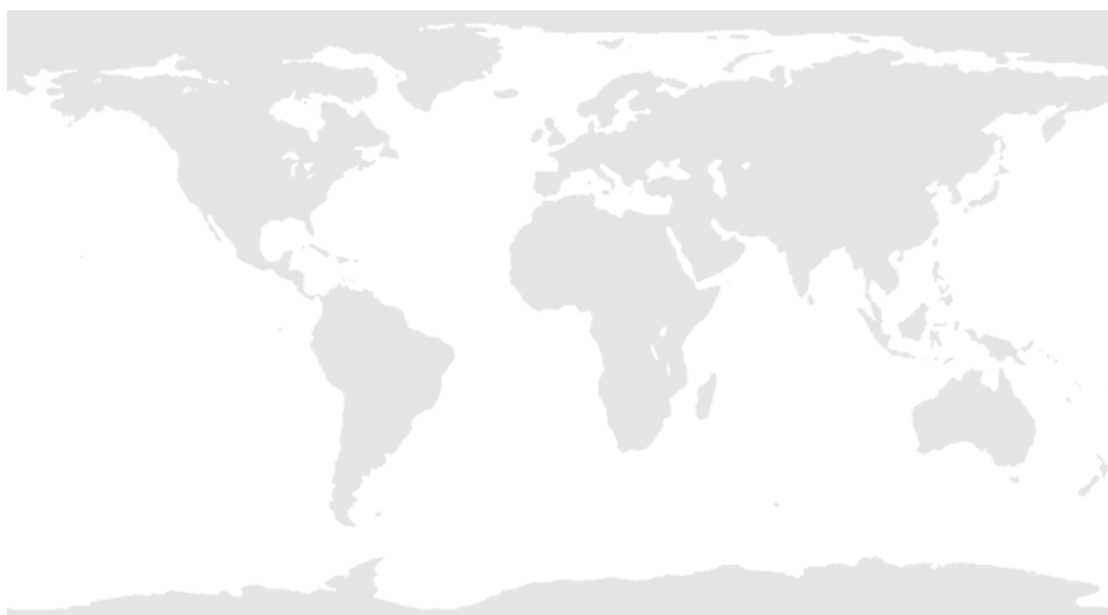




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Albania

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Principles and general objectives of education

The purpose of the national educational service is to supply future Albanian citizens with proper knowledge, adequate skills and capacities, as to be educated and committed to the implementation of the economic and development national plan. This system, aiming to meet the domestic needs of the labor market and socio-cultural aspirations of the people, is a prerequisite for the economic growth and sustainable development of the country. (MOES, November 2008).

The vision of Albania within the framework of the *National Strategy for Development and Integration 2007-2013* is that of a country with high living standards, which is integrated in the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, is democratic and guarantees the fundamental human rights and liberties. A good quality, inclusive, flexible education system will respond to the demands of the market economy. The vision for the pre-university education sector is to guarantee a modern national education system, which will stimulate sustainable economic growth, will raise competitiveness in the region and beyond, and will help consolidate citizen consciousness. The higher education and research system will create, develop and transmit knowledge through teaching, relevant research and service provision. It will assist economic development and contribute to higher standards of democracy and citizenship.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

After the multi-party elections held in 1992, and the new main constitutional provisions which were adopted during the period 1992-1995, new acts were passed. By these acts, the education sector has been regulated on a new basis and with new characteristics.

The initial basis for the new legal framework of the education system is the citizens' right to education. Schooling is available to everyone under equal conditions. The main legal instruments concerning education adopted in the 1990s include the **Pre-University Education Law No. 7952** of June 1995 and subsequent amendments, the **Normative Provisions for Public Schools**, the **Labour Code of the Republic of Albania** (1995), the **Private Education Law** (1995, private education was re-established after 1996) and the **Higher Education Law No. 8461** of 25 February 1998. In accordance with these laws, several regulations were adopted concerning various important issues, such as the assessment of students, appraisals and rewards to be given, enrolment into secondary schools, standards for the lessons, and in-service teacher training.

The Higher Education Law was amended in July 2003 in order to establish a higher education system based on study cycles in accordance with the Bologna model. The new **Higher Education Law No. 9741** of 21 May 2007 (amended in July 2010) provides for the mission and main goals of higher education and regulates aspects



related to the establishment, organization, administration, management, financing, and quality assurance in higher education institutions, in compliance with the European standards. The **Council of Ministers' Decree No. 864** of 5 December 2007 (amended in June 2008) was adopted in order to regulate the offering of doctoral studies at the university level in accordance with the Bologna process. The **Council of Ministers' Decree No. 467** of 18 July 2007 defines the criteria and procedures for the pedagogic and scientific qualifications system of academic staff in higher education institutions.

The **Vocational Education and Training (VET) Law No. 8872** of 29 March 2002 (recently being amended) defines the basic principles, structure, organization, management and development of a common VET system, based on the cooperation of governmental institutions, social partners and other stakeholders in VET field.

The **Law No. 78** of 8 February 2006 provides for the establishment of state *matura* exams to be administered at the end of secondary education through external evaluation. State *matura* shall consist of compulsory and optional tests and exams and only students who have passed the state *matura* exam shall have the right to pursue higher education in public universities.

