



ACTIVITY REPORT

*By the Ministry of Education and Science
September 2005 – August 2008*



Three years of this government's mandate have passed. The third one was the most difficult, in particular for the school education system where tasks were many and not easy, and the expectations of education process actors - inflated and not always synonymous. This was the year of the first compulsory secondary school-leaving examination - Matura, of delegated school budgets implementation, the year of the longest strike of Bulgarian teachers. Yet these twelve months were also a most important period in many aspects. Education became a topic of serious and concerned discussions, which highlighted the main challenges for the system. While the first two years were a period of outlining priorities and making first steps towards achievement of the goals set, the third twelve months were a time of key changes which have marked the development of school education for years ahead. The good point is that the system accepted smoothly and met responsibly the important steps that have been taken.

In the last year of this government's mandate, the team of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) has the ambition to consolidate achievements and build on them so that the education process actors feel the first positive effects of the changes. Major focal points will include passing of a new law in the field of school and pre-school education, formulation of a clear long-term vision for development of research in Bulgaria, and building of a dynamic career development model for the Bulgarian system of tertiary education and science.

SCHOOL EDUCATION

1. National Program for Development of School and Pre-school Education (2006-2015)

On 7 June 2006, the National Assembly passed the National Program for Development of School and Pre-school Education (2006-2015), which was developed by MES and approved by the Council of Ministers. For the first time a programming document setting out the main principles and measures for system's development in the next 10 years has been passed. As set out in the program, every year on 1 October the Minister of Education and Science shall introduce in the National Assembly a report on National Strategy's implementation in the previous year and on the main measures to be implemented in the next school year. The two reports submitted hereto have been discussed in the parliamentary Education and Science Commission. The third program implementation report will also be delivered on schedule.

2. Improving school education financing mechanisms and enhancing cost efficiency

2.1. Introducing a unified per student cost standard

From 1 January 2007, all state and municipal schools, kindergartens and service units are financed on basis of unified per student cost standards. The standard is unified but also

differentiated in order to take account of the objective geographic and demographic characteristics, and municipalities are grouped into four categories. In 2007, the average standard was set at BGN 988.

From 1 January 2008, following negotiations with the social partners, the unified standard was increased to an average of BGN 1157. A proposal for increase of the standard from 1 July 2008 to an average of BGN 1266 is under coordination with the ministries.

In 2009, depending on the budget allocations for education, the standard per child/student should go above BGN 1400.

2.2. Introducing a delegated budgets system

The delegated budgets system is the second key component of the new school education financing model. In 2007, financing authorities applied the system on an optional basis and MES encouraged through various measures its wider implementation in schools. At end of 2007, over 600 municipal schools in 45 municipalities, as well as all state schools financed from the MES budget (500) operate delegated budgets.

From 1 January 2008, the system is implemented in all 3062 state and municipal schools.

The delegated budget enhances director's financial independence in school's management. He is given the powers of a second level spending unit, the right to make compensated changes of the revenues and expenditure plan, to manage school's funds, to determine individual remunerations, teachers' workload and the number of students in groups and classes, as well as to decide alone the personnel strength.

The following changes have been undertaken towards ensuring proper introduction and implementation of the system and efficient management of delegated budgets:

- Pursuant to the 2008 State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria Act (SBA), the municipalities have developed formulas for allocation to the schools of the funds received on basis of the unified standards. The municipalities are obliged to allocate not less than 80% of the funds on basis of the unified standards and the other 20% they can distribute, taking account of the objective factors for inequalities in the access to education. To help the municipalities, MES and MF have prepared guidance documents and other materials for development of the formulas.
- MES has prepared and delivered to directors a manual for introduction, operation, assessment and control of delegated budgets in the education system.
- An assessment of delegated budgets implementation has been made in fulfilment of the 2008 SBA and in accordance with the criteria approved by the Council of Ministers. Results show that over 97% of the municipalities have fulfilled properly the requirements of the law. An additional amount of BGN 21 m was allocated to these municipalities as an incentive for proper system implementation.

- The Institute of School Directors provided training on delegated budgets management to all directors of state and municipal schools.
A major task for MES in 2009 is to contribute for the sustainability and irreversibility of the delegated budgets system in schools by making system's positive effects felt by directors and teachers.

2.3. A right to carry over balance

As agreed with the social partners during teachers' strike, a possibility for state and municipal schools to retain and include in their next year budget the excess of revenues over expenditures at the end of the previous budget year was included in the 2008 SBA. This measure encourages efficient management of budget funds and makes it possible to keep management effects for those to whom funds were initially allocated.

2.4. Program-based financing of the school education system

Owing to the serious system optimization and the savings made, in 2007 we managed for the first time to allocate BGN 171 m for financing of school education programs, while not increasing the budget for education as a percentage of GDP (these are almost 75% of the absolute increase of expenditure on education in 2007). These processes were not easy ones, but thanks to the assistance and understanding of education process actors, we can now boast of good results – the funds were spent for achievement of specific goals along 14 lines of action. In 2007, MES prepared the following programs, which the Council of Ministers approved:

- Consolidation of the school network (BGN 34 m);
- Modernization of the resource base of schools (BGN 22.5 m);
- The school – a student territory (BGN 12 m);
- Qualification (BGN 7 m);
- ICT in school (BGN 32.5 m);
- Energy efficiency (BGN 15.5 m);
- Fuller outreach of children and students in compulsory schooling age (BGN 30.4 m);
- Differentiated pay (BGN 15 m).

These programs made it possible for schools to prepare projects and apply for financing of certain activities, which could hardly be implemented with the funds from the maintenance subsidy.

In 2008, the funds for national development of school education programs were increased to BGN 221 m (almost 30% up on the 2007 amount).

A new program “Introduction of a national standardized external assessment system” (BGN 4.8 m) was approved in addition to 2007 program updates.

In order to better meet the different needs and capacities of municipalities, the module “Providing breakfast and milk to all I – IV grade students” of the program “Fuller outreach of children and students in compulsory schooling age” was decentralized. The

principle of funding projects under the program “Modernization of the resource base of schools” was changed for municipal schools. In these schools, projects will be implemented within the program “Co-financing of municipal investment projects targeting improvement of the resource base of schools” (BGN 10 m).

3. Introducing the components of a national external assessment system

The first components of a national external assessment system were introduced in the period 2005-2007:

- National external assessment after IV grade was first introduced in 2007.
- The examinations after VII grade were organized for the first time in a test format. To replenish the pool of test examination tasks, MES has organized on a monthly basis national competitions for compiling tests and test questions on Bulgarian language and literature and Mathematics with the participation of teachers and students from all schools. The first national test solving competition for VII graders was organized.
- State school-leaving examination (Matura) was piloted in April 2007 pursuant to the requirements of the Higher Education Act. Five percent of the XII grade students took part in the pilot Matura. It was organized in a test format.

The external assessment system was developed further in 2008:

- An external assessment after IV grade was carried out again and the knowledge and skills of students who have completed V grade were tested for the first time. Like in the past year, results had no effect on students’ marks but provided a good and objective measure of the level of achievement of state educational requirements and contributed for the implementation of a more efficient educational policy. The external assessment carried out in the school year 2007/2008 made it possible to follow students’ achievements in two consecutive IV grades. In the next year, the scope of external assessment will be extended to cover VI grade students.
- For a second year running, the examination after VII grade was in a test format. In the past three years, MES pursued a consistent policy targeting a wider choice of schools and forms of learning for students. It is manifested in the increased planned number of students to be admitted on basis of examinations after VII grade. This number was increased as follows: in 2006 – 26 000 students, 1000 classes; in 2007 – 27 560 students, 1060 classes; in 2008 – 33 587 students, 1198 classes.
- The second national test solving competition for VII graders was organized. For the first time the three top ranking students in the national round of the competition were given the option to use their results as an examination mark for the respective subject and not sit for an entry exam.
- At the end of the school year 2007/2008, for the first time in decades, school-leaving exams (Matura) were organized for all students completing XII grade. The Matura was carried out following serious preparatory work, including an information campaign:

- On a request by the Minister of Education and Science the tertiary education institutions announced as early as February their decision concerning the admittance to tertiary education institutions on basis of the Matura examination marks. A total of 41 tertiary education institutions accepted the Matura, including 36 which acknowledged Matura examination marks as university entry examination for certain specializations and 5 included these marks only as a component of the final ranking score. Information about the specializations and the method of recognition of Matura results was published on the Matura site.
- The National Assembly passed amendments to the Law on Public Education aimed at improving the regulation of the secondary school-leaving examination and ensuring its implementation.
- Experts provided detailed information on the secondary school-leaving examination to parents and students during reception days and hours in the regional inspectorates of education.
- MES opened a hotline where parents and students can ask questions about the Matura and get information and assistance from ministerial experts.
- A special information site integrating the Matura information has been launched (www.zamaturite.bg).
- Test compiling competitions for all 15 Matura school subjects were organized for teachers and students.
- All schools having XII grade classes were provided with information boards with the most important Matura dates.
- A leaflet containing answers to Matura FAQs was prepared and published in three national newspapers.
- A TV debate on the Matura involving representatives of all stakeholders was organized.
- A “Matura – FAQ” discussion was organized.

