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Cycles of basic education

Basic education lasts for nine years, is divided into three sequential cycles (see table below) and starts at the age of six.

Cycles of basic education	Grades	Modal age
1st cycle	1-4	6 - 9 years old
2nd cycle	5-6	10 - 11 years old
3rd cycle	7-9	12 - 14 years old

General objectives

According to the Education Act, the aims of basic education are:

- to provide all Portuguese citizens with a common general education that allows them to discover and develop interests, skills, the capacity for reasoning, memory and critical thinking, a moral sense and aesthetic sensitivity, as well as promote individual fulfilment in harmony with the values of social solidarity.
- to provide a balance between knowledge and know-how, between theory and practice, and between school culture and everyday culture.
- to provide physical and motor development, promoting manual activities and artistic education to make pupils aware of the different forms of aesthetic expression, detecting and encouraging skills in these fields.
- to teach a first foreign language and begin a second one.
- to give pupils the basic knowledge that will allow them to pursue studies or join vocational training schemes, helping pupils to acquire and develop methods and tools for individual and group work, promoting the human dimension of work.
- to encourage a national awareness that is open to universal humanism, solidarity and international cooperation.
- to develop knowledge and appreciation of the key values of Portuguese identity, language, history and culture.
- to provide pupils with experiences that encourage civic maturity and social and emotional maturity, creating positive attitudes and habits in their relationships and in cooperation with others, whether within the family or in conscientious, responsible intervention in the situations they find themselves in.
- to help pