

- **Background information on your Higher Education System**

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Main achievements since Bergen

1. Describe the important developments relating to the Bologna Process, including legislative reforms, since Bergen.

As a country, included in the Bologna Process from the very beginning, Bulgaria will continue achievement of the main goal – creation of an integrated model of higher education and building an European Higher Education Area. Bulgaria continued to work towards aligning of our higher education with the modern European standards and good practices after the Bergen Conference. The legislative reforms gave impetus to the development of the Bologna Process.

During the last two years the Higher Education Act underwent changes and some supplements were added. (http://minedu.government.bg/opencms/exports/sites/mon/left_menu/documents/law/zkn_voEU.pdf) The same happened to sub-delegated legislation. The changes will be in effect from 01.01.2007 – the date on which the Contract for the accession of the Republic of Bulgaria to the European Union becomes effective. They will eliminate the existing obstacles, connected with the opening of affiliates of foreign institutions of higher education in Bulgaria. The students, doctoral students and postgraduates – citizens of the member states of the European Union and the European Economic Community - will have the chance to be admitted to Bulgarian higher educational institutions and pay fees for their education under the conditions and regulations set for Bulgarian citizens. This will be an important step towards broadening of the European dimensions of the higher education and the opportunity of equal access of young people willing to continue their education in Bulgaria. Another legislative change is directly linked to the free movement of people and their right to practice a regulated profession in Bulgaria on the basis of recognized professional qualification and diploma of higher education, issued by a certified authority in a member-state.

The ordinances for the state requirements for acquiring a higher education in programmes which suppose practicing of regulated professions have been aligned with the Sector Directives of the EU since 2005. Thus an opportunity for European compatibility and comparativeness of the suggested educational programmes has been guaranteed. A favorable environment of trust in the quality of the offered education has been created, the students' and lecturers' mobility has been encouraged.

The process of alignment of the regulations with the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA) was completed at the end of 2005 and the requirements of the Higher Education Act and the international standards of quality were met. The Agency modernized its principles and drafted its main guiding documents using the European recommendations and the ENQA guidelines for providing quality. The NEAA became a member of the Central European network of the agencies providing quality for education and in 2006 NEAA is a full member of ENQA which grows its international reputation.

New Strategy for development of higher education is expected soon. Having in mind our future accession to the EU on 01.01.2007, it will set this tasks and perspectives for the development of the Bulgarian education in new social and economic conditions.

National Organisation

2. Describe any changes since Bergen in the structure of public authorities for higher education, the main agencies/bodies in higher education and their roles.

There was no urgent or significant structural changes to the management of higher education system after Bergen. The coordination and execution of authority got better among the main national institutions responsible for higher education. They are the National Assembly (NA), the Council of Ministers (CM), the Minister of education and science and the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA). Their activities were described in detail in the Bulgarian report in Bergen.

The minister of education and science has the authority of coordination, control and management of the higher education system. Other new things, concerning setting-up and support of an informational system containing register of higher schools, register of the academic staff with main and additional labor contract, register of current and suspended students and doctoral students according to their degree and professional field, register of graduates.

The NEAA (www.neaa.government.bg) created within its structure a unit for post-accreditation monitoring and control which activity is linked to the monitoring of the tendencies that appear in the post-accreditation period.

Other organizations which take part in the management of higher education are:

The Council of Rectors (<http://sr.au-plovdiv.bg/ustav.html>). This is the body that voices the common interests of the higher education institutions in front of the state authorities. It issues statements and proposals on problems in higher education and science; it issues opinion on the Annual Draft of the National Budget Act especially on its part concerning higher education and science; issues statements on the criteria for awarding academic ranks and academic titles and others.

The National Representation of the students' councils (www.npss.bg) voices at national level the interests of the students and doctoral students.

The Higher Attestation Commission (<http://vak.acad.bg/>) is an institution with the Council of Ministers and main focus on awarding and recognition of academic ranks and titles.

A sector council for tripartite cooperation in the field of higher education and science was set up with the Ministry of Education and Science this year. It aims at guaranteeing transparency and social consensus in the discussion of strategic issues and legislation concerning the development of higher education. Its members are deputy ministers of education and science and all national representative organizations of trade unions and employers.

- There is no legislative requirement the MoES to be monitored by other ministries. Horizontal links between the MoES, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Economy and other interested ministries and organizations have been set up. Through them, policies concerning main tendencies in the development of higher education and human resources are coordinated. The National Audit Office carries out planned financial check-ups and external audit of the universities. For better financial control, the MoES is obliged to submit every month to the Ministry of Finance a generalized report about the monthly usage of budget funds every university and in the Bulgarian Academy of Science, and every three months a generalized report to the Ministry of Finance and the National Audit Office.

- The public higher education institutions are funded in accordance with the norm for sustaining a single student and the annual plan for admittance approved by the Council of Ministers. The state is mainly responsible for funding higher education at the expense of other sources of funding. The subsidy from the state budget is approved by the National Assembly and ensures funds for: support of the training – it depends on the number of the students, the professional sectors and the assessment given at the time of accreditation; the art and science activity in every higher education institutions, publishing of textbooks and scientific works, overhead expenses, capital expenses. Every state-owned higher school drafts, fulfills, strikes a balance of and accounts for its own budget. It has the right to form its own funds and to determine independently the conditions and rules under which they are put on use. Thus the revenues of the public higher education institution include the subsidy from the state, financial aid, donations, wills and sponsorships, income of their own coming from scientific research, sports, consulting, etc. At the

end of the year the surplus of the income over the expenditure stays with the higher school for the next year.

- The state management of the higher education comes down to setting up of general framework and conditions for the system functioning. The Higher Education Act gives full academic independence to higher education institutions. The state encourages the autonomous higher education institutions in their efforts to build strong and sustainable university structures with enough independence and transparency of process of decision making. At the present time the good practices are being researched and promoted and the possibilities of implementation of new managing models are being explored, models that are connected with the adoption of modern forms of managing, leading to further financial stabilization of universities.

3. Describe any changes since Bergen to the institutional structure.

The state and the higher education institutions make joint efforts to optimize institutional structure. Four colleges and one faculty were closed down in the first half of 2006 after proposals from the universities, followed by decrees of the Council of Ministers. The optimization procedure spreads over the medicine colleges too.

- The total number of higher schools in Bulgaria is 51, 37 of them are state-owned and 14 – private.
- Higher education institutions can be classified according to type and also according to their ownership. According to their type they are: universities, specialized higher schools and colleges; according to their ownership they are state-owned and private.

The universities offer education on a large scale of disciplines in at least three spheres of knowledge (humanitarian, natural, social and technical sciences) and award educational and qualification degrees of “bachelor”, “master” and “doctor”.

The specialized higher institutions ensure education mainly in one of the areas of knowledge which is reflected in the name of the schools. Specialized schools can also be defined as universities under the condition that they offer master’s and doctor’s programmes which meet the requirements of the legislation.