Applications for Matura examination were filed by 76 080 secondary school graduates from 1071 schools (in the school year 2007/2008 XII graders were 79 334 in number). Applications for Matura examination were filed also by 157 students with special educational needs (SEN). 72 951 students sat for the school-leaving exam. 1854 students sat for optional exams. Over 12 000 teachers were quæstors on the examination day. Fourteen national assessment commissions comprising 1382 assessors were set up for all school subjects. 145 823 examination papers were assessed. A commission of 320 people was set up to classify and declassify examination materials; technical commissions of 135 people were also formed.

The following main conclusions can be drawn up on basis of Matura results:

- The system and the students accepted smoothly the state school-leaving examination. The Matura was organized and carried out without any notable problems.
- The test format presented no difficulties for the students.
- On national level, the Matura examination marks for Bulgarian language and literature are similar to the marks in the diplomas of completed secondary education of 2007 school-leavers.

- Very high, including maximum results, were registered on all subjects.
- Education and training in special-field secondary schools is at very high level – Matura results are higher than the marks in the diplomas of completed secondary education of 2007 school-leavers.
- There are sizeable differences in Matura results by types of schools.
- There are notable differences in Matura results at municipal level.
- Sizable differences between the Matura results and the marks in the diplomas of completed secondary education of 2007 school-leavers are registered at school level (in History and Philosophy the difference is more than one unit).
- Students have difficulties with open-end questions and in particular with the tasks to create a text and to state a thesis and support it with arguments.
- The results for the school subjects, which are most closely related to self-understanding, forming a scale of values and an attitude to the other people, the country, and the world, are unsatisfactory.

4. Lowering the number of students in compulsory school age who are out of school or are dropping out

Like in the first two years, implementation of two major measures for preventing the drop out of students continued in the third twelve months and the scope of these measures was broadened.

4.1. Providing free access to learning content

- Until the school year 2007/2008 the State provided free textbooks and school aids to I – IV grade students in state and municipal schools. In January 2008, the Council of Ministers expanded the right to free textbooks and school aids to cover also V – VII grade students and private school students from I to VII grade. BGN 41 m is earmarked for free textbooks and school aids for the school year 2008/2009 (against BGN 17 m in the previous school year).
- In order to take account of the needs of different schools and to enhance competition in the supply of free textbooks, their purchase was decentralised by delegating it to the municipalities which at their option granted the right to the schools.
- The set up of electronic learning courses, which are made available to the students in the national education portal, continued in the reference period. Development of new electronic aids for students will be financed from Operational Program “Human Resources Development”.

4.2. Providing free transport

Over 700 motor vehicles have been procured in the period 2005/2008 in order to guarantee the principle of providing equal access to education of commensurate quality through free transport to the central schools, as follows:

- 2005 – 219 motor vehicles at a total value of BGN 15 396 755, including 22 eight-seat, 53 eleven-seat, 72 fifteen-seat and 72 twenty-seven seat.

- 2006 – 153 motor vehicles at a total value of BGN 14 985 205, including 74 thirty-seat, 25 eleven-seat, and 54 fifteen-seat.
- 2007 – 237 motor vehicles at a total value of BGN 29 950 000, including 9 seven-seat, 25 eleven-seat, 47 fifteen-seat, 68 twenty-seven seat and 86 thirty-two seat.
- 2008 – 95 at a total value of BGN 14 956 206, including 20 fifteen-seat, 33 twenty-seven seat and 42 thirty-two seat.

5. Information and communication technology in school

Serious efforts for strong set in of information and communication technology in school were made in the period 2006-2007:

- 2006 was proclaimed a year of e-learning.
- Information technologies began to be taught in V grade.
- E-learning courses have been developed.
- 3000 portable computers, 2000 multimedia projectors and 3000 multifunctional units (copier-printer-scanner-fax) have been purchased and made available to Bulgarian schools.
- Towards introduction of IT training in V grade, training has been provided to over 95 000 teachers of basic computer literacy, over 3000 heads of computer labs, over 2000 teachers of information technology.
- The national education portal has been launched (www.start.e-edu.bg).
- Electronic register of the diplomas of completed secondary education has been set up and all diplomas issued at the end of 2006/2007 school year have been registered therein.
- Over 98% of the schools in the country have been provided with high-speed network connection to the Internet.

In the period 2007-2008, MES continued to pursue an active policy in respect of information and communication technology, the more important measure undertaken including:

- All teachers in the 31 biggest Bulgarian schools were provided with portable computers, a wireless (WiFi type) network was build and phased-in implementation of the Electronic School Register was launched, aiming to incorporate gradually all schools in the country. By the end of 2008, such network will be made fullyoperational in another 24 schools and partially in other 75 schools.
- New computer configurations and peripherals have been purchased – 4500 portable and 3100 desktop computers, 3000 multimedia projectors have been made available to schools with over 300 students, whereby the ratio of the number of students using one computer improved to 11.5:1.
- MES allocated BGN 5 m from its budget for network connectivity and Internet access of schools. Thus one of the most important components of education was financially procured until the end of 2008/2009 school year. The funds were made available to the State Agency for Information Technology and Communications. Until yearend, an optical ring with gigabyte connectivity is expected to be built

and connect the 15 biggest regional inspectorates of education and the traffic from schools is expected to be aggregated to the new core network.

- A project with a value of BGN 39 116 600 for top up financing of national information and communication technology programs has been approved within Operational Program “Human Resources Development”. It includes activities for procuring of cheaper or free Internet access from the home for 20 000 teachers and specialized software for the schools; providing e-content development and foreign language training to teachers; upgrading the information system of education with new modules and application components; financing of activities for licensing and adaptation of valuable foreign language learning content; building a national ICT helpdesk and call centre; development of net electronic aids for the liberal subjects for I – III grades, etc.

6. Making the school a more attractive territory for the student and ritualizing school life

MES makes targeted efforts to make school not just a place where students learn new things, but an attractive territory where they discover and express themselves, manifest and develop their talents, build a sense of belonging to a community, and spend their leisure time.

6.1. National programs

- *The School – A Student’s Territory Program*

A special The School – A Student’s Territory Program including two modules – Ritualizing School Life and Developing Out-of- School and School Activities was first approved in 2007. It finances projects targeting development of extracurricular and out-of-school activities and ritualization of school life.

- 150 projects with a total value of BGN 154 057 were approved for activities related to the celebration of school fests, traditions and school anniversaries.

- 107 projects with a total value of BGN 1 465 697 were approved for activities related to development of a school uniform element with a school distinguishing symbol. Thus in the 2007/2008 school year 43 317 students got their school uniforms or their school distinguishing symbol.

- 1360 projects with a total value of BGN 9 751 000 were approved for development of extracurricular and out-of-school activities. Implemented projects resulted in over 68 000 students included in extracurricular and out-of-school activities in the school year 2007/2008.

In 2008, BGN 5 million are allocated for ritualizing school life (against BGN 2 m allocated for the module in 2007). Funds for the financing of projects for development of school uniforms have been increased sizeably. Maximum project value is up to BGN 50 000 (BGN 10 000 up on 2007), including 30 per cent of school co-funding. A new module “National Student Competitions and National and International Olympiads” has been developed and allocated a budget of BGN 3 million.