The **Law on Gender Equality in Society No. 9970** of 24 July 2008 regulates fundamental issues concerning gender equality in public life, the protection and equal treatment of women and men with regard to equal chances and opportunities for the exercise of their rights, as well as their participation in and contribution to social life. This Law provides for the establishment of the National Council on Gender Equality, an advisory body whose representatives are appointed by the Prime Minister. Article 24 of the Law states that gender-based discrimination by/in public and private educational institutions at all levels shall be prohibited. Article 25 stipulates that textbooks, programmes and other educational materials at all educational levels shall help in promoting and building an equality mentality and in preventing gender discrimination, negative stereotypes, prejudices, or any other practices violating the principles of gender equality.

Article 57 of the **Constitution** (1998) states that: everyone has the right to education; compulsory school education is determined by law; general high school public education is open for all; professional high school education and higher education can be conditioned only on criteria of abilities; mandatory education and general high school education in public schools are free; pupils and students may also be educated in private schools of all levels, which are created and operated on the basis of law; the autonomy and academic freedom of higher education institutions are guaranteed by law. Traditionally, compulsory education lasted eight years (age group 6-14 must attend school).

Administration and management of the education system

According to the main constitutional provisions, the Government and the Parliament determine the educational policy. They formulate and pass laws and other regulations and execute other activities in the field of education as envisaged by the law. The Ministry of Education and Science and municipal or commune authorities ensure that certain requirements in the field of education are met.



The **Ministry of Education and Science (MOES)** is responsible for the administration of the education system at the national level. The functions of the MOES include among others: the implementation of laws and other regulations approved by the Parliament and the government; decisions on legal matters, management and professional supervision; approval of statutes, curricula and other documents; execution of professional work; work improvement, planning, and programming; development and financing of education. The MOES determines the network of primary and secondary schools, decides on the establishment of postsecondary colleges and universities, elaborates the higher education financing standards and handles development requirements.

The main areas of activity of the **Institute of Curricula and Standards** (Institute of Pedagogical Research), established in 1970, are: research and development in education; school curriculum development; in-service training of teachers and principals; documentation, publication and information sharing in the service of specialists, decision-makers, teachers and other stakeholders.

The main tasks of the **National Inspectorate for Pre-university Education**, established in February 2010 by a decision of the Council of Ministers, are to: carry out inspections, and monitor and evaluate the educational process and its management; verify that regional education directorates, educational offices and educational institutions respect and implement existing legislation, normative provisions and MOES instructions; monitor the use of textbooks; and inspect the implementation of regulations concerning the school-leaving examinations at the end of grade 9 and the state *matura* exam.

The MOES is also responsible for vocational and technical secondary education, while vocational training is under the supervision of the **Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities**. The **Vocational Education and Training (VET) Council** is an inter-ministerial advisory body in charge of making recommendations on VET policies and development. The **National VET Agency** has been established on the basis of a decision of the Council of Ministers passed in 2006. The main tasks of the Agency are to: revise the national register of occupations, qualifications, levels and standards; develop curricula; define principles and criteria of evaluation and certification for professional qualifications and administer the register of certificates issued; accredit VET institutions; ensure that competence standards are in full compliance with international best practices, particularly the European Qualifications Framework and the European Credit System for VET; and coordinate with VET stakeholders.

The **Council of Higher Education and Science**, an advisory body to the MOES, provides its advice on issues concerning higher education policies and the development and promotion of quality higher education.

The **Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education** was established in January 2000. The Agency, a public state-funded institution accountable to the MOES, defines criteria and procedures for the external evaluation of private and public higher education institutions and their accreditation. (Eurydice, 2007).



One of the main tasks of the **National Council on Gender Equality**, an advisory body whose representatives are appointed by the Prime Minister, is to ensure gender mainstreaming in the political, social, economic, and cultural fields.

Decentralization of the education system management and service delivery at the pre-university level is a core aspect of the country's ongoing efforts. The decentralization process of the pre-university education system is based on the following guiding principles: striving for high academic achievements and administrative effectiveness and transparency; a culture of evaluation; performance-based management; a new role for school principals; and participatory approach. Under the decentralized system, schools are required to take increased responsibility for planning and managing the provision of services they deliver along with the associated quality improvement procedures. **Regional Education Directorates**, located at the regional level (counties or prefectures) and headed by a director appointed by the Minister of Education, among others are responsible for the appointment and transfer of teaching and non-teaching staff, in-service teacher training, collection of information at the district level, provision of furniture and equipment to schools, as well as the planning of investments at the district level, including the construction of new facilities and rehabilitation of existing ones. There are also **District Education Offices** established in the majority of districts (which are sub-divisions of counties or prefectures). The **municipalities** and **communes**, as forms of local government, administer state funds received from the MOES through the Regional Directorates, cooperate with the educational establishments within their jurisdiction and participate in the financing of school running costs and school buildings maintenance and small repairs.