Colleges are structures which offer professional higher education. They offer a three-year training course and their graduates are awarded the degree “specialist” in a specific professional field (ISCED’97 - level 5B). The college graduates can continue their education in bachelor’s programmes.

The Bulgarian Academy of Science, the National centre for agrarian science, the national centre of public health and other scientific organizations can hold doctor’s programmes for scientific specialties that have scored a very good assessment at the programme accreditation.

- In the 2006/2007 educational cycle 33 476 students were admitted to the state-owned universities and 7400 to the private ones. The ratio is 81.8 to 18.2 in favor of the state-owned higher schools.
- All higher education institutions are opened in accordance with the requirements of the Higher Education Act and are regulated by common legislation which they are obligated to observe. In their own regulation documents they may include additional rules which do not contradict with the legislation.

Partnership

4. Describe the structure which oversees the implementation of the Bologna Process in your country.

Through its directorates “Higher Education Policy” and “European Integration and international Cooperation” the Ministry of Education and Science monitors directly and assists the development of the Bologna Process in Bulgaria. Partnerships have been established with:

- National teams of „Bologna promoters” through National Agency “Socrates/Erasmus”. It consists of five members. They provide educational seminars, which inform the main topics in the Bologna process: “Recognition of higher education and implementation of ESCT”, “The role of the

students in the Bologna Process”, “Competence in higher education”, “The role of the higher education on regional development”, “The attractiveness of higher education – main Bologna priority”. They have made the academic community became more active in the process of fulfillment and implementation of a Bologna reforms at national level.

- “National teams of Bologna promoters” traditionally include a representative of students’ community who works in close by national students’ organizations. Conferences and meetings are organized in order to motivate the students` commitment to the Bologna process. They have substantially contributed to development of projects which encourage students’ activity and promote the role of Students councils in assessment of the quality at university and accreditation level.

The action plan of the newly-created Sector Council for tripartite cooperation called “Higher Education and Science” within the MoES entirely covers the main priorities of the Bologna process. Its main members (representing trade unions and employers’ organizations) have extensive experience and are very proficient in the implementation of the Bologna process in Bulgaria.

The Council of Rectors also plays a significant role in the implementation of the Bologna Process in Bulgaria. Through its energetic activity positive actions have been undertaken which lead to tangible achievements. One of them is the “Memorandum for cooperation between business and higher schools in Bulgaria” which has been adopted at national level. This document encourages the development of the Bologna Process in Bulgaria through undertaking of concrete actions toward: financial support of higher schools under preliminary negotiated conditions; inclusion of representatives of the business community in the activity of the academic councils; spreading of information about labor market and employers; working on mutual projects for exchange of experience and staff; acquaintance with the good practices in business; post-graduate qualification of market-oriented staff; development of trainee programmes and setting-up of students’ career centres.

The Bologna process in Bulgaria encouraged the creation of other associations. They are the Association of the rectors of the private universities in Bulgaria, the Association of the rectors of classical universities.

The new Strategy establishes concrete steps for active involvement of the private sector and the technical intelligentsia in the development of higher education.

5. Describe the arrangements for involving students and staff trade union/representative bodies in governance of HEIs.

Bulgaria has unambiguous legislation which regulates the participation of students, trade unions with national representation and governing bodies in the managing of the higher education institutions.

- Article 70, paragraph 1, section 5 of the HEA grants the students the right to elect and be elected in governing bodies of higher schools. The students’ council can elect its representative to the governing bodies of the higher school in accordance with article 73, paragraph 1, section 1 of the HEA, and article 73a grants the National representation of the students’ councils the status of a national body which represents the interests of students and doctoral students. Articles 73a and 73b provide for the formation of National council for solving students problems which is a consulting body with the minister of education and science.

Articles 2 and 3 of the Labor Code, updated this year by the Act for Amendment and Supplement of the Labor Code (promulgated in State Gazette N48 of 2006), regulate the social dialogue and the collective labor negotiation. It is an obligation of the state to ask for the opinion of the representative organizations of trade unions and employers when adopting regulation documents in the field of labor relations and the relations connected with them – like social security relations and issues of the standard of living. The cooperation and the consultations are carried out on national level within the National Council of Tripartite Cooperation which includes representatives of trade unions and employers’ organizations. At institutional level in higher schools there are collective labor contracts, registered with the General Labor Inspectorate. They must include the

mechanisms for participation in the governance of the higher schools. This is done through the councils of social partnership, set up with an ordinance by the rector.

- The Students' Council is a body which should defend the common interests of students and doctoral students. It arranges for the election of its representative into the governing bodies of the higher school. The National Representation of students' councils is a national body defending the academic, social and cultural rights and common interests of the students and doctoral students. It has the right to present its opinion on the state budget, more specifically its part about education and science. The National Council for Solving Students' Problems is a consulting body with the minister of education and science.

6. Describe the measures in places to ensure the cooperation of business and social partners within the Bologna Process.

The encouragement of the cooperation among business, social partnership and higher education institutions is set as a main priority in carrying out the reform in Bulgarian higher education. The MoES works intensively towards building adequate environment for modernization of higher education system which should be balanced in accordance with the needs of business and society. The purpose is to achieve adequate relation between the requirements of the labor market and the quality of the labor potential which ensures long-term and stable employment for young people.

The relationships among MoES, the national trade unions and the employers' representatives have improved significantly due to the activities of the Sector Council "Higher Education and Science" of the tripartite cooperation. The democratic spirit of such consulting institution has a direct connection to the Bologna Process. The MoES seeks the participation and informs of its social partners in the preparation and discussion of strategic regulation documents. This year funding of higher education and the possibilities of universities to accumulate their own funds have been discussed.

Specific steps have been taken towards building stable partnerships and optimizing the differences between the needs of business, employers and the qualification of graduates. At the initiative of the staff of "National Teams of Bologna Promoters" and the Council of Rectors the attention of the society has been focused on the regional dimensions and significance of university in the development of local economies and the stabilization of regions. A special conference was held which discussed the future measures for raising the level of demand for professional qualification and its connection to the reality of the human factor. After these debates the term "educational regions" gained popularity in the country, the same happened to the political understanding of concrete educational policies for stabilizing the connections between universities and business partners.

Another example of a stable partnership between universities and business is the creation of Centers for Career Development at higher education institutions. A special training of their staff has been ensured by the certification of their experts in accordance with the Global Career Development Facilitator Programme. The centers not only facilitate the professional orientation of the graduates, but also serve as a bridge between higher schools and employers' in order to meet the social needs. Almost all higher education institutions have appreciated the benefits of setting up career centers and at present such centers function in 24 higher schools.

The universities are changing their disposition towards the current changes at the labor market and they have started:

- Looking for a new balance between theory and practice, (for example through students' participation in internships). This experience contributes to the students' increased interest in the specialized practical training. Such good practices have been established at the University of National and International Economy, the Agrarian University and the National Sports Academy, where students have additional motivation after they graduate.