In 2007, a grant aid scheme “Let’s Make School an Attractive Territory for Young People” with a budget of BGN 9 779 150 was launched within Operational Program “Human Resources Development”. It finances activities for development of extracurricular and out-of-school activities. 251 contracts with beneficiaries with a total value of BGN 9 582 085 were signed within the scheme (out of 689 project proposals submitted). As this grant scheme enjoys wide interest, it will be reopened in 2008 with a total budget of BGN 21 120 000. Project selection is scheduled to start in early September 2008 (the budget and some of the conditions for applying for funding from the scheme are pending approval by the Monitoring Committee of the Operational Program).

- *Modernization of the Resource Base of Schools Program*
- *Sports in School Module*

In 2007, BGN 15 m was allocated for the building up of an environment for student sports development. The Sports in School Module is implemented along three lines: activities for rehabilitation and routine maintenance of outdoor grounds and facilities; activities for construction of outdoor sports grounds with artificial pavements; activities for modernisation of gyms. Repairs carried out within this module in 2007 are 450 in total, with the following breakdown of activities: over 300 asphalted grounds, almost 50 grounds with artificial pavements, and about 80 rehabilitated gyms.

In 2008, another 51 schools will be rehabilitated within the program (37 gyms, 8 grounds with artificial pavements and reasphalting of 6 grounds). Schools, which were selected in the previous year but failed to receive funding because of the limited financial resource, have been proposed. The 2008 module budget is BGN 7 million.

- *Rehabilitation of School Furniture and Technical Equipment*

In 2007, schools were provided with a total of 41 648 tables, 82 440 chairs and 8 451 whiteboards.

In 2008, the total budget of BGN 7 m includes in addition to the replacement of school boards and purchase of tables and chairs an activity for equipment of school labs with school aids. The following allocation has been approved for the first two activities: 558 schools will receive a total of 8 258 whiteboards, and 95 schools will receive a total of about 20 thousand tables and 40 thousand chairs. A public procurement procedure is currently carried out for the third activity and is scheduled for completion in early September when fulfilment of supplies will start.

- *Building of Accessible Architectural Environment Module*

Activities for adapting the architectural environment to the needs of the people with disabilities were carried out in 55 schools in 2007.

The 2008 module budget is BGN 1 million for construction of platforms and adaptation of sanitary rooms, and for building of accessible architectural environment in infrastructure-specific facilities (lifts and hydraulic facilities) in about 40 schools.

The lower amount of funds and hence the lower number of schools which will benefit from the Modernization of the Resource Base Program in 2008 is due to the fact that the program is only for state schools. For municipal schools these activities are included in the program “Co-financing of municipal investment projects targeting improvement of the resource base of schools” for which a separate allocation of BGN 10 m has been approved.

6.2. History materials and other information materials

- A board with information on national symbols has been developed and provided for all 43 677 classrooms in 2007 on the occasion of the Bulgarian National Holiday.
- For 9 May 2007 (The Day of Europe) all schools received similar information boards with the symbols of the European Union.
- In 2008, on the occasion of the Bulgarian National Holiday and the 130 anniversary of the Liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman Ruling, MES provided all 3069 schools in the country with Relics of the Bulgarian National Epic sets.

6.3. Holidays, rituals, awards, initiatives involving students

Over the past three years, MES has shown the necessary consistency and insistence in establishing traditions for the uniform celebration of national holidays and holidays important to the school education system, including by introducing new holidays:

- A tradition has been set up to open the school year on the same day in all schools by raising the national flag and under the sounds of the national anthem. To that end, national flags, pylons and CDs with the national anthem have been made available to all schools.
- On MES' initiative, for a third year running 24 May is celebrated with a school parade of brass bands and majorette groups from all over the country.
- A day of students' self-government is organized on 9 May in MES and in all schools across the country.
- For a third year running a student excursion from the Rila Monastery to the cave where St. John of Rila used to live is organized on 11 May. During the excursion the Minister of Education and Science awards the annual St. John of Rila Prize given to school directors.
- On a proposal by the Minister of Education and Science, 5 October was declared a Day of the Bulgarian Teacher with a decision of the Council of Ministers.
- An Apollonia Prize, awarded annually to children and students with outstanding talents in the field of music arts and high educational, extracurricular and out-of-school activity achievements, has been established on the occasion of the Apollonia Festival of Arts. In 2006, the prize was awarded to Lubomir Pipkov

National Music School, and in 2007 it went to Svetlin Georgiev – a student in the National Academy of Fine Arts.

- For a third year running MES organizes a national artistic photography competition. In 2008 the topic of the competition was “School”. 120 photographers across the country took part in the competition with over 200 photos. 12 photos were rewarded and included in MES’ 2008 calendar.
- A competition for a logo of MES was organized. The author of the selected proposal was awarded a cash prize.
- An active campaign to improve the attractiveness of vocational training by organizing national competitions by professions was launched for the first time. 15 competitions were organized in the 2007/2008 school year according to a schedule of events approved by the Minister of Education and Science.
- The first National Fashion Performance Show of models of school uniforms and school-leaving celebration clothes made by students from 12 vocational schools of clothing and fashion design across the country was organized in May 2007. In May 2008, MES organized for a second year running a fashion performance show of school uniforms under the motto “School Clothes Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow”.
- The winners in the Third National Student Competition for best gas installation construction group were rewarded on 19 May 2008.
- 2008 was declared a year of key competences. Competitions on the following key competences were organized: “Native Language Communication”, “Mathematical Competence and Basic Knowledge of Natural Sciences and Technology”, “Social and Civil Competences”. Competitions on other key competences like “Foreign Language Communication”, “Learning Skill”, “Digital Competence (ICT)”, “Enterprise and Entrepreneurship”, “Cultural Awareness and Creativity” are to be organized for Bulgarian students.

7. Improving teacher’s prestige and social status

In the first two years, MES focused its main efforts on designing a career development model for teachers and a model of differentiated teacher pay.

7.1. Developing and introducing a differentiated teacher pay model

In 2007, MES developed in cooperation with MF, the World Bank, and the social partners a differentiated pay model which was put to broad-based discussion and was piloted in 27 educational institutions across the country. The model was included in the National Differentiated Pay Program approved with Council of Ministers’ Decision No. 541/07.08.2007. The program has a total budget of BGN 15 100 million and comprises two modules:

- Module One – pedagogical specialists – BGN 13 100 million.
- Module Two – directors of kindergartens, schools and service units – BGN 2 million.

A wider outreach (97%) has been achieved compared to 2007, which calls for the following conclusions:

- The psychological barrier has been overcome because the principle of voluntary participation has been preserved.
- Pedagogical staff's motivation to participate in the differentiated pay has been improved.

7.2. Developing a career development model for teachers

The model developed by MES has been examined with the social partners and put to broad-based discussion. It envisages five positions of teachers' career development – junior teacher, teacher, senior teacher, principal teacher, and teacher – methodologist. The main objectives of this model include: enhancing teachers' motivation for full-fledged participation in the teaching process; ensuring career development foreseeability in accordance with the personal plans, capacity and ambitions of every teacher, linking the respective position to higher responsibilities but also with corresponding pay by integrating the model in the differentiated pay system. The new system will be implemented by the end of 2008.

7.3. Determining teacher salaries on a decentralized basis

In 2008, in line with the decentralization of the administrative and financial management of schools, a number of principal changes were made in the method of determining the pay of school education system employees.

The pay of school education system employees is no longer determined centrally. The average gross monthly salaries were eliminated as an external limit of the teacher pay in a school. The new ordinance on the salaries of the employees in the units within the public education system sets out only the general salary structure rules and minimum salaries by position levels. The mechanisms applied to determine individual teacher salaries are negotiated in the collective labour contract and/or in internal salary rules, and individual salaries are determined by the school director.

From 1 July 2008, the teacher pay cannot be less than BGN 450 at a minimum or higher teaching load rate. Mechanisms have been set up to pay for the additional teacher load above the minimum rate – the amount is either included in the basic salary or given as an additional labour pay.

7.4. Qualification activities

- In the 2006/2007 school year, 24 214 teachers were included in routine qualification activities and in the period August 2007 – August 2008 their number was 26 017 people.

