career development and qualification.

In the context of the Government strategy to link the teachers’ qualification and performance to the differentiated pay and career development the necessity of the quality control system for their preparation and qualification increases significantly. The recent national teachers’ strike has shown how sensitive are the teachers as well as the society as a whole to the volume of teachers pay and the new strategy of differentiated pay. This is why the developing of such system based on standards for teachers’ knowledge, skills and competences and linked to the Common European Principles for Teacher’s Competences and the European Qualification Framework is absolutely necessary. This will shape the framework of the career system in a specific for both “horizontal career development” – junior teacher, teacher, senior teacher, chief teacher and teacher-methodologist, and “vertical career development” – i.e. management positions in the educational system.