- Updating qualification characteristics of programmes at a three-level structure. The goal is to make them clearer and easy to understand by the employers. For now there is poor understanding of the advantages of the three-level training and its connection to the labor compensation.
- Encouraging relations with business through building bridges between the existing small and medium enterprises in some universities and attempting to make them high-tech business incubators for development and implementation of innovative products.
- Signing of mutual agreements with representatives of business in the field of education, science and technology. Some technical universities are able to react quickly to the arising professional opportunities. It is the universities top priority to create scientific communities through ensuring of strategic unions with industry and setting up of specific laboratories and centers for development of modern technologies as well as finding technical solutions with practical implementation in industry and society.

- **Main Stocktaking questions, including scorecard elements**

- **Degree System**

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

- Stage of implementation of the first and second cycle

- 7. Describe the progress made towards introducing the first and second cycle

When the Bologna Declaration was signed Bulgaria was one of the few countries which had three-cycle system and had introduced the educational and qualification degrees – bachelor, master and doctor - in accordance with the Framework for Qualifications of EHEA. The system functions well because there are clear distribution and differentiation of requirements for the training plans and programmes for each separate degree. Constant efforts have been made towards updating and coordination of modern requirements for the qualitative and quantitative distribution of new knowledge, abilities and competence for every separate cycle. They should be academically appropriate and suitable to the market needs. The goal is to achieve quality balance in the distribution of training load among separate levels. Additional efforts are made for achieving a complete recognition, comparison and integration of the Bulgarian and European education and qualification systems.

- In 2006 78% of all students are trained at the bachelor's level and 18% - at the master's level.

- Stage of implementation of the third cycle

(Eurydice)

- 8. Describe the progress made towards implementing doctoral students as the third Bologna Cycle.

During the last two years the attention was focused on the quality of the doctoral programmes, the development of interdisciplinary and joint (with other European universities) doctoral studies. The universities which will offer such programmes have been carefully selected and the condition of the scientific potential of the training unit – examined. In order to achieve the right to carry out doctoral training in a certain scientific field the universities and the scientific organizations should receive a very good assessment for programme accreditation from the NEAA. New criteria have been set up and they are linked with the following ratios: lecturers-students; successful graduates-total number of people trained; relative share of the people who are trained in joint projects with foreign universities, etc.

- 2.5% of the students are trained at the doctor's level.
- The regular doctoral degree requires three years and the distance one requires minimum of four years. The doctoral studies are done according to an individual training plan which includes: the subject of the dissertation, the preparation (attending of a certain cycle of lectures and seminars, participation in courses, conferences and other public events) research tasks, and deadlines for their completion, teaching and defense of the thesis.
- The Faculty council of the higher school (or the scientific council of the unit) which trains the doctoral student selects a scientific mentor, approves the training plan and assesses it annually. Scientists with academic rank or another doctor have the right to become mentors of the doctoral

students. The doctoral students are examined according to the individual training plan by a commission consisting of at least three people with academic rank and with the participation of the scientific mentor of the doctoral student. Once a year the scientific organization which trains the doctoral student discusses the individual plan of the doctoral student, his or her research work and the condition of his or her dissertation.

- The doctoral training is included as the last third cycle in the national qualification framework. It is in accordance with the descriptor in the European qualification framework. The subjects of the doctoral programmes are consistent with the specialties in the General Classifier of the specialties of the scientific workers (State Gazette N81 of 1995). The autonomous higher schools and scientific organizations define the necessary knowledge, abilities and competence which the doctoral student should have acquired at the end of his training.

- Interdisciplinary training is provided for the development of the abilities of the doctoral students to be able to make a critical analysis, assessment and synthesis of new and complex ideas in different fields.

- Presently there are no requirements which include gaining of credits in the field of doctoral studies.

9. Access to the next cycle

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Describe the arrangements for access between the first and second cycles and the third cycle.

- Students whose grade point average is no less than good 4 at the bachelor level (the literal correspondence to the ECTS scale is C) can continue their studies to be awarded a master's degree.

- The students who have completed the first cycle of the bachelor's programme do not have the right to continue in the doctor's programme.

- Students whose grade in the bachelor diploma is no less than good 4 (the literal correspondence to the ECTS scale is C) can continue to study to become masters but do not have the right to continue their education to become doctors.

- All students who have been awarded a master's degree have the right to continue their training at the third level.

- There are no prohibitions of the access between the first and second degrees.

- All qualifications from second cycle provide access to the third cycle.

- No linking courses between the cycles are necessary as the access is totally open.

- Measures to obviate the obstacles between the cycles have not been planned because no such obstacles exist in the Bulgarian higher education system.

Implementation of national qualification framework

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

10. Describe the stage of implementation of the national qualifications framework to align with the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA.

- Since 1995 by means of legislation a qualification framework for higher education has been introduced in Bulgaria. It includes the following educational and qualification degrees: bachelors, master's and doctor's. Decree of the Council of Ministers N162 (promulgated in State Gazette N 76 from 2002) sets the state requirements regulating the conditions for higher education for awarding bachelor's and master's degree and Decree of the Council of Ministers N222 (promulgated in State Gazette N 90 from 2002) sets the state requirements for admittance of doctoral students. Ordinance N 21 of the Minister of Education and Science provides for the requirements and procedure for implementation of the system for accumulation and transfer of credits at separate levels as well as the correspondence of the six-grade evaluation system to the letter scale for evaluation of ECTS.

The state sets the following requirements for graduates at bachelor level: they should have a broad-scale training, basic knowledge, abilities and competence, connected with the wholesome idea of the essence of the professional sector and the programme; they are expected to have acquired a broad-scale theoretical knowledge and practical abilities; ability of adaptation in accordance with the ever changing conditions on the labor market; they should have acquired

abilities for independent professional work and working as part of a team. On this basis the autonomous higher education institutions include the necessary specific to the programme knowledge, abilities and competence in the qualification description of each programme. The students who have completed the four-year course of training should have been awarded at least 240 credits and 10 of them should be for a passed state exam or a defense of a thesis.

The state sets the following requirements for graduates at master level: they should have acquired fundamental knowledge and deep scientific and theoretical understanding of their programme; they should have learned the basics of the scientific research; they should have developed abilities for adaptation in situation with changing social, economic and technological conditions. On this basis the autonomous higher schools should determine in the qualification description of every separate programme the necessary additional knowledge, abilities and competence. The graduates of the master's programme after being awarded a bachelor's degree in the same programme should have gained at least 60 credits according to the training plan and 15 of them should be for a passed state exam or defended thesis. For programmes which have only master's degree there should be at least 300 credits and 15 of them should be for a passed state exam or defended thesis.