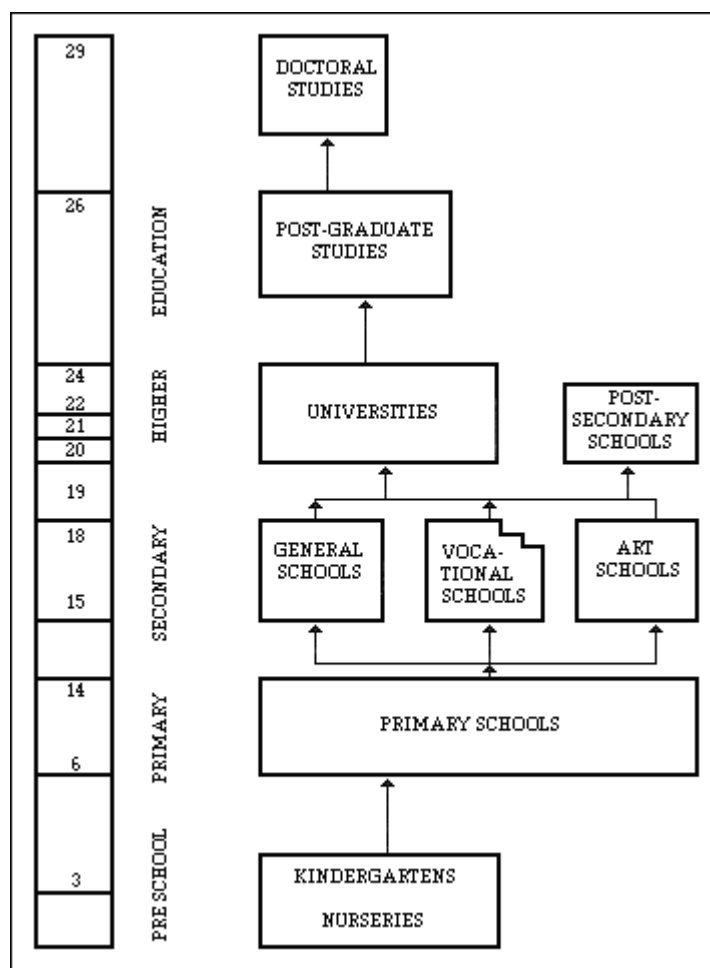
The functions of school managing bodies are defined by the Law on Pre-University Education. These are the **school board** and the **school principal**. The school board adopts the report on work, decides on school activities and investments, announces open competitions to fill the vacancies of school teachers, and gives its opinions on candidates for the posts of teacher and school principal. The school principal manages the school and is appointed by the local educational authorities. His/her responsibility refers to the overall scope of school work and the implementation of curricula. He/she provides instructional insight in and supervision of the teachers and professional associates work, handles the promotion of educational work, undertakes measures against inappropriate behaviour of teachers and associates, convenes the sessions of teacher councils, directs the work of professional bodies and co-operates with the community in connection with school activities.

The Law on Pre-University Education envisages that postsecondary colleges have **managing bodies** and **professional bodies**. Managing bodies include the school principal and the deputy principal, while the professional body is the **Teachers' Council**. The school principal manages the school, makes proposals concerning the employment and dismissing of the teaching staff and is responsible for the implementation of the curriculum and the school work in general. The **Teachers' Council**, which includes all teaching staff, makes proposals on the curriculum and monitors its implementation, executes special programmes for some types of in-service teacher training, as well as programmes for gifted students and programmes for development and research in order to improve the teaching process.

The role of universities, their scope, basic working conditions and objectives are regulated by the law, while the overall organization and activities are more closely elaborated by their statutes. The university has managing and professional bodies. The rector manages the university, while the top managing body is the Senate, consisting of the representatives of associated members and founders. Members of the Senate are elected for a two-year period. Their responsibilities include: passing of the university statute; adopting curricula and the financial plan; studying the reports on work and business activities; approving the statutes of faculties; proposing the students enrolment plan to the government; making decisions upon the funding of university establishments; promoting students standard activities, etc.

Structure and organization of the education system

Albania: structure of the education system (2004)



Pre-school education

Preschool education (kindergarten) is not compulsory and caters to children aged 3 to 5 years.



Primary and lower secondary education

Primary education is compulsory and children enter primary school when they reach the age of 6. The eight-year compulsory primary education programme was divided into two four-year cycles, i.e. grades 1-4 and grades 5-8. In 2004 the government decided to introduce the nine-year primary (basic) education programme, comprising primary (grades 1 to 5) and lower secondary education (grades 6 to 9). The implementation of the nine-year basic education programme started in 2008/09. At the end of basic education, students sit the school-leaving examination and if successful are awarded the certificate of completed primary (basic) education.

Secondary education

Secondary education is provided in high schools or gymnasia, technical and vocational schools, art, sports, foreign language and pedagogical schools. Following the introduction of nine-year basic education, general secondary education lasts three years (prior to 2008, the duration of the programme was four years). Secondary art schools educate students in the fields of music, art and ballet. Starting from 2009/10, initial vocational education is offered at three levels and provides basic education graduates with general and vocational (theoretical and practical) education, preparing them for work and further education. Two-year programmes offered at the first level are for the training of semi-skilled workers and assistants; successful trainees receive a basic vocational training certificate and can enter the labour market or continue their training at the following level. At the second level, one-year programmes train technicians and lead to the award of a certificate of professional training. The completion of technical-vocational programmes at the third level, normally lasting one additional year, gives access to tertiary and higher education; at the end of this level trainees sit the state *matura* exams and the professional practice exam. Continuing vocational training is offered in private centres and public vocational training centres under the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Upon completion of general secondary education, students sit the *matura* exam and if successful are awarded the maturity certificate.