- In addition to routine qualification, in the first two years the main focus of qualification activities was placed on providing teachers with training on “Man and Nature” for V and VI grade (training was provided to 2 617 teachers of physics, chemistry and biology who will teach this school subject in VI grade), as well as on the training of basic computer skills with a view to ensure the teaching of the new Information Technology subject in V grade (over 2000 teachers).
- In the third year, special focus was placed on foreign language teachers. On basis of the National Program for Qualification of Pedagogical Staff, which the Council of Ministers approved in 2007, 1455 teachers with lower than higher education were provided with training for the professional qualification of a foreign language teacher. 1150 teachers with higher education continue their qualification training for acquiring the professional qualification of a foreign language teacher. The training is scheduled for completion in November 2008. Qualification courses for improving the knowledge, skills and competences of foreign language teachers were organized and carried out according to the requirements of the Common European Framework of Languages, as follows: 200 teachers of Spanish; 100 teachers of Russian; 60 teachers of French.
- The project “Improving the qualification and building an environment for career development of teachers, professors in high schools and directors” with a total value of BGN 6 845 405, which has been approved within Operational Program “Human Resources Development”, will be launched in October. Implementation of project activities will make it possible to tailor professional competence development to the demand of highly qualified teachers in priority areas:
 - introductory qualification for newly appointed teachers – not less than 300 teachers;
 - routine and upgrading qualification for key competences – qualification courses for foreign language teachers and certification by accredited external institutions – not less than 1200 teachers;
 - ICT and digital competence qualification courses – not less than 1000 teachers;
 - qualification courses for teachers from professional secondary schools and vocational schools, with focus on enterprise and entrepreneurship – not less than 250 teachers;
 - a qualification course for form-masters, aggression prevention – 1000 teachers.

8. Improving the managerial competence of directors

The Institute of School Directors became effectively operational on 1 November 2006 and launched a qualification program for directors. The qualification program started with training of current directors. From November 2006 till July 2007 all 2924 school directors completed short-term courses on managerial skills improvement, including on delegated budget management.

Over the period September 2007 – July 2008, training was provided to 2336 school directors. 67 newly appointed directors also received training. By end of 2008, 720 school directors and 200 kindergarten directors will receive training within two national programs.

9. Consolidation of the school network. Central and protected schools.

In the past few years MES and the municipalities have made serious efforts to consolidate and restructure the school network and to cut down the number of smaller size and merged classes. The consolidation process is a demonstration of the principle of ensuring an opportunity for every child to receive access to quality education, and of the goals of improving education cost efficiency.

9.1. Consolidation of the school network

A special Consolidation of the School Network Program with a total budget of BGN 34 m has been approved in support of municipal efforts to consolidate the school network and strengthen central schools. 64 municipalities applied with 78 projects for funding from the Consolidation of the School Network module. 47 municipal programs with total project value of BGN 18.4 m (including BGN 5 m for completing the construction of new school buildings) were selected within the measure “School restructuring and set up of central schools”. In 2007, municipalities closed a total of 74 schools with funding from the program and in 9 municipalities closing of more than 1 school was financed. 22 municipal programs with a total value of BGN 1.1 m are selected within measure “Cutting down the number of classes”. 64 classes were closed, resulting in improved per class number of students rate.

The program continued in 2008 and total funds were increased to BGN 67 m. 126 municipal programs for consolidation and 5 projects of regional inspectorates of education for consolidation of the network of special schools have been submitted for the program. 123 municipal programs for consolidation with a total value of BGN 60.4 m and 5 projects for consolidation of the network of special schools with a total value of BGN 1.4 m have been selected. In 2008, the number of schools closed with funding from the program is 296 and the number of transformed schools is 13. Six special schools were also closed. In 2008, municipalities received funding for consolidation of the school network and set up of central schools, which is BGN 40.4 m up on the 2007 amount.

In 2008, the program scope was expanded to include a new module “Consolidation of the school internal structure” which finances the payment of compensations for termination of labour relations resulting from reduced personnel strength on account of change of personnel structure and composition. Funding for the module will be provided on a monthly basis according to the forms submitted by the 10th day of the current month. To date, the forms submitted by the municipalities, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and MES, with a total value of BGN 2.3 m, have been approved.

Additional instruments were provided in 2008 within the policy for ensuring equal access to education and as a corrective of the school network consolidation – additional financing for central schools and regulation of the protected school status.

9.2. Central schools

May 2008 amendments to the Public Education Act regulate a mechanism for financing of additional costs of central schools for transport, canteen meals and semi-boarding education. This opens up additional opportunities for strengthening of central schools, in parallel to the support provided along the line of school network consolidation.

9.3. Protected schools

MES have developed and put forward for discussion the protected schools concept – closing these schools would impair the access to education. The Minister of Education and Science introduced in the parliamentary Education and Science Commission possible criteria for giving a protected school status and the after effects of designating a school a protected school – ban on closing the school and an option for additional financing under certain circumstances. The protected school status was regulated in the Public Education Act. The criteria and the list of protected schools will be approved on an annual basis by the Council of Ministers in order to ensure a flexible approach, given the dynamics of school network consolidation. The draft first protected schools list is under coordination and is pending approval by the Council of Ministers.

10. Integrating children with special educational needs and children for whom Bulgarian is not their mother tongue

Notable progress was registered in 2006-2007 in respect of the integration of children with special educational needs and of children for whom Bulgarian is not their mother tongue:

- the targeted policy pursued in the past few years resulted in higher number of children and students with special educational needs integrated in kindergartens and schools – in 2007 they were 4380 compared to 1593 in 2006 (about 175% up). The number of kindergartens and schools providing integrated training to children and students with special educational needs is increasing steadily – 770 schools and 183 kindergartens in 2007 against 130 in 2004, or about 631% up on 2004 and 40% up on 2006.
- Serious efforts have been made also to build accessible architectural environment in kindergartens, schools and service units. The number of institutions with such environment is increasing and at August 2007 stands at 184 – 153 schools, 22 kindergartens and 9 service units. In 2007, projects for ensuring architectural access to children and students with special educational needs in another 55 schools and service units were developed and approved under module “Building an accessible architectural environment” of the national program “Modernization of the school resource base”.
- The 28 resource centres for integrated education of children and students with special educational needs set up in 2006 were successfully launched and in 2007 they employ 635 resource teachers and specialists.
- Active policy for deinstitutionalization of children from special schools and consolidation of the network of special schools is pursued.

- Fifteen homes for raising and educating children deprived of parental care (HRECDPC) and 31 special schools were closed in the period 2006-2007, including: 13 booster schools for mentally retarded students, 2 logopedic schools, 1 hospital school; 1 health improving school; 12 sociopedagogical boarding schools (for students with deviational behaviour); 1 booster and instructive boarding school (for mentally retarded students with deviational behaviour); 1 day kindergarten for children with physical disabilities. The students from the closed special schools have been directed mainly to integrated education in a mainstream educational environment.
- From 1 January 2007 HRECDPCs have been transformed into special social service institutions (childcare homes) within the meaning of the Social Assistance Act and their management was delegated to municipalities.
 - The Centre for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities set up with Council of Ministers' Decree No. 4/11.01.2005 became operational in 2006.
 - According to data from the regional inspectorates of education, in the 2006/2007 school year 16 577 Roma students were trained in 262 receiving schools outside Roma quarters with 578 semi-boarding groups. In the 2006/2007 school year, 95 students studied Roma as their mother tongue.