For the third degree – the doctor's – credits are not awarded. The training institution independently determines the requirements of every scientific specialty for the successful completion of instruction and they should be in accordance with the received scientific accreditation.

The graduates from the short cycle in colleges who have been awarded the degree "specialist" should be: theoretically prepared which means that they should have knowledge about the basis of the professional sector; technologically prepared in accordance with the respective college studies, practically prepared for the respective programme; they should have computer literacy needed for practicing the profession. The qualification description by the college should also contain other additional knowledge, abilities and competence for the practicing of the profession. The students who have passed the course should have at least 180 credits and 10 of them – for a passed state exam or defended thesis.

- The Bulgarian national qualification framework corresponds to a great extent to the Framework for Qualification of the EAHA. It is necessary that further steps are taken for full alignment of the existing requirements of knowledge, abilities and competence with the ones recommended in QF of the EHEA as well as for the commensurability of the awarded credits. It is expected that it will bring about amendments and supplements to the national legislation that covers these issues. During the last two-year period research was done in this respect, expert consulting was provided and the processes of alignment with EQF for LLL and QF of the EHEA were studied at the level of universities and permanent committees in the NEAA.

- Working towards alignment of the national qualification framework with that of the QF of EHEA is expected to finish next year. Having in mind the exceptional importance of the upcoming changes, they will be discussed in detail with nationally represented trade unions and employers organizations.

11. What measures are being taken to increase the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications?

- It is a complicated question and we present it in the broader context of all higher education degree holders. According to information from the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy the relative share of people with higher education is 22% which is the same as the average percentage in the EU countries. The analysis of the data for the registered unemployed people in the country shows a tendency of decreasing of the number of unemployed young people under 29 years of age and the percentage of young people with higher education is the lowest – 6.3 in 2005 and for the first quarter of 2006 it has fallen down even further to 6.1%.

The activity of the career centers facilitates the desired synchronization between the graduates and the dynamic labor market. The career centers are committed to play a key role in the organization of the trainers' programmes and the drawing practicing experts into the training

process. In this respect the centers use efficient tools of regulation and enrichment of the labor market with suitable specialists.

Maintaining contacts with employers and the presence of highly developed forms of employment for students is an element of the criteria of NEAA in institutional accreditation thus stimulating the development of higher schools in this direction.

Other concrete measures connected with the increasing employability and the adequate presence of young people on the labor market are being taken through employment programmes like “Career Start”, “Computer courses for young people” and “Guarantee fund for micro credits”. They give the young people the opportunity for professional career by trainees’ programmes in state administration, funding and enlistment in courses for application exams, development of the entrepreneur spirit and starting private business after graduation, etc. At institutional level the MoES takes actively part in the initiatives of the Ministry of State Administration and Administrative Reform for short-term trainees’ programmes at all levels of state administration which often result in employing young people as experts of the public sector for example internships at MoES.

- In 2005/2006 about 20% of the students continue their training in master’s programmes and 2.5% - in doctor’s programmes;
- We do not expect any substantial changes of these figures in 2006/2007.

Quality Assurance

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

National implementation of the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA.

12. To what extent is your national system of QA already in line with the Standards and Guidelines for the QA in the EHEA?

- During the last two years the efforts of the NEAA were on the complete implementation and alignment of the national system for quality assurance with the respective European standards and guidelines.
- The NEAA took part in all initiatives for standardization of evaluation and accreditation criteria of European agencies for evaluation of higher education and on this basis it developed its own texts and criteria in accordance with the requirements of the Higher Education Act and the Standards for Quality Assurance in Education in the EHEA.
- The Criteria list of the NEAA combines the principle of equality of the three main areas of activity of higher schools: educational and scientific (artistic) activities and governance. Thus suitable environment and conditions for mutual recognition have been established and they become possible through alignment of criteria, procedures and efficiency of results from evaluation and accreditation. The Criteria list of the NEAA is developed in accordance with the basic models of evaluation, especially the CIPP (context, input, process and product evaluation) model. All accredited higher education institutions have internal system for quality assurance. It includes mechanisms of approval, regular review and monitoring of the suggested training plans and programmes, central point is the attention to structure and content of the training material, securing of resources, the students feedback report and the regular review of the training plans. A substantial progress has been detected, as well as greater transparency in criteria of students’ evaluation. In some universities a tradition lost in the 1990s has been revived, namely the compulsory inclusion of the young and newly appointed academic staff in programmes for development of teaching skills. There has been great progress in innovation and modernization of the equipment and materials that serve students in all higher schools.
- The adopted criteria for institutional evaluation and accreditation are developed further in accordance with the standards set in the Guidelines for QA in the EHEA.

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Stage of development of external quality assurance system.

13. Describe the quality assurance system operating in your country.

- To provide external quality assurance a new methodology for evaluation and accreditation has been introduced in 2004. It reflects to the European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance, developed by the E4 group under the governance of the ENQA and adopted at the Bergen meeting. The NEAA Criteria list was announced in 2005. The regularity of evaluation and accreditation is established with the Higher Education Act and 80 % of the higher education institutions in Bulgaria have been evaluated for the second time according to the new criteria by November 1, 2006. At the end of 2006 the first sector reports will be published and they will reflect the situation with higher education in every separate professional sector. They are done on the basis of the ongoing programme accreditation of professional sectors.
- The scope of the accreditation activity of the Agency encompasses all higher schools – universities as well as specialized higher schools and colleges. The accreditation pattern is common for all and it is obligatory for the private as well as for the state-owned institutions.
- The accreditation decisions are based on the evaluation done by external independent experts and the internal self-assessment (the self-assessment report), visits on the spot and evaluation report which is submitted to the evaluation institution before the final decision is taken. The report is not publicly accessible. Only the accreditation decision is published and it contains a concise evaluation according to the criteria, period of validity of the accreditation, the capacity of the higher school and recommendation for improvement. A system of post-accreditation monitoring has been introduced. The period of post-accreditation and monitoring of the adherence to the recommendations depends on the general evaluation.
- From May to June 2005 the NEAA was checked-up by an external team from the National Audit Office and its activity in connection with sustaining and improvement of the quality of Bulgarian higher education was evaluated. This audit, however, could not be linked because of objective reasons to the review of the activity of the Agency in connection with meeting of Bergen standards for an Agency for external quality assurance because these standards were set up later in May same year.

Level of participation

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

14. Describe the level of participation in your national quality assurance system.

Students contribute to the efforts for quality improvement of higher education. In this respect Bulgaria has achieved good results and shows progress. Different approaches are used for the inclusion of students in all stages of the evaluation process – in the preparation of the self-assessment report of the higher education institution, during the visit of the NEAA group, as well as participating as members of the expert group and of the Accreditation council. Students from all higher education institutions are given the opportunity to participate in the preparation of the self-assessment report and to talk to the members of the expert group. The NEAA has developed its own pattern which achieves encouraging results. It gives the students the opportunity to become part of the expert groups but not their full members. A student is nominated through a special procedure and presents an independent report which the expert group gets before issuing its statement. This approach takes into consideration the fact that the student is competent in some respects like training (for example the training plans and programmes, quality of teaching, etc), service (administrative service, the condition of the library, information centers), social and cultural environment, etc.