Higher education

Tertiary-level education is offered in vocational training colleges and the duration of programmes leading to a professional diploma is not less than two years. University higher education is provided by universities (faculties and departments), art academies, and higher physical training institutes. Faculties are educational and scientific institutions offering basic, specialized and doctoral studies. Traditionally, the duration of all basic studies was three to six years, specialized studies lasted one or two years, and the duration of doctoral studies was three to five years. Starting from 2005/06, and in the framework of the implementation of the Bologna process, higher education institutions offer accredited programmes organized in modules evaluated in credits using the European Credits Transfer System (ECTS); the average number of credits for a full-time year of studies is 60 credits. Programmes at undergraduate level leading to a bachelor's degree last a minimum of three years (equivalent to 180 ECTS). The duration of programmes leading to the award of a master's degree is two years, including 30-40 credits for the research project and thesis; professional master's degree programmes normally last one and a half years



(60-90 credits). In the case of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, architecture, and veterinary medicine, first-cycle programmes take five to six years to complete. Doctoral studies last a minimum of three years. Third-cycle specialization degree programmes take of a minimum of two years to complete.

At the pre-university level, the school year generally begins in September and ends in June; it is divided into two terms. In 2010/11 the school year consisted of 35 (five-day) teaching weeks in grades 1-9, 36 weeks in grades 10-11, and 34 weeks in grade 12. At the university level, the academic year begins in October and ends in June. It is divided into two semesters, each comprising 15 weeks.

The educational process

Educational reforms implemented in Albania during the period 1992-1998 included the revision of curricula and the definition and introduction of new regulations in several domains, such as foreign language teaching, school management, organization of the school year, evaluation of teachers' performance, etc. Innovations in the curricula of primary and secondary education were introduced from the 1997/98 school year. This process enabled the rationalization of curricula in order to provide greater prospects for the teaching process and enhance efficiency.

The process of modernization of curricula and of the educational process in primary school started in 1993 and was continued later on. Certain innovations were implemented in schools in 1997/98. These changes have been based upon a critical estimation of objectives, content and complexity of curricula concerning subjects, content correlation and functionality of optional subjects and extracurricular activities. Changes included the reduction of school curricula and teaching time (number of lessons), as well as more logical arrangement of the content. Since 1998/99, all pre-university schools operate five days per week. Some subjects like civics, history and literature were completely revised, while others were only partially changed. In addition, other initiatives were launched in order to modernize some forms of work at school, to introduce information technologies, enhance regulations concerning the required qualification of teachers, etc.

As regards secondary education, after several years of examining the achievement results at this level it was concluded that it was necessary to introduce changes in the curricula and in certain domains of activity, to reduce part of the curriculum content, and to introduce innovations reflecting the recent achievements in science and technology, changes in social relations, ways of doing business, laws, etc. A new subject, computer studies, was introduced in general secondary schools and it has been planned to introduce the application of the computer technique in certain subjects in vocational schools. Due to the introduction of this new subject, a better equipping of schools with computers has been foreseen. It has been planned to divide the general school programme into two streams after the second year, i.e. humanities and natural sciences streams. In the same way, the possibility of opening three- or five-year combined vocational secondary schools has been envisaged.

There is a need to develop a curriculum that focuses on the knowledge and skills needed by the students to function in a free market economy and a democratic

society. This requires a shift from the current collection of isolated subjects to an approach that is focused on key learning outcomes. Curriculum specialists need to explore new subject options and/or the integration of subjects to meet the demand for the new knowledge and skills. There is a need to align the current curriculum content and processes with the emerging needs and aspirations of students and parents. Authentic and integrated learning activities that reflect everyday life experience should be included. The curriculum reform should consider the quality of learning rather than the quantity, allowing more time for student to experiment, research, reflect, and synthesize information. It is also necessary to increase flexibility in drafting and designing the curriculum so that schools and local authorities can customize the curriculum to make it more relevant to local circumstances and traditions. Appropriate policies guiding the use of electives and subject clusters can provide that flexibility. While the curriculum framework and national standards are set centrally by the MOES, the school boards and local governments need more flexibility, for example to approve the school curriculum policy and prioritize specific curriculum projects in school grant applications. (MOES, December 2005).

Pre-primary education

Preschool education is not compulsory and caters to children aged 3-5. Preschool education is a functional part of the education system and, at the same time, constitutes an integral part of the system of social care for children. Preschool education is also part of basic education.

The educational activity of the kindergarten is understood as an addition to the family and as a preparation for school. Preschool education aims at: the education and upbringing of free and conscious individuals, participating in social life; the acquisition of the communicative, expressive, logical and operational abilities and competences; and the development of psychomotor, cognitive, emotional, social and moral abilities.