Active work in the field continued in 2008:

- In 2008, the number of children and students educated on an integrated basis in kindergartens and schools is 5573 (1193 up on 2007). The integrated education of these children and students is supported by 883 resource teachers, psychologists, logopedicians and hearing and speech rehabilitators.
- Over 500 pedagogues receive training on working with children with disabilities in a mainstream educational environment.
- Implementation of activities for deinstitutionalization of children from special schools and consolidation of the network of special schools continued. 7 special schools have been closed – 3 booster schools and 4 sociopedagogical boarding schools. Thus by the end of the 2007/2008 school year special schools in Bulgaria have been reduced to 100.
- Free textbooks for students with special educational needs and Braille textbooks for children with impaired sight have been provided.
- Special efforts have been made to provide the necessary conditions, assistance and technical means for the students with special educational needs to have no problems when sitting for the secondary school-leaving examination:
 - longer examination hours;
 - accessible architectural environment, separate rooms;
 - consulting teachers and other specialists (psychologists, logopedicians) depending on the type of disability and student's individual needs;
 - oral examination for students with disabilities which prevent them from sitting for a written examination;

- adapted text (for example, larger characters) and technical devices (Braille machines, Braille printers, Braille paper, magnifying glasses, audiotapes, discs with special computer programs).
- Methodological guidance has been developed for the complex pedagogical assessment teams in the regional inspectorates of education.
- A seminar was organized to train resource centre directors on preparing of programs for development of integrated education in the respective region, on building up partnership with parents and the society in general.
- Joint projects with not-for profit legal persons, seminars, working meetings were organized with a view to achieve a change of attitudes towards support for the integration of children with special educational needs.
- Two information campaigns were organized in support of the integration of children with special educational needs and towards changing public attitudes, as well as two national conferences with international participation on the education of children with special educational needs and on inclusive education.
- Four training seminars on assessment of educational needs and building of supportive environment in kindergartens and schools were organized with experts, pedagogues, and parents, representatives of other institutions and of non-governmental organizations.
- In the second half of 2007, the Centre for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities opened up an opportunity for implementation of various activities under 4 programs with a total value of BGN 1 million.
- Completed were the call for, assessment and financing of project proposals submitted within a competition on “Educational integration of Roma children and students” with a total value of BGN 700 000 and co-funding from the Roma Education Fund – Budapest.

HIGHER EDUCATION

During the government’s first two years in office, the experts of the Ministry of Education and Science took an effort in reaching relative agreement on the main

challenges, facing the system of higher education, and the measures for overcoming them, taking into account current tendencies in Europe and throughout the world. Back in 2006, the Ministry initiated a broad public discussion on the key elements of the future Strategy for the Development of Higher Education, which is to form the basis for a new Law on Higher Education. Part of the measures dwelt upon back then became part of the Law for Amending and Supplementing the Law on Higher Education of May, 2007. The main goal of the amendments was to create opportunities for competition among universities and thus increase the quality of higher education. Part of the amendments had the immediate aim of strengthening outside control over the activity of universities in view of them complying with the law and spending public funds in a transparent manner.

1. Changes in the model of financing of higher education

- One of the most significant changes, stimulating the competition among universities, has been the substantial increase in the number of students enrolled each year. For the academic year 2008/2009 the universities offered places for 58 802 students (out of which 50 581 in state universities, incl. military academies, and 9914 – in privately owned universities). This is an increase of over 6000 places in comparison with the year 2007/2008 (51 909) and of over 15 000 places in comparison with the year 2006/2007. The places for doctoral students in universities and scientific institutes have increased by 46 % in comparison with the year 2007/2008 – 1403 (1049 full-time students and 354 extramural students), while in the year 2006/2007 the number of those students was 963. The increased number of students to be accepted in universities gives opportunities to more people, completing their secondary education, to make a choice in accordance with their personal preferences, capacities and ambitions and decreases the number of students, enrolling in illegal structures, encourages universities to offer attractive educational environment and creates potential for full abolishment of entry exams and the introduction of the state matriculation exams as an “entrance” to higher education.
- With the amendments of the law, the universities also received more powers in determining tuition fees. This year the Council of Ministers approved again the proposals of universities for their tuition fees, as they were made, adhering to the following two principles: fees should be lower than 30 % of the differentiated normative allowances for students and should not exceed two average monthly salaries for the country, as determined by the National Institute of Statistics. For the year 2008/2009 the highest fees amount to 960 BG levs and the lowest amount to 267 BG levs.
- In order to increase the accountability and responsibility of universities for the spending of public funds, the Law on Higher Education stipulated that the state subsidy for universities should be based on the number of students actually enrolled and not on the number of places announced. Along with this, a financial sanction is imposed on state universities, which do not work within the capacities, determined by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency. In 2008 the Ministry of Education and Science has exercised control over the number of students accepted, the universities’ adherence to their pre-determined capacity and undertook measures for bringing institutions into compliance.

2. Changes, related to the institutions, which can offer higher education

- The Law on Higher Education introduced an express prohibition for teaching to be done outside the main units and branches of universities, created in accordance with the law.
- In order to prevent any circumvention of the law, regarding the places, where teaching could be done, teaching (with the exception of practical and seminar sessions and the use of laboratories and other scientific infrastructures) was excluded from the scope of the cooperation agreements between universities and scientific organizations.

3. Increasing transparency in the management of universities through the creation of boards of trustees

The Law on Higher Education provides for each state university to create a board of trustees, comprising persons from outside the university. Up until now, 16 state universities have created their boards.

4. Improvement in the accreditation regime and in the quality control over the higher education

- The availability of academics and proper material conditions was introduced as an absolute condition for the accreditation of universities.
- A prohibition was introduced for one and the same academic to take part in the accreditation of more than two universities.
- An obligation was introduced for an opinion poll of students to be done at least once a year, with the results being announced publicly.
- Each academic is now obligated to develop and announce a description of his/her course.
- There is now a requirement for the evaluation of knowledge and skills of students to be done in writing, unless the specifics of the respective field do not allow that.

5. Improvement of the access to education and the living conditions of students

5.1. The Law on Loans for Undergraduate, Master and PhD Students

In July 2008 the National Assembly adopted the Law on Loans for Undergraduate, Master and PhD Students. The draft was developed with the support of the Ministry of Finance and the Association of Banks in Bulgaria and was subject of a broad discussion.

- Undergraduate, Master and PhD students shall have the right to apply for loans if they:
 - have not attained 35 years of age;
 - are currently studying towards obtaining a Bachelor (Bachelor or Professional Bachelor), Master or PhD degree in a state or privately owned university or scientific organization in the Republic of Bulgaria, created and functioning pursuant to the law;
 - have not been suspended or have not left their degree programmes;
 - have not already obtained the same degree.

- Loans shall be given for the whole or part of the period of education for covering tuition fees and/or living allowance. The right to use a loan for living allowance shall arise in case of having or fully adopting a child during the study period and shall belong to the parent, exercising parental rights, or, if those are the two parents, to only one of them.

- Loans for students shall be granted with the financial support of the state in the form of:
 - guaranteeing the loan, including the principal and the interest;
 - covering the payments for the whole or part of the loan in the cases, determined by law;
 - payment of management fees to the bank.

- The following concessions for students are provided for:
 - loans are granted without any collateral or fees, commissions or other expenses;
 - low interest rates – the base interest rate of the Bulgarian National Bank, increased by two points;
 - long gratuitous period – from the signing of the loan agreement until one year after the first date, offered for the last state exam or thesis defense, or after the end date of the PhD programme. During the gratuitous period students shall not repay the principal or the interest on the loan;
 - long repayment period – 10 years from the end of the gratuitous period;
 - opportunity for advance repayment without fees, commissions or additional interest;
 - release from the obligations under the loan – by virtue of the law.

- Loans shall be given by banks, having concluded a standard contract with the Minister of Education and Science. Those banks will be included in a special electronic register, maintained by the Ministry.

- The new National Council on Student Loans with the Minister of Education and Science, provided for in the law, will be created in a few months and a standard contract to be offered to banks will be drafted.

5.2. Improvement of the conditions in student dormitories

- In 2007 the central state budget provided an additional (beside the funds for capital expenses, included in the transfers to state universities) sum of 5.5 million BG leva for

repairs and rebuilding of student dormitories. Additionally, after consultations with universities and the Ministry of Finance, 40 million BG levs from the state budget surplus were given at the end of the year for repairs, building, modernization and improvement of the material conditions in state universities.

- In 2008 the Council of Ministers adopted a programme for tied financing of repairs of student dormitories, amounting to 50 million BG levs. Over 10 student dormitories will be repaired with these funds until the end of this year.

5.3. Increase of the scholarships for undergraduate, Master and PhD students

- In 2008 the Council of Ministers increased the maximum amount of student scholarships from 90 to 120 BG levs.

- PhD students' scholarships were almost doubled – from 250 to 450 BG levs. A one-time bonus of 1000 BG levs is provided for if the student submits his/her dissertation on time and another one-time bonus of 1000 BG levs is given if the student defends his/her dissertation within one year after submission. Each university will be given 4000 BG levs for the conduct of the defense procedures.

- Under the Human Resources Development Operational Programme additional funding of 10 million BG levs will be provided for student scholarships, 2 million BG levs for practical internships and training in companies and organizations, as well as another 4 million BG levs for supporting PhD, post-doctoral, other post-graduate students and young scholars.