Bulgarian legislation does not provide for the participation of students in the process of decision making by the accreditation council of NEAA.

In conclusion, Bulgarian experience with making students part of the accreditation procedures was highly estimated at seminars organized by the European Association of Quality Evaluation.

Level of international participation.

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

15. Describe the level of international participation in your national quality.

The NEAA participates in the coordination of the European countries for improvement of quality of higher education and mutual acknowledgment and recognition of procedures and accreditation decisions. The agency is a co-founder of the Central and Eastern Europe Agencies for quality assurance in higher education (CEEN) and the chairperson of the NEAA has been a member of the managing board of the CEEN since May 2006. The NEAA recruits international experts for institutional and programme accreditations. It maintains active European connections with other similar agencies. The NEAA has signed a bilateral agreement with French Agency CNE and the agreement stipulates establishing of joint working groups (one such group has already been set up), joint research, exchange of information and experts. There are negotiations with other partners for signing of similar bilateral agreements for cooperation. The NEAA took part in the most important international seminars of the period and there it presented its activity and had the chance to compare it with others. In June 2006 together with the British Council in Sofia the NEAA organized an international conference on the subject of "Institutional evaluation in European Higher Education". The chair of the European association ENQA and representatives of agencies from South-East and Western Europe took part in it.

The NEAA was accepted as a full member of the European Association ENQA.

- The NEAA has well-established procedures and usually includes foreign experts in experts groups. We consider this inclusion of foreign experts to be necessary and important because as a result it enriches the knowledge of Bulgarian experts and gives more credibility to the evaluation. This useful approach could not be applied in all procedures, mostly because of financial reasons.

Recognition of degrees and study periods (Scorecard and Euridice)

Stage of implementation of Diploma Supplement.

16. Describe the stage of implementation of Diploma Supplement in your country.

With the change to the Higher Education Act (promulgated in State Gazette N 48 from 2004) a legislation provision was endured for the higher education institutions to issue Diploma Supplement to people who hold educational and qualification bachelor's and master's degrees, awarded in accordance with the Higher Education Act.

- 100% of graduates in Bulgaria will be given Diploma supplements in 2007;
- It is issued in one of the most widely spread European languages – English;
- Diploma supplement is issued free of charge;
- For people who have graduated after 01.01.2005 the Diploma Supplement is automatically issued and for holders of degrees that have been awarded before this date its is issued on request because the educational degrees were adopted in the period 1995-2000 but the universities were not obliged to issue Diploma Supplements then;
- The Diploma Supplements issued in Bulgaria fully meet the requirements of format, content and requisites of the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format;

National Implementation of the principles of the Lisbon Convention; (Scorecard)

17. Describe the stage of implementation of the main principles and later supplementary documents of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

The Republic of Bulgaria is among the first countries to sign the Lisbon Convention of Recognition on the spot in 1997.

- The Convention was ratified by the National Assembly on March 15, 2000 (State Gazette N 25 dated 28.03.2000). The country has deposited its instruments of ratification with the Council of Europe.
- After the ratification of the Convention the necessary measures have been taken up for further development of the sub-delegated legislation in the field of the academic recognition. The issues of the qualification recognition are regulated by The Higher Education Act, article 10, paragraph 2, section 4 and the Ordinance on the state for recognition of higher education degrees and finished courses of education in universities and colleges abroad, adopted through the Decree by the Council of Ministers N 167 dated 14.08.2000 (State Gazette Issue 69 from 22.08.2000).

- The Ordinance quoted above totally adheres to the principles of the Lisbon Convention of Recognition, specifically: the right to fair recognition for everyone; recognition in all cases when it is impossible to prove substantial difference is the main principle of recognition. The existence of substantial difference as grounds for rejection is always quoted in the decision for rejection issued by the Commission for recognition of the higher education. For example, the qualification acquired does not meet the requirements of the state for the awarding of the respective qualification degree in Bulgaria.
- Within the European Integration and International Directorate of the Ministry of Education and Science there is a functioning National Academic Centre for academic recognition and mobility, which is a member of the ENIC/NARIC networks. The Centre is established by an Ordinance at the Minister of education and science.
- The activities carried out through active assistance to the ENIC/NARIC networks for academic recognition. The Centre promotes academic mobility by developing integrated criteria and procedures for academic recognition of educational qualification, as well as by granting access to information about educational systems.

Stage of implementation of ECTS

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

18. Describe the credit and accumulation system in your country.

The implementation of the credit system in Bulgarian higher education institutions as provided for by the amendments to the Higher Education Act and the issue of Ordinance N 21 by the Minister of education and science for the implementation of the ECTS system in higher education institutions (promulgated in State Gazette N 89 of 2004). It is aligned with the European ECTS system and has an obligatory effect over all students in their first year in 2004-2005 school year. Students admitted before that year had the right to continue their education under the condition they started it. In connection with implementation of the new requirements the universities made fundamental changes to their programmes and training plans. In the documents used by the higher schools new rows were introduced to check the credits for campus and external activity, the total number of credits for each school year, semester, subject, etc. In several Bulgarian universities were visited by the EC representatives in connection with the application for the ECTS-label.

- During the school year 2006/2007 all Bulgarian higher schools apply the credit system at 100%;
- For the academic 2006/2007 program between 75%-80% from all the persons trained in bachelor and 100% master's programs will receive credits except those students who presently are undergoing their education in bachelor's programs in 4th course since for them it is not obligatory to keep the above mentioned Regulation. In spite of all some higher schools applied flexible methods in the organization of their educational process and grant credits for these categories of students.
- Before the date of the official and obligatory introduction of the credit system (most often compared to the Scottish, English and European practice) having in mind the large number of Bulgarian universities, that have taken part in the international TEMPUS projects and have undergone training under joint programs with European universities.

19. Has your country produced a national plan to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications? If so, give a brief description of the plan and attach a copy.

Republic of Bulgaria produced a Action plan for action connected with the improvement of the quality of the process for recognition of foreign qualifications for higher education. Quite recently in the work of the Commission for recognition of the higher education the usage of computer database processing for the recognized diplomas was introduced. The electronic processing of the information contributes for a considerable shortage of the time necessary for making a decision for recognition. The developed Action plan provides for actualization of the normative base for recognition which is to reflect the most recent developments in the field of the

international practice for academic recognition, for example the recognition of “joint educational degrees”.