In 1993, the Ministry of Education and Science adopted a draft programme for preschool education for children aged 3-6. This draft programme was defined as an overall framework offering preschool teachers a common orientation for their individual creative work on the basis of real conditions and requirements where they live and work. The programme should be implemented through integration of different fields of educational activities via games and the creation of activity centres. In the main cities of Albania there are pilot preschools applying new methods and advanced didactic elements of educational models. These activities are monitored by local educational authorities and the staff of pilot pre-schools. The Ministry of Education is planning to develop the new preschool curriculum based on the preschool standards approved in 2003. Additionally, the Ministry has approved the standards of achievement for children of 3, 4, and 5 years of age.

The Normative Provisions for Public Schools determine the number of children in upbringing groups of preschool establishments as follows: children 3 to 5 years old: not less than 25 per group; in villages is permitted to have: not less than 15 children per group; in remote villages is permitted to have: not less than 10 children per group. Preschool education institutions usually offer 240 teaching hours (lessons) per year.



The Gardens of Mothers and Children are low-cost community-based centres that serve children from birth to 6 years along with family and community members. Organized by local communities and Christian Children's Fund in spaces donated by families or local government, the centres offer social and educational services. They operate daily from 8.00 am noon, providing children with preschool education and the opportunity to play and learn to interact with their peers. At the same time mothers and other women in the community participate in training and discussions on child health and development, nutrition, play and children's rights. The Gardens of Mothers and Children are situated primarily in remote and poor rural areas in the north and northeast of Albania, where about 15% of the population is children under age 6. Opened in 2004, the centres are benefiting up to 1,800 children. Around 760 fathers take part in activities and training aimed at encouraging active fathering and participation in the community. More than 2,000 mothers and other young women receive training on child health and development and the importance of play and interaction.

The results of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2005 showed that about 40% of the 36-59 month old children attended an early childhood education programme in 2005. Urban, rural and regional differences are significant, as this figure is as high as 49% in urban areas, compared to 35% in rural areas. There are no significant gender differences. There are, however, significant differences regarding the classification by wealth status of the household: 60% of children living in the richest households attended an early childhood education programme, while the figure for children in the poorest households drops to 26%. The proportion of children attending preschool increases with age, from 33% at ages 36-47 months to 45% at 48-59 months. Overall, 70% of children aged 6 or 7 and attending the first grade of primary school were attending preschool the previous year; 74% of children in urban areas had attended preschool the previous year compared to 68% among children living in rural areas. (NIS & UNICEF, 2008).

According to the MOES, in 2007/08 the net enrolment ratio at the pre-primary level was 49%. (MOES, November 2008). The National Institute of Statistics reports that in 2008/09 there were 1,774 preschool education institutions, of which 89 in the private sector. The total enrolment was 75,445 children, of whom 3,464 in the private sector. The number of educators at the preschool level was 3,949. (NIS, 2010).

Primary and lower secondary education (basic education)

As mentioned, primary education is compulsory and children enter primary school when they reach the age of 6. The traditional eight-year compulsory primary education programme was divided into two four-year cycles, i.e. grades 1-4 and grades 5-8. In 2004 the government decided to introduce the nine-year primary (basic) education programme, comprising primary (grades 1 to 5) and lower secondary education (grades 6 to 9). The implementation of the nine-year basic education programme started in 2008/09.

The main objectives of school education are to: support the development intellectual, creative, practical and physical skills among pupils as well as their independent, critical, creative, constructive and tolerant action; promote the harmonious personal development of pupils; support the acquisition of patriotic,



human, moral and democratic values; and prepare for adult life and further general and vocational education. Primary (basic) education aims to:

- provide readiness for citizenship, work, further education and self-education;
- provide the basic elements of general education;
- prepare for the application of acquired knowledge and skills and the creative use of leisure time;
- develop intellectual and physical abilities, independence and interest in acquiring new knowledge;
- provide the basic principles regarding the development of environment, society and human beliefs, and develop awareness of the need to protect health, nature and the human environment;
- develop human values, love of truth, patriotism and other ethical characteristics of the individual;
- encourage human and cultural relations among individuals irrespective of their sex, race, religion, nationality and personal beliefs;
- develop the need for culture and the preservation of cultural inheritance;
- provide the basic knowledge of appropriate behaviour in all occasions.

School curricula are approved by the Ministry of Education and Science and developed by the Institute of Curricula and Standards (Institute of Pedagogical Research). The curriculum includes the list of compulsory and optional subjects, their schedule by grades, and the weekly and annual number of lessons. It also defines the content of each subject, teaching aims and objectives, and provides instructions on how to accomplish these tasks. School councils, in collaboration with the municipality, take decisions on which optional subjects and foreign languages (both compulsory and optional) will be offered.