6. Preservation of state property, managed by universities

A law, prohibiting the restitution of lands, managed by universities, is being drafted. After the draft is elaborated, it will be open for public discussion and will be submitted for adoption to the Council of Ministers.

7. Creation of electronic registers

- During the reporting period, the Ministry of Education and Science created four electronic registers:

- Register of current undergraduate, Master and PhD students and students, who have left their programmes;
- Register of academics in the universities;
- Register of certificates of recognition of higher education;
- Register of higher education diplomas.

- In accordance with the Law on Student Loans two more registers will also be created – a register of banks, included in the loan system, and a register of loan agreements.

SCIENCE

1. Strategy for the development of scientific research in Bulgaria

Led by their conviction that in today's dynamic and globalizing world only a nation successfully developing its education, science and technology can fully meet the challenges of the future, the experts of the Ministry of Education and Science, supported by representatives of universities and scientific organizations, started in 2007 the drafting of a strategy for the development of scientific research in Bulgaria. All scientific organizations were requested to give their opinions and proposals, related to finding priority scientific areas, potential models of financing, mechanisms for stimulating high-quality research, etc. The main elements of the strategy were discussed in May 2008 at a roundtable with university rectors, the management and heads of institutes of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the management of the Agricultural Academy, the members of the National Council of Scientific Research and the management of the National Science Fund. The draft strategy will be sent for consultation to Ministries in a couple of days and will then be proposed for adoption by the Council of Ministers. After that, the draft will be submitted to the National Assembly.

2. Funding for science

1.1. Increase in the public funding for science

In the last three years there has been serious increase in the budgetary allocations for science. The budget of the National Science Fund for 2008 exceeds 60 million BG leva, which is over four times more than the budget for 2007 (15.9 million BG leva). For 2006 the budget of the Fund was only 13.8 million BG leva (including 6 million BG leva from the decreased dues for the 6th Framework Programme). Generally, the funds for science have increased by 43% since 2007. The aim is for the public expenditure for science to increase by at least 0.1% each year to reach 1 % of the GDP.

1.2. Increase in the funding under projects and programmes and concentration of resources

- In the last three years it has been our priority that the funds, allocated to projects, be consistently increased at the expense of the funds, allocated by institution. As a result, in 2007 the ratio between institutional and programmatic funding was 70:30, while in 2004 it was merely 90:10. Due to the substantial increase in the budget of the National Science Fund in 2008 the ratio between institutional and programmatic funding this year (i.e. less than 5 years later) is 50:50.

- The increase of project funding has allowed for an increase in the number of open calls for funding to 16, which has led to greater diversity in the funding opportunities – there are now competitions for teams and individual competitions, competitions with or without priority areas, competitions for state universities and others, open to a broad range of candidates. At the same time, the increased funding has led to an increase in the

maximum amount of funds awarded and thus has brought more funds under the different projects.

- 1050 project proposals, drafted by universities, the institutes of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the Agricultural Academy, NGO's and companies, were submitted in the open calls for funding, which is an increase of 50 % in comparison with 2007. Despite the fourfold increase in the funds for scholarly projects, the sums applied for exceed six times the limited budget – 45 million BG leva are allocated for new competitions, while project proposals seek around 350 million BG leva.

- Certain concentration of resources has also been achieved in view of a more effective scientific policy through: the introduction of thematic competitions in 6 priority areas; increase in the amount of funds awarded from around 30 000 leva per project in 2003 to around 100 000 leva per project in 2006. In 2008 the average amount of funding per project is expected to reach 350 000 leva. 2008 has also been the first year when a competition for centres of top scientific achievements has been launched, which would allow additional concentration of scientific infrastructure and scientific potential in several large scientific centres.

1.3. Encouraging cooperation with businesses and education

In 2008 a competition was launched for the first time by the National Science Fund for integrated scientific units, which were to become a meeting point of research, higher education and businesses.

1.4. Bulgarian scientists as part of the European Research Area

- According to preliminary data, until July 2008 the 7th Framework Programme has awarded funds to 189 projects and Bulgaria's contribution was over 21 million Euro. For a year and a half, Bulgarian scientists have received funding under such a number of projects as they reached for three years under the previous framework programme. By way of comparison, 250 projects were funded under the 6th Framework Programme, as a result of which over 27 million Euro entered the country.

- Under the COST Programme Bulgaria works on 116 projects and the contribution there is around 7 million Euro. Bulgarian scientists have increased their activities by 70%, compared to the last two years, and the income from this programme has increased by 40%.

- The number of countries, with which Bulgaria concluded agreements for bilateral scientific and technical cooperation, increased by 50%. At present, Bulgarian scientists work on 120 bilateral projects.

- For the first time, Bulgaria has granted funds for co-financing Bulgarian projects under the European scientific programmes.

2. Development and raising the status of Bulgarian scientists

2.1. Development of a dynamic model for career development

In 2008 the development of a dynamic model of career development has started, an important part of which is the change in the model for awarding scientific degrees and titles. The main elements of the future law were discussed at a roundtable in March 2008 with university rectors, the heads of institutes with the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the presidium of the Supreme Attestation Commission. The draft is largely ready and will be sent for consultation to the Ministries in a couple of days, after which it will be presented for approval to the Council of Ministers. The draft is based upon the following principles:

- „Unclogging” the system, but not affecting its quality, through strengthening of the dispositive principle of action, simplifying procedures and providing for taking substantive decisions at a lower level;
- Decentralization, preserving the state guarantee for quality – a balance between a flexible system and the necessity of outside control;
- Transparency and objectivity of the system and responsibility of the persons, governing the outcome of the procedure;
- Separation of powers to certify suitability (habilis) from employer powers;
- Encouraging interdisciplinary research.

2.2. Raising the social status and strengthening the motivation of scholars for a career in science

- There has been a significant increase in the allowable funds for salaries of participants in scientific projects, financed by the National Science Fund – in 2008 those funds reached 50% of the sums for research (until then they were up to 20 %). In addition, the allowable funds increase parallel to the increase in the percentage of young scholars on the team.
- It was decided that teams, including more young scholars, receive bonus points when evaluating proposals.
- Under the Human Resources Development Operational Programme a project proposal was developed for ensuring the access of universities and scientific institutes to global information databases of high scientific quality and the development of hi-tech parks on the territories of three universities.
- A special call for proposals was announced only for young scholars and the interest towards it was very high (85 proposals for 4.1 million BG levs, while the total preliminary budget for the call was 400 000 BG levs).
- Pilot competitions were announced for supporting young scholars:

- Post-doctoral fellowships in foreign scientific organizations with a mandatory return to a Bulgarian scientific organization;
- Writing a doctoral dissertation in cooperation between a scientific organization and/or university and a company

- Competitions were announced for renowned scholars and for stimulating Bulgarian scholars, working abroad, to return to the country.

- The Young Scientists Contest was again held in 2008 – it is part of the European Young Scientists Contest, initiated in 1989. The contest gives an opportunity to all young people in Europe and representatives of other countries throughout the world to present their scholarly ideas and to create networks with their peers, having similar interests.

- The Ministry's campaign for popularizing the achievements of Bulgarian science has continued in 2008 – its goal has been to present the activity of various scientific units in Bulgaria, to popularize their discoveries and scholarly and applied projects and also to attract the attention of businesses in view of projects' successful introduction in practice.

- 10 million BG leva from the budget surplus were provided at the end of 2007 for repairs, building and modernization of the material conditions at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

3. Quality control over scientific research

3.1. International evaluation of scientific units

- In 2007 an international evaluation was done of the National Science Fund by experts from leading international scientific organizations. In 2008 an international evaluation was done of institutions in the fields of natural, medical, biological and engineering sciences, which formed the basis for the Foresight Programme. The evaluation was done by teams of international experts.

- The first cycle of the national evaluation of public scientific organizations and universities was also performed.

3.2. Independent international evaluation of projects

The increase in the budget for scientific research requires more responsibility and greater effort in guaranteeing the transparency in the allocation of funds. In view of this, the specifications for all call for proposals were announced much in advance of the deadline for submitting proposals and an explanatory campaign was conducted among beneficiaries.