Lifelong Learning

(Scorecard)

Recognition for prior learning

20. Describe the measures in place to recognize prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning.

In Bulgaria besides the classic scheme for obtaining higher education and issuance of diplomas for higher education, exists a long lived tradition for organizing the formally ongoing education in the system for higher education. Normatively it is being provided with the acceptance of the Order of the Council of Ministers No.42 for development of “Common National System for Enhancement of the Qualification of the Personnel” (published in the State Gazette No.67 of 1980), where the principles for continuing training are set forth, as well as its types and the issued documents for education and training. Various documents exist in conformity with the state requirements based upon the existing content of the basic documents issued by the University. They are issued in accordance to the respective education length and type – specialized, post diploma education, re-qualification – as well as to the qualification courses needed for different professions (e.g. teachers, doctors). Now the documents are easily recognizable and facilitate the process for recognition of the Prior Formal Learning since they are easily compared and are in conformity with the normatively determined ongoing education. These documents are recognized without any problems and in some of the sectors (education, health protection etc.) as well as by employers’ organizations. Today in almost all higher education institutions under different names actively function accredited units for continuous ongoing or post-diploma education. In conformity with the state requirements and the type of the training undergone, the higher school issues a document for the respective professional qualification. The system in force allows granting credits from the ongoing education which are recognized in the system of higher education. The ongoing education can be financed by both the post-graduate students and the enterprises, as well as by private and/or state organizations or employing companies.

- In Bulgaria exists well established practice for adaptation and recognition of the Prior Formal Learning, obtained in organized processes and attested with various documents for public recognition of the qualifications. A good example for such practice is the existing on this basis national system for raising the qualification and career development of the teachers.

The normative base gives concrete possibilities for free transition upon the recognition of the previous education connected with consecutive transition from one educational degree to another as well as for obtaining new specialty including from other professional trends. The regulations of the independent higher schools set forth clear procedures, the order and conditions at which each specific transition is being affected.

The recognition of the prior non formal learning is not a popular practice for the higher schools. Where separate cases have been established (mostly in the art academies, or in the philological faculties or in the faculties for informational and communications technologies) this recognition undergoes testing procedures set forth for each separate case. If the candidate succeeds to cover the respective academic standards he can be granted the respective certificate or even educational credits for the given educational discipline. Examples for recognition of the prior informal learning exist in the musical academies. They determine high academic criteria and norms, which are to be covered and which also include obligatory candidate students’ exam prior to the awarding credits for specific achievements corresponding to the certain educational discipline.

- Regulation exists in HEA that gives possibility for free admission of candidate students on the grounds of proved previous achievements obtained as informal learning – laureates of national and international Olympiads, bearers of medals at Olympic, World and European Championships in the cases when the competitive examination for the specialty they have chosen corresponds to the subject of the respective Olympiad or discipline.

- The question for allocation of the credits at the higher schools (published in the State Gazette No.89 of 2004). The granting of educational credits can be effected not only in the system for higher education but also in the system of the lifelong earnings as well. For example the specialized authorities at the medical faculties can grant credits for knowledge and skills obtained in training at courses and individual training. The grounds for granting such credits is the Order of the Minister of Health and a Contract with the Bulgarian Medical Union.

21. Describe legislative and other measures taken by your country to create opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education.

- The normative basis in Bulgaria gives good possibilities and clear principles for flexible transitions in the system for higher education. The independent higher schools have the right to develop specific rules and to put them into force. The students can continue their education with master's programs different from the bachelor programs that they have completed. They have the right to undertake education under different set of disciplines which differs from their previous education. At a later stage the credits obtained from this education can be recognized in the system for the lifelong learning.
- Flexibility regarding the methods of teaching can be applied by division of the contents of the various disciplines at levels, part of which are obligatory for the respective educational and qualification degree, while another part is freely chosen or facultative. Thus the respective student/post-graduate student has the possibility to personally set the palette for his education and to stress certain accents in it in conformity with the aspects that he believes would be useful for his future realization. Especially strongly the possibilities for flexibility are manifested when a request was made for partial education for certain set of disciplines with fixed duration – month, semester etc.). The various universities have rich experience in the usage of flexible pedagogical means for teaching, which are specific for each professional trend or specialty – from the usage of the contemporary ICT-instruments to the comparison and analysis of the personal achievements through audio-visual records of seminars etc., connects mainly with the arts specialties.

Joint Degrees

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Establishment and recognition of joint degrees

22. Describe the legislative portion on joint degrees in your country.

HEA gives the right of the autonomous schools to separately establish partners relations with national and international institutions for higher education aiming at establishment and education under joint training programs.

The criteria list of NEAA for institutional accreditation requires existing university organization for cooperation and work under international projects and programs. In Bulgaria we have suitable conditions for joint education including possibilities for recognition of joint degrees. The requirements is that the joint programs are to be accredited by the respective institutions of each of the countries participating in the issuance of the diploma. Thus the quality of the program can be guaranteed. Principally the persons that have graduated language schools are exempted from entrance examination for the respective language when they are candidates under joint programs. The Diploma supplement issued also improves the transparency and simplify the procedures for recognition of the degree obtained.

- Since 1995 HEA created supporting normative basis for education under joint national and international programs for the three degrees.
- Joint degrees are widespread in the Bulgarian schools and envelop the 3 cycles. At present in Bulgaria exist 7 joint bachelor programs, 14 joint master's programs and the joint medical programs with Universities from Germany and AUF.
- 16% of the total number of higher schools in Bulgaria provides joint education. Now diplomas for completed higher education under Joint degrees are issued by the Technical University of Sofia, University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy, the Economic Academy at the town of Svishov, the Rousse University as a partner of the Bulgarian-Roumanian Interuniversity Europa

(BRIE), center; The University of Food Technologies at the town of Plovdiv, the New Bulgarian University, the Sofia University St.Kliment Ohridski and the International Higher Business School at Botevgrad etc.

- After we join the EU the restrictive hindrances towards the European universities shall be removed and they will be able to establish their branches in the country and the possibilities for the European students and professors who want to study or teach in Bulgaria shall be increased. This strengthens the integration between the universities and widens the scope of the joint degrees.

C. Current issues in Higher Education

Higher education and research

23. Describe the relationship between higher education and research in your country – what percentage of research is carried out in HEIs; are any steps being taken to improve the synergy between HE and other research sectors.

The national policy in the field of the scientific researches is carried out by the Council of Ministers and MoES <http://www.nsfb.net/>. The common limit of funds set for the state budget and granted by MoES to the state schools for higher education for 2006 is 3,2 million levs. A fund Scientific Research was established at the higher education institutions under granting principle for fundamental and experimental projects. Through these projects the international integration with other universities, scientific organizations, university hospitals and national centers is stimulated; the international cooperation, the participation of the university scientists and units in the creation of EHEA, the development of the university scientific infrastructure, the intensification of the link “science-industry” through the execution of joint scientific projects with small and medium-sized enterprises.