As regards the former eight-year primary education programme, compulsory subjects included: mother tongue; foreign language; music; art; knowledge of nature; history; geography; physics; mathematics; biology; chemistry; civic education; technical education; and physical education. A second foreign language as an optional subject was offered in grades 3-8. In addition to compulsory and optional subjects, other types of upbringing and learning included: sports (one week during the school year for sport, recreation and cultural activities); excursions (one to three days per school year); additional work for gifted students; remedial instruction for pupils with learning problems; support to pupils taking the catch-up examination; social and free group activities; preparation for participation in various competitions or Olympiads; and cultural and other activities. The lesson timetable of the former eight-year primary education (1998) is shown in the table below:

Primary education: weekly lesson timetable (1998)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade							
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Albanian language	–	5	5	5	4	3	3	3
Literature	10	5	5	4	3	3	3	3
Foreign language	–	–	–	–	2	2	2	2
History	–	–	–	1	2	2	2	2
Knowledge of nature	–	–	2	2	3	–	–	–
Geography	–	–	–	–	1	2	2	2
Mathematics	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4
Physics	–	–	–	–	–	2	2	1
Chemistry	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2
Biology	–	–	–	–	–	1	2	2
Civic education	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Art education	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Music education	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1
Technical education	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
Physical education	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Total weekly periods	21	21	23	23	27	27	28	28

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, 1998. Each teaching period lasts forty-five minutes.

The weekly lesson timetable of the nine-year basic education programme for the school year 2010/11 is presented below:

Albania. Basic education: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade									
	First stage					Second stage				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Mother language (Albanian)	8	8	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	
Foreign language	–	–	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	
Mathematics	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	
Knowledge of nature	–	–	2	3	2	–	–	–	–	
Physics	–	–	–	–	–	1	2	2	2	
Chemistry	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	2	
Biology & health education	–	–	–	–	–	2	2	2	2	
Our country	–	–	–	–	2	–	–	–	–	
History	–	–	–	1	–	2	2	2	2	
Geography	–	–	–	–	–	2	2	2	2	
Civic education	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Art education	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	–	
Music education	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	
Technological training	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	–	–	
Physical education	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	
Computer studies	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	1	
Additional activities, electives	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	
Total weekly periods	20	20	22	23	23	27	29	29	29	

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, *Lesson plans of pre-university education for the school year 2010-2011*. Each teaching period lasts about 45 minutes.



Pupils' achievements in each subject are assessed using a 10-point grading scale, i.e. exemplary (10); very good (9); good (8 or 7); satisfactory (6); sufficient (5); and insufficient (4 to 1, failing marks). Pupils' behavior is assessed through non-numerical grades, i.e. exemplary, very good, good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory.

The monitoring of pupils' performance and the assessment process are carried out almost every day. The assessment is carried out two times during one term and at the end of the school year, when the overall evaluation and final grades are given. If the subject syllabus includes several fields, or theory and practice, the performance and progress of pupils are monitored in each field separately and, at the end of the term and of the school year, a unique, final mark is assigned. Pupils' overall achievement is calculated on the basis of the arithmetical mean of non-failing marks in each subject. The assessment of pupils' behaviour is not taken into account for determining the pupils' general achievement.

Normally pupils are promoted to the next grade if they have non-failing marks in all the compulsory subjects. Grade 1 pupils are promoted to the next year even if they have failing marks. Besides assessment during regular instruction, students are also assessed at examinations. The content depends on the type of examination and the syllabus. Examinations include: the catch-up exam in the subject in which the student failed to achieve a sufficient mark (at least '5'); the class exam in subjects in which the student has not received any mark; the remedial exam in the subject in which the student failed. At the end of basic education (grade 9), students sit the school-leaving examination and if successful are awarded the certificate of completed primary (basic) school.

The results of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2005 showed that of children who are of primary school entry age (typically age 6 or 7), 82% were attending the first grade of primary school in 2005. Sex differentials do not exist, nor between urban and rural areas. Overall, about 92% of primary school age children (6-9) were attending primary school and 96% of basic school age children (6-13) were attending basic schooling. The low rate for children 6 years old is related with the fact that children often start school at age 7. With the exception of this group of young children who are starting school late, primary schooling is virtually universal. Almost all children (99%) that completed successfully the last grade of primary school were found at the time of the survey to be attending the first grade of (lower) secondary school. Ninety-five percent of children of lower secondary completion age (14 years) completed secondary, however a quarter of children did not continue to upper secondary education. The transition rate to upper secondary shows bigger differentials between urban and rural areas (89% versus 68%) (NIS & UNICEF, 2008).

According to the MOES, in 2007/08 the net enrolment ratio at the basic education level was 92%. (MOES, November 2008). The National Institute of Statistics reports that in 2008/09 there were 1,605 primary and lower secondary schools, of which 128 in the private sector. The total enrolment was 457,886 students, of whom 20,452 in the private sector. The number of teachers at the primary and lower secondary level was 27,724. In the public sector the teacher to pupil ratio was 1:17 (1:20 in urban areas and 1:15 in rural areas), while in the private sector it was 1:10.5. (NIS, 2010). In 2009, the net enrolment ratio was estimated at 88%. (Government of Albania & UN Albania, 2010).



Secondary education

As mentioned, secondary education is provided in high schools or gymnasias, technical and vocational schools, art, sports, foreign language and pedagogical schools. Following the introduction of nine-year basic education, general secondary education lasts three years (prior to 2008, the duration of the programme was four years). Secondary art schools educate students in the fields of music, art and ballet.