To guarantee the independence of evaluation, all projects have been evaluated by foreign experts and the evaluation has been done by *ad hoc* expert committees, created for each call for proposals.

4. National scientific priorities

The determination of national scientific priorities, which are to be allocated more financing, involves a difficult debate for a number of reasons. There are differing opinions as to who has the authority and legitimacy to determine priorities in science, what the criteria should be for determination and in what scientific areas to look for such priorities. The formulation of scientific priorities is also one of the main challenges before the European Union.

Our country has participated actively in the debate over the ERA Green Paper, elaborated by the European Commission. In 2007 the Ministry of Education and Science initiated a nationwide discussion over the issues the Green Paper dwells upon, involving all interested parties – universities, scientific organizations, etc. Around 1000 scholars and experts were surveyed and around 300 of them presented answers and opinions.

- In 2008 the National Foresight Programme has started, which aims at formulating the potential national scientific priorities, based on the evaluation of the progress in different scientific areas and institutions.
- A national survey was done on the significant national scientific infrastructures.
- Scientific priorities will also be one of the subjects of the discussions over the draft National Strategy for the Development of Scientific Research.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY AMONG BULGARIANS ABROAD

In 2007-2008 the educational policy of the country among Bulgarians abroad became a serious subject of concern. The Ministry's experts made an analysis of the present state of affairs and, based on it, proposed new principles and specific measures to form a more effective and modern policy of the state towards Bulgarian communities abroad. The main elements of the Ministry's concept were presented at a conference, discussing state policies towards Bulgarians abroad, as well as at a special roundtable in July, discussing the subject of *Bulgarian Schools Abroad. Situation, Problems, Perspectives*.

ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES

During the government's first three years in office the Ministry of Education and Science undertook important measures with clear anti-corruption implications:

1. Normative prohibition for providing paid educational services in case of a conflict of interests and an obligation to submit conflict of interest declarations

In May 2008 amendments were introduced to the Law on Public Education, regulating the provision of paid educational services.

- An express prohibition was introduced for providing paid educational services in case of a conflict of interests – when a teacher provides such services to pupils from the school he/she teaches in. An obligation was also introduced for teachers at the beginning of each school year to submit declarations in writing before the school headmaster as to whether they had provided paid educational services in the preceding year and that they were not in a situation of conflict of interests.
- Due to the nature of their work, related to the management of education, headmasters, their deputies, heads and officials from the regional educational inspectorates and officials from the Ministry, as well as municipal education officers are prohibited in absolute terms from providing paid educational services.
- In case of providing educational services in the existence of a conflict of interests, failure to submit a declaration, submitting a false declaration or violating the absolute prohibition for persons, managing the educational system, the persons, having committed the violation, carry disciplinary liability.

2. Introduction of the main elements of an effective national system of outside assessment

- The development of an appropriate system of objective standardized outside assessment is a key element in the development of school education. The outside assessment (where pupils are assessed by a person, different from their own teacher) provides for greater objectivity and more transparency in the educational system. It allows for a comparison with the results of the internal assessment, which guarantees greater responsibility by the participants in the educational process. The “elucidation” of the educational system by means of outside assessment creates an environment, better opposing corruption.
- The use of standardized forms (tests) reduces the potential risks and negative effects of subjectivity in grading and the need for paid educational services.
- The creation of national boards for grading state matriculation exams, the exchange of invigilators among regions, the introduction of computer grading of test materials are only part of the measures, reflecting those principles.

3. Changes in the system of approval of textbooks and delivery of state-paid textbooks for pupils from I to VII grade

- Until June 2006 the ranking of textbooks to be used in the system was done, based on the votes of schools (each school had one vote). Amendments of the law provided that, in order to determine which the three textbooks approved and in use will be for each school subject, the votes of all teacher in the respective subject are to be counted. Thus the opportunities for influencing the selection of textbooks were largely reduced.

- As from the school year 2008/2009 the purchase and delivery of state-paid textbooks has been decentralized – procedures are conducted not by the Ministry, but by municipalities, which creates greater competition among suppliers.

4. Introduction of electronic registers, strengthening transparency and control within the system

5. Cooperation with the Prosecutor's office

5.1. Public announcement of a list of 22 structures (“branches of foreign universities”), offering education and issuing diplomas in violation of the Law on Higher Education, and initiation of inspection of their work

Based on the information, submitted by the Ministry, the Prosecutor's office requested from the court the termination of the respective legal persons, offering illegitimate education, and three of them have already been terminated.

5.2. Actions of the Office of the Prosecutor General against violations, related to certifying forged higher education diplomas, based on information, submitted by the Ministry of Education and Science

As a result of these actions, disciplinary dismissal was imposed on three officials from the Ministry, one left the Ministry by own initiative and three other officials received less serious disciplinary punishments. Parallel to this, the Ministry undertook a number of internal re-organizations to improve effectiveness and minimize potential violations.

6. Increase in the number of pupils, enrolled in secondary schools after 7th grade and in the number of students, accepted in universities

The Ministry's stable policy in the last few years for increase in the number of pupils enrolled in secondary schools after 7th grade, as well as in the number of students, accepted in universities, has had a deterrent effect on the paid educational services and has limited the possibilities for corruption due to insufficient number of places. These measures have limited the number of people, willing to study in illegitimate educational units, offering education in violation of the Law on Higher Education, and have alleviated the pressure for creating new universities, offering no guarantees for sufficient quality of education.

7. The requirement for written examination of students' knowledge and skills

This amendment in the Law on Higher Education of May, 2007 was led by the understanding that written examination allowed for greater objectivity in grading and limited the possibilities for illegitimate influence, especially if exam papers were to be kept for not less than a year after conducting the exam.

8. Participation of foreign evaluators in the evaluation procedures of scientific projects

The independent international evaluation of project proposals, submitted for financing by the National Science Fund, was introduced back in 2005. Since 2006, all project proposals have been evaluated by independent foreign experts.

9. The Ministry's green telephone line

In March 2006 a permanent toll-free telephone line was established, where citizens can leave their opinions and proposals on the activity of all units within the system of public education, as well as submit signals for violations. All signals are checked and measures are undertaken pursuant to the Ministry's competence. Since its establishment, the green telephone line has registered 27 191 incoming calls, based on several of which signals were submitted to the Prosecutor's office.

PARLIAMENTARY CONTROL

The Minister of Education and Science and the members of his political cabinet regularly take part in the sessions of the Parliamentary Committees on Education and Science, on Children, Youth and Sport, on Human Rights and Religious Matters and other committees, whenever they are invited.

Since his inauguration into office, the Minister of Education and Science has answered 159 queries by Members of Parliament.

COOPERATION WITH SOCIAL PARTNERS AND MUNICIPALITIES. PARTNERSHIP WITH OUTSIDE EXPERTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY STRUCTURES

1. Cooperation with social partners and municipalities

1.1. Discussion of the key elements in educational policy

The Ministry's experts work in active cooperation with the representatives of trade and employers' unions and regularly discuss with them within the framework of the council for tri-partite cooperation in education the main issues, related to the labour and social security status of the people, working in the system of public education, and their conditions of labour. Representatives of trade unions and the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB) have taken part in working groups, related to the introduction of differentiated payment, the optimization of the school network, the development of the uniform standards of living allowance, etc.

1.2. Collective labour agreement

- On 31 May 2006 the Ministry signed a two-year collective labour agreement for the system of public education together with the Union of Employers and the trade unions.
- On 30 June 2008 the new collective labour agreement in the system of secondary education was signed.

1.3. Joint projects

- The Minister of Education has taken part in a number of fora, organized by the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria.
- The Ministry of Education and Science and the NAMRB implement a joint pilot project for decentralization of management in the system of school education.