MoES accepted specific measures supporting the synergy between the universities and the other research sectors like:

- Establishing of centers of research competence aiming at pooling the existing research potential and resources. Currently we have 33 Centers of competence supported both by Framework programmes for research and technological development and from targeted national programmes. Total funding exceeds 13 mln. EUR, from which Universities received approximately 3 million EUR.
- Special competition for stimulating the scientific researches at the universities. This scheme started in 2003 and there are more than 200 projects with joint funding of 2 million EUR per year. In 2007 we expect that this sum will reach 6 mln. EUR;
- Modernization of the scientific infrastructure. We create programs funded by MoES aiming at renewal of the scientific basis at the scientific organizations and the universities. The total funding exceeds 4 mln. EUR, for 2005 – 1 mln. and for 2006 – 3 mln. respectively, 70% of which are adopted by the universities;
- A pilot scheme for strengthening the public and private partnerships between the universities and the small and medium-sized enterprises. Totally 11 joint programs are funded.

The scientific cooperation aims at the execution of joint projects for exchange of scientists, good practices, access to scientific infrastructure and creation of sound partnerships. For the last 3 years 120 such two and three-sided projects are being affected with France, Germany, Greece, the countries from the western Balkans etc.

24. What percentage of doctoral candidates take up research careers; are any measures being taken to increase the number of doctoral candidates taken up research careers?

MoES has a target policy of supporting young researchers aiming to establish adequate environment for their career and scientific development in the universities. Government approved a Action plan for activity for the period 2006-2007, providing for legislative amendments, focused on promotion of the sustainable public-private partnerships and relating universities to the business, as well as development of innovative structures on the territory of the higher schools. MoES and Ministry of Economy and Energy will establish entrepreneurship centers with the technical schools.

These and other measures in future will promote to a great extent the scientific environment in the higher schools and will facilitate retaining young researchers in the universities. All the above specified projects are open for participation of the young researchers. Scientific researches fund has special schemes for promotion of young scientists and their re-integration. They are designated to granting doctoral and post-doctoral scholarships for the young scientists. 45 such projects have been undertaken in 2006.

The social dimension

25. Describe any measures being taken in your country to widen access to quality higher education

In the last several years it is clearly outlined the trend of transition from elitarian to mass system of high quality higher education. Higher schools simplify the models of admission aiming to attract more students (participation in preliminary entrance examinations is allowed, double entrance examination dates are announced, more rankings are introduced, entry tests are employed except for the traditional written examinations).

A great number of the higher schools, which comprise college in their structure, provide college graduates with opportunity to pursue higher educational degrees. A part of the individual colleges enter into agreements with individual higher schools where college graduates are trained under bachelor programmes.

Persons with double citizenship, one of which is Bulgarian, pay half of the fixed fee when they apply and are admitted according to terms and provisions, determined by the Council of Ministers. Students and doctoral students, admitted according to international agreements, do not pay fees when this issue is reciprocally settled.

With decision of the academic council higher schools are entitled to enroll candidate students without examination if they have successfully taken the matriculation examinations according to the Public Education Act, the comprehensive studies minimum and the curriculum.

After Bulgaria – EU accession the opportunities for free admission of students, doctoral students and postgraduate students - citizens of EU and EEC member-states will be widened.

- For groups at risk and groups in unequal social status special terms and conditions for admission to the higher schools are implemented. These groups comprise candidate students, who have successfully taken the entrance examinations and are: disabled with long-term disabilities and reduced capacity to work; disabled soldiers; complete orphans; mothers with three or more children.

Tuition fees are not due by complete orphans; disabled persons with long-term disabilities and reduced capacity to work; disabled soldiers; candidates from orphanages; cadets from military higher schools and doctoral students during the last two years of doctoral studies. They are entitled to additional relieves, regulated by the regulations of the higher school.

- All principal government instruments specify as priority implementation of policy for “retaining the availability of higher education system and increase of equality” for the various social and ethnical groups. As a result from the target national policy in respect to involvement of Roma minority the University of Veliko Tarnovo has developed bachelor programmes for teachers in Roma mother tongue. During the last two years a number of international projects were implemented, aiming to ensure relieves and additional opportunities to young people from isolated groups and provide them with chance and access to higher education. In result from this activity during the next year people from Roma minority will be provided opportunities to attend specially elaborated pre-admission preparation courses, organized by university lecturers, whereas the condition is candidates to hold diplomas of secondary education with very good results.

- Bulgarian government has undertaken particular legal actions related to expansion of the access to higher education after the date of accession to the EU – 1st January 2007, specified in details above.

26. Describe any measures to help students complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background.

Principal legal measures are described in details in the Bulgarian report in Bergen. Systems for social support and credit financing for students are in progress. Additional special relieves, regulated in the regulations of the higher school for orphans, blind, deaf and long-term disabled persons of reduced ability 70 and more percent, disabled soldiers, mothers with children below 6 years of age and hospitalized persons.

- National unions of blind, disabled persons and deaf persons render specialized advises and information to students with specific educational needs, related to provision of additional opportunities for their financial and social support. Students are directed to non-government organizations, providing additional financial or specialized support to students.

Ministry of Labor and Social Policy proposes to disabled graduating students also participation in special employment programmes, aiming at ensuring jobs in the public administration.

- During the last years higher schools have implemented sustainable and target policy of improving the training conditions for students with specific educational needs, which to a great extent have already positive implications. At a number of premises there are established platforms for access to educational halls, library places are adapted for the needs of disabled persons. A fund of scanned literature is provided to blind students, studying at different higher schools. In a number of universities, especially of humanities and economy, blind students are provided with specific library places, equipped with Brile displays, scanner, talking computer software and Brile printer. Such places in New Bulgarian University are used free of charge by disabled students from all universities. Some lecturers provide their complete courses of lectures in electronic form, which is a great relief to blind students and is related to their independence.

Distant form of training, introduced in 2004 in Bulgaria is especially useful for the blind students, as they receive in electronic form the overall information flow and this promotes their full value training. Future development and expansion of this form of training shall take into account the needs of the students with motor disabilities, aiming at overcoming their social isolation.

For the needs of sport activities of students with physical disabilities National organization for sport and integration has been established and it uses the base provided by St. Climent Ohridsky University of Sofia and organizes its activities jointly with the sport department. Disabled students are offered training in sport games for disabled persons as well as goal ball for blind students.

- Information database for disabled students from the University of national and World Economy, divided into specialties, will be implemented in the next year. It will provide specialized information for the free positions, adequate for them, in the German enterprises with outsourced activity in Bulgaria.

In 2007 a few universities will start training of students under one-year master programme, as well as will launch specialized post-graduate training for teachers, willing to work within multicultural and multiethnic educational environment.

Specialized B.Sc. programme for deaf-mute students is functioning at the National Academy of Theatrical and Film Art (NATFA).

Mobility

27. Describe any measures being taken to remove obstacles to student mobility and promote full use of mobility programmes.