Starting from 2009/10, initial vocational education is offered at three levels and provides basic education graduates with general and vocational (theoretical and practical) education, preparing them for work and further education. Two-year programmes offered at the first level are for the training of semi-skilled workers and assistants; successful trainees receive the basic vocational training certificate and can enter the labour market or continue their training at the following level. At the second level, one-year programmes train technicians and lead to the award of a certificate of professional training. The completion of technical-vocational programmes at the third level, normally lasting one additional year, gives access to tertiary and higher education; at the end of this level trainees sit the state *matura* exams and the professional practice exam. Continuing vocational training is offered in private centres and public vocational training centres run by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

In order to prepare students for work and further education, the main aims of secondary education are to: provide the necessary general, specialized and vocational knowledge, skills and habits based on scientific, technical, cultural and artistic achievements; and develop of intellectual, ethical, aesthetic and other personal abilities and characteristics of students, in particular love for vocation and love for homeland as well as the ability and readiness to defend its independence.

Gymnasias provide general education in humanities and sciences which qualify students for further education at the tertiary and higher education level. Upon completion of general secondary education, students sit the *matura* exam and if successful are awarded the maturity certificate. There are also high schools for music and arts, dance, sports, pedagogy, and foreign languages. These schools are different from other types of secondary schools in several aspects including enrolment conditions, as students who want to enter these schools have to pass special tests on talents and abilities. At the end of the programmes offered in these schools, students sit the final examination and, if successful, they are awarded the maturity diploma and also a certificate of professional skills.

As in the case of basic education, secondary school curricula are approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. The curriculum consists of compulsory and optional subjects. Optional subjects include, among others, foreign languages and computer studies; local educational authorities can decide the optional subjects offered by the school, based on the local conditions and needs. The weekly lesson timetable of general secondary education (high schools or gymnasias, four-year programme) implemented in 1998 is shown in the table below:

Comprehensive school: weekly lesson timetable (1998)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each form			
	I	II	III	IV
Language and literature	3	4	4	4
History	2	2	2	3
Geography	3	2	2	–
Foreign language	2	2	2	2
Knowledge of society	2	2	–	–
Knowledge of economy	–	–	–	2
Introduction to philosophy	–	–	2	–
Mathematics	5	4	5	5
Physics	3	3	3	4
Chemistry	2	3	2	2
Biology	2	2	2	2
Technology	2	2	–	–
Computer studies	–	–	2	2
Astronomy	–	–	–	1
Physical education	2	2	2	2
Total weekly periods	28	28	28	29

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, 1998. Each teaching period lasts forty-five minutes.

The weekly lesson timetable of general (upper) secondary education for the school year 2010/11 (three-year programme) is presented below:

Albania. General secondary education (high school, gymnasium): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade		
	10	11	12
Albanian language and literature	3	3	4
First foreign language	3	3	4
Mathematics	3	3	4
Physics	2	2	–
Chemistry	2	2	–
Biology	2	2	–
History			
Earth science, environment, astronomy	2	–	–
Natural sciences	–	–	2
Civic education	2	1	–
History	1	2	2
Geography	–	1	2
Economics	–	–	2
Career education and personal growth	1	1	1
Technology	–	–	2
Computer studies	2	1	–
Arts and history of the art	1	1	1
Physical education and sports	2	1	–
<i>Sub-total core curriculum</i>	26	23	24
Compulsory electives	2–4	4–6	4–6
Free electives	2	3	2
Total weekly periods	30–32	30–32	30–32

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, *Lesson plans of pre-university education for the school year 2010-2011*. High schools must offer 30 periods per week, while gymnasias can offer up to 32 weekly periods. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

A student repeats the grade if he/she, at the end of the school year, has at least three failing marks in compulsory subjects and if he/she does not take the catch-up examination or the class examination or fails to pass them. At the end of each grade, a student who has non-failing grades is awarded a certificate of completion for that grade.

According to the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Law of 2002, the main objectives of VET are to: develop the main personal objectives of the individual, necessary for his/her future professional activity in a society based on democratic principles and the market economy; adapt VET to the current and future labour market conditions; offer general professional knowledge and specialized vocational training in accordance with the development of science and technology as well as the national culture and traditions; and enable the individual to be suited to the changing labour market requirements. There are vocational schools for industry, agriculture, economy, construction, technology and services. Vocational profiles cover a variety of fields, including: forestry and wood processing; agriculture; veterinary; sewing;



geology and mining; metallurgy; mechanical, engineering and metal processing; electrical engineering; chemistry; textile and leather processing; trade; catering and tourism; economy and administration. Normally, general education contents cover 40-50% of the curriculum. Theoretical and vocational education represents 20 to 25%, and practical training 25 to 40% of the total number of lessons. Schools may also offer optional subjects which should meet the specific and special interests of students, their choice of vocation and broader knowledge.

The results of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2005 showed that after the compulsory years of education (eight years at that time), secondary school attendance drops off consistently from 83% for 14 year olds to 58% for 17 year olds. In 2005, 57% of children aged 14-17 were attending upper secondary education, with urban children (69%) more likely to attend upper secondary than rural children (51%). Similarly, 78% of children from the richest households were attending upper secondary school but only 35% of children from the poorest households. While gender parity for primary and lower secondary school is close to 1.00, indicating no difference in the attendance of girls and boys to primary school, the indicator drops to 0.96 for upper secondary education. Gender disparity which is more evident at the upper secondary level is driven by the patterns of school attendance in rural and urban areas and household wealth. The disadvantage of girls is particularly pronounced in the poorest households. Poor families are more likely to send boys to school when they cannot afford education for all their children. (NIS & UNICEF, 2008).