2. Cooperation with outside experts and civil society structures

- A Public Council on the Issues of Religious Education was created as a consultative body with the Minister of Education and Science in order to elaborate a concept on the forms, mechanisms and terms for the introduction of religion as a mandatory school subject. A special survey was also conducted on the public attitude towards the teaching of religion in schools. The concept developed was presented at a special roundtable before Members of Parliament, sociologists, political scientists, sociologists, etc.
- The Association of Banks in Bulgaria has taken an active part in the discussion of the main elements of the student loan model in Bulgaria and has rendered expert assistance to the team at the Ministry in the development of the draft law, regulating student loans.
- The Ministry signed with the Bulgarian Association for Information Technologies a memorandum for cooperation in the introduction and application of information and communication technologies in the system of public education and in the improvement of the quality of education.
- A meeting was held with the Board of the Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria, where the opportunities for broader participation of the private sector in the financing of scientific research was discussed, as well as the means of cooperation between business circles and the scientific institutions for building scientific infrastructure in Bulgaria and the development of hi-tech centers in cooperation with businesses.
- The Ministry and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation organized a roundtable on *The New Educational Structure of Secondary Education*. Teachers, heads of regional educational inspectorates, trade unions, teachers' organizations, employers and representatives of the academic community took part in the discussion on the draft educational plan for 8th-12th grade.

- A roundtable was held with sociologists, political scientists, psychologists and activists, discussing the results of the state matriculation exams and formulating conclusions.

- By order of the Minister of Education a working group was created on the learning of literary Bulgarian language, comprising representatives of the academic and scientific community, as well as teachers and experts. Until the end of 2008 the working group has to analyze the education in the Bulgarian language, to elaborate state educational requirements towards the learning of the Bulgarian language and to make an assessment of the need to adopt a law, regulating the use and protection of literary Bulgarian language.

SUPPORT OF NATIONAL POLICIES BY EU STRUCTURAL FUNDS. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

1. Human Resources Development Operational Programme

The Ministry of Education and Science, as an intermediate unit under the Human Resources Development Operational Programme, is directly responsible under priority axes 3 and 4, namely “Improvement of the quality of education and training pursuant to the needs of the labour market for building a knowledge-based economy” and “Improvement of the access to education and training”. The financial resources under those priorities amount to 436 993 047 Euro, which is 36 % of the overall budget of the operational programme.

- In 2007 the Ministry opened four calls for proposals under programmes, financed by the Human Resources Development Operational Programme:
 - Making Schools Attractive for Young People – budget 9 779 150 BG levs.
 - Development of Mechanisms for School and Student Practical Internships – budget 3 911 660 BG levs.
 - Support for the Development of Doctoral, Postdoctoral, Other Postgraduate Students and Young Scholars – budget 3 911 660 BG levs.
 - Creation of Favourable Multicultural Environment for Practical Implementation of Intercultural Education and Training – budget 5 574 116 BG levs.

Out of the 1049 proposals received, 405 were approved with a total budget of 22 987 062 BG levs. Contracts were concluded with 397 beneficiaries.

- In June 2008 the Ministry opened 6 new procedures. Financing, amounting to 104 636 905 BG levs, will be given to proposals under the following programmes:
 - Information and Communication Technologies in the System of Public Education;
 - Enhancing the Qualification and Creation of Opportunities for Career Development of Teachers, Academics and School Headmasters;
 - Supporting the Introduction of Delegated Budgets;
 - Development of a System for Quality Assessment of Secondary Education and a Rating System for Universities in the Republic of Bulgaria;
 - Educational Services for Pupils of Insufficient or Outstanding Performance;

- Student Scholarships for Equal Access to Education and Enhancing the Motivation towards Better Results.

• In August and September 2008 three new calls will be launched under the following programmes:

- Making Schools Attractive for Young People – budget 16 624 555 BG levs;
- Development of Mechanisms for School and Student Practical Internships – budget 3 911 660 BG levs;
- Support for the Development of Doctoral, Postdoctoral, Other Postgraduate Students and Young Scholars – budget 9 779 150 BG levs.

• To popularize the calls under the Human Resources Development Operational Programme, for which it is responsible, the Ministry held an information campaign, including information days throughout the country.

2. Bulgaria's participation in EU programmes in the fields of education and science

• On 10 April 2006 Bulgaria received for the first time the European Commissioner Janez Potočnik, responsible for science and research. Commissioner Potočnik held coordination meetings with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Minister of Education and Science and other Ministers, as well as with scholars. At the meeting with the Minister of Education and Science, the reduction of the dues under the 6th Framework Programme was negotiated.

• As of 1 January 2007 Bulgaria is a part of the 7th Framework Programme of the EU, covering research, technological development and demonstration activities, as a Member State of the EU. On 31 January-1 February 2007 the Ministry held an inauguration conference for popularizing the programme, where representatives of the European Commission were also present.

• As a Member State of the EU, Bulgaria also takes part in the EU Lifelong Learning Programme, uniting the Socrates and Leonardo mobility programmes, which were active until 31 December 2006.

3. Harmonization of Bulgarian legislation with the *acquis communautaire*

• Amendments and supplements to the Law on Public Education, introducing in Bulgarian legislation the norms of Council Directive 77/486 EEC on the education of the children of migrant workers.

• Amendments and supplements in the Law on Higher Education, providing for enrolling and educating citizens of EU Member States in Bulgarian universities under the same conditions as for the Bulgarian citizens; introduction of the European system for recognition of qualifications and providing for universities from EU Member States to be able to open branches on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria.

- Adoption of a Law for Recognition of Professional Qualifications, introducing into Bulgarian legislation the requirements of Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, Council Directive 2006/100/EC of 20 November 2006 adapting certain Directives in the field of freedom of movement of persons, by reason of the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, Council Directive 74/556/EEC of 4 June 1974 laying down detailed provisions concerning transitional measures relating to activities, trade in and distribution of toxic products and activities entailing the professional use of such products including activities of intermediaries and Council Directive 74/557/EEC of 4 June 1974 on the attainment of freedom of establishment and freedom to provide services in respect of activities of self-employed persons and of intermediaries engaging in the trade and distribution of toxic products.

- Amendments in secondary legislation, related to the introduction of the requirements of the EU towards the attainment of qualification in certain professions.

- Adoption by the Council of Ministers of a List of Regulated Professions in the Republic of Bulgaria. The Council's Decision also determines the competent authorities, giving/recognizing the right to exercise regulated professions in the country. Current information on issues, related to professional recognition in Member States, could be found on <http://regprof.nacid.bg>.

- Amendment in the Law on Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria, partially introducing in Bulgarian legislation the requirements of Council Directive 2005/71/EC of 12 October 2005 on a specific procedure for admitting third-country nationals for the purposes of scientific research and adoption of secondary legislation, by which the Directive was fully and timely transposed.

- Adoption in June 2008 of a Law for Ratification of the Convention defining the Statute of European Schools.

4. Participation in the work of the bodies of the EU

As of 1 January 2007, when Bulgaria became a Member State of the EU, the Ministry of Education and Science participates actively in the decision-making process and in the formation of the education policy of the Community. Bulgaria also takes an active part in the Council of the European Union in its format, gathering Ministers of Education, as well as in the work of its supporting bodies.

5. International cooperation

- In December 2007 the Minister of Education and Science visited the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, Switzerland. During his visit, the Minister got acquainted with the work of Bulgarian scientists on installing cameras on the CMS detector, which is one of the main experiments of CERN. Through this experiment,

scientists hope to re-create the conditions of the “Big Bang” and to answer the question as to how the Universe was created. The first results will come out in 2009.

- On 29 February 2008 Sofia hosted the 14th Conference of the Committee of Ministers of the Member States of the Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies (CEEPUS), which was opened by the Minister of Education and Science.

THE MAIN CHALLENGES BEFORE THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE UNTIL THE END OF THE GOVERNMENT’S TERM IN OFFICE

1. In the field of school education

- Adoption of a new law, regulating school education.
- Introduction of a system for career development of teachers.
- Introduction of the three pillars of the system of differentiated payment.
- Conducting outside assessment in the 6th school grade.

2. In the field of higher education

- Continued work on the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education and amendments or a new Law on Higher Education

Main emphasis – accreditation of universities and control over the quality of higher education

- Measures for protection of higher education diplomas – hologram stickers

3. In the field of science

- Adoption of a Strategy for the Development of Scientific Research in Bulgaria
- Adoption of a Law on Scientific Degrees and Scientific Titles
- Measures for enhancing the social status and motivation of scientists for scholarly career:
 - Increase in the remuneration of scientists, working in priority scientific areas (e.g. reaching of the average salary in central state administration), provision of life-long payments to academicians, equal to the salary of a Member of Parliament
 - Creation of an attractive social package for young scholars (scholarships, support to participation in conferences, etc.)
 - Creation of an academic city for young scholars and their families.