Bulgaria registered an active position in the field of transnational mobility by its participation in the “Socrates II“ programme – “Erasmus” subprogramme of the EC. A major task has been during the last few years to turn Bulgaria into a preferred Erasmus destination. From 51 higher schools in the country, 34 institutions took part in the programme. The incoming student mobility has risen for the last academic year 2005-2006 alone, by 29%, and that of the lecturers by 48%. Bulgaria has signed so far 60 bilateral arrangements, agreements and programmes for cooperation and exchange in the field of education and science. Bulgaria will actively participate in the new EU programme for LLL.

To encourage the internal and external mobility, the National Agency of Assessment and Accreditation (NAAA) has included requirements, which are to account, at the institutional accreditation, for parameters related to the exchange of lecturers, undergraduate and post-graduate students, for instance: number of creative trips abroad during the last 5 years per lecturer, relative share of undergraduate and post-graduate students, undergoing courses of study according to the European programmes for international exchange, etc.

- The measures undertaken through the “Erasmus” programme are related to: increased information activity, creation of a web-site intended to draw foreign students and lecturers to the Bulgarian universities, and presenting our country as an attractive Erasmus destination, with enhanced quality of the mobility conditions offered in the Bulgarian universities. The messages encouraged students and lecturers from Europe to choose Bulgaria as their receiving state for mobility.

The Bulgarian universities have also made efforts to attract Erasmus students and lecturers by developing and proposing curricula for mobility in foreign languages.

Another successful practice implemented by the universities, is improving the administrative procedures for working with the incoming Erasmus students and lecturers as well as providing steady institutional assistance before and during the stay at the receiving institution. To facilitate the initial social integration of the incoming Erasmus students and lecturers, the universities took and used the support of their Erasmus students who had traveled abroad.

The promotion of Bulgaria as an attractive Erasmus destination can be measured by the increased interest in the intensives Erasmus language courses. Bulgaria is already for the 4th consecutive year organizing and conducting Bulgarian language courses of study for the incoming Erasmus students and lecturers, which include rich cultural and social events, too. Because of the grown interest in such courses, Bulgaria increased during the past academic year the number of the crash Erasmus language courses, hosting twice as many students as in the previous years.

The Diploma Supplement introduced two years ago, has worked a powerful positive effect to increase mobility, in that it has become possible through it to augment transparence and to obtain qualification, and also to increase the information concerning the personal study-associated achievements for every single student.

- A powerful impetus to increase the foreign mobility was produced by the optimization of the financial frame of the Erasmus programme. The national agency “Socrates” updates every year the financial procedures involved in the administration and execution of the programme in Bulgaria. The financial management changes ensured maximum rate of utilization of the Euro-funds under the programme, and therefore satisfaction of the participants not only in its respect, but also towards the other EC educational programmes. The Erasmus Programme has currently the highest percentage of utilization rate of the funds provided by the EC, viz. in excess of 95% from the funds set aside annually for the decentralized activities of the Erasmus programme. The positive results attained in enhancing the outgoing mobility, are evident from the statistical analysis of the data on the implemented students’ and lecturers’ mobility in Bulgaria in recent years. A constant trend of increase of the Bulgarian participants in the Erasmus mobility has been registered, the foreign students’ mobility having increased by 13% in the latest academic year 2005-2006 alone.

28. Are portable loans and grants available in your country? If not, describe any measures being taken to increase the portability of grants and loans.

The bilateral governmental programmes stipulated between Bulgaria and other states provide for the exchange of grants on a reciprocal basis. The commercial banks in Bulgaria offer opportunities for student crediting. The Government’s programme provides to ensure by the end of 2007 public guarantees and eased conditions for a veritable student crediting.

29. Describe any measures being taken to remove obstacles to staff mobility and promote full use of mobility programmes.

- The enriched international contacts of Bulgarian university lecturers with their foreign colleagues have made possible the increased interest in the Bulgarian universities. The incoming lecturers’ mobility percentage has risen in 2005-2006 by 48%. The Bulgarian academic

participation in international forums, in the works on projects, proves before our European partners that the Bulgarian university lecturers, scientists, scholars and researchers have a steady potential and are reliable counterparts. In this regard the interest is growing not only from the European academic community, but also from other continents. Particular examples of cooperation based on increased professional interest in the Bulgarian universities, is presented in section No. 30, while the shared successful practices on home mobility from section 27 are valid here, as well.

- The positive results obtained in increasing the outgoing mobility are evident from the statistical analysis of the data on the achieved lecturers' mobility for Bulgaria in recent years. For the past academic year 2005-2006 alone, the foreign lecturers' mobility increased by 19%.

The attractiveness of the EHEA and cooperation with other parts of the world

30. Describe any measures being taken in your country to promote the attractiveness of the EHEA.

The Bulgarian contribution is presented by the adopted political approach, making use of the following mechanisms and tools:

- Participation in the development of joint programmes for financial support to foreign and home student and lecturer mobility. That is being achieved by our participation in the programmes "Socrates", "Leonardo Da Vinci" and "Youth", with the objective of increasing the knowledge on the European Union and on the role of the civil society. Through its national institutions and the academic network institutions, our country has made itself a member of, or is keeping active contacts with the World University Association, the European University Association, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, the International Student Organization, the UNESCO/CEPES, the Council of Europe and the European Commission.
- Participation in the Black Sea educational cooperation. The priorities adopted by the Black Sea University Network are directed to building a competitive regional economic environment. By fulfilling its specific commitments in the network on promotion of the Bologna process, Bulgaria is showing a high degree of professional maturity.
- Requirements for the presence and functioning of an administration system of international educational contacts maintaining during the institutional accreditation of higher education institutions. This way, actual normative prerequisites for accrual of helpful practices and examples of positive interactions are provided.
- Development of educational modules and programmes, illustrating Bulgarian national specifics, its essential educational and cultural values. Some serious achievements have been attained in Bulgarian Academies of Arts. Only for the last two years they have been educating a considerable number of representatives from different continents including: USA, Australia, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Canada and almost all European countries. Lecturers from these parts of the world have also paid increased professional interest when they enrich their personal disposition through the process of encountering Bulgarian art. It has become practice for them to visit the Academies of Arts together with their classes – artists, orchestras, choirs, etc. Bulgarian higher education attracts numerous foreign students from many parts of the world including Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, etc. in many technical majors. Examples of humanitarian professional fields can be also given – history, Tracian studies, etc. The examples given, together with many others can serve as a testimonial for the sound international prestige of Bulgarian higher education.

Future challenges

31. Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for your country.

Bulgarian membership in European Union, starting from Jan. 01, 2007, and the absorption of financial resources from EU Structural Funds will put a serious challenge for Bulgarian higher educational system.

The major strategic goal to which we aim is to enable Bulgarian universities offer world class European higher education and Bulgarian graduate specialists - compete successfully on the EU labor market. The social responsibility of Bulgarian government is to guarantee the strategic development and modernization of Bulgarian higher education in its national and European context.