According to the MOES, in 2007/08 the net enrolment ratio at the upper secondary level was 57% (25% in rural areas and 85% in urban areas). (MOES, November 2008). The National Institute of Statistics reports that in 2008/09 there were 502 upper secondary schools, of which 121 in the private sector. The total enrolment in general education was 132,803 students, of whom 11,695 in the private sector. In addition, 21,658 students (of whom 1,827 in the private sector) were enrolled in vocational education. The number of teachers at the upper secondary level was 8,046. The teacher to student ratio at the upper secondary level was 1:16 in the public sector and 1:8.4 in the private sector. (NIS, 2010).

Assessing learning achievement nation-wide

Albania has participated in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). In PISA 2000, Albanian students received the second lowest score among the participating countries. PISA 2003 results showed that a significant proportion of Albanian students aged 15 years had poor reading literacy skills. Overall, 70.3% of the Albanian students who participated in PISA 2003 fall below literacy level 1, while the average for OECD countries is 19.1%.

As regards PISA 2009, Albanian students scored 385 in reading (OECD countries average: 493), 377 in mathematics (OECD average: 496), and 391 in science (OECD average: 501).

Teaching staff

Preschool teachers must complete a four-year pedagogical programme or be graduates from faculties of education in order to teach in preschool establishments. Recently, some faculties have established three-year training programme for preschool teachers.

Primary school teachers teaching in grades 1-4 must have the same qualifications as preschool teachers. Subject teachers in higher grades (5 to 8/9) of primary (basic) education schools must hold a higher education degree (university level). All teachers must sit the professional examination.

Theoretical and practical instruction in secondary school shall be provided by teachers having completed their higher education. Practical instruction in secondary vocational schools shall be provided by teachers with higher education or with a secondary school qualification (in the case that they have completed a relevant specialization after the secondary school).

Curricula for pre-service teacher training encompass three basic groups of disciplines: (a) the disciplines in the field of academic education; (b) pedagogical and psychological disciplines (pedagogy, psychology and teaching methods for vocational subjects); and (c) teaching practice. Psychology includes developmental and pedagogical psychology.

All universities offer pre-service teacher education programmes. There are differences concerning the number of lessons devoted to pedagogical/psychological and methodological disciplines, as well as the subjects taught. Most programmes include pedagogy, psychology and didactics. Teaching methods (with demonstration classes and practical lessons) are considered by all programmes, but with different numbers of lessons. The duration of studies is three years.

Concerning teachers' workload, at the preschool level teachers work 36 hours per week. At the primary level (grades 1-4/5), teachers work 23-26 hours per week. In grades 5/6-8/9, teachers of language and literature work 20 hours per week; teachers of mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology, 22 hours per week; and other teachers, 24 hours per week. At the secondary level, teachers of language and literature normally have 20 teaching hours per week. Other teachers and vocational school teachers have 22 hours per week; professional internship work 33 weekly hours (data refer to 2003; see Musai, 2006).

Educational laws provide for the necessity of a permanent in-service training of educational staff. Permanent in-service training is more precisely detailed by separate regulations on in-service training of primary and particularly secondary school teachers. The content of in-service training programmes can include: children's developmental psychology; methodology and didactics; teaching methods; pedagogical psychology; methods of pedagogical work; informatics; application of new teaching technology; social psychology; etc. Universities, professional societies,



scientific and professional organizations, and some non-governmental organizations offer in-service training programmes in several fields.

In-service training at the school level can be individual or collective. The individual type is accomplished by mastering the approved programme, studying professional and scientific literature, applying professional and scientific achievements, performing experimental lessons and professional lectures, issuing professional papers, as well as by acquiring a higher degree of qualification. Collective in-service training is conducted within the professional teachers' work groups and teachers' councils of one or several schools in the area of a municipality or region, or within professional societies. The school principal, inspectors from local education authorities and the Ministry of Education and Science monitor in-service training activities.

Government has pledged to achieve Education for All by 2015, and has committed increased funding to attain specific goals. To attract and retain committed professionals to the field, teachers' salaries have been doubled over the past five years. (Government of Albania & UN Albania, 2010). The range of (net) teacher salaries in public schools was 260-300 Euros in 2011.

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Web resources

Ministry of Education and Science: <http://www.mash.gov.al/> [Mainly in Albanian; some information in English. Last checked: November 2011.]

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities: <http://www.mpcs.gov.al/> [In Albanian; some information in English. Last checked: November 2011.]

National Agency of Vocational Education and Training: <http://akafp-al.org/> [Mainly in Albanian; some information in English. Last checked: November 2011.]

National Inspectorate for Pre-university Education: <http://ikap.edu.al/> [In Albanian; some information in English. Last checked: November 2011.]

Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education: <http://www.aaal.edu.al/> [In Albanian. Last checked: November 2011.]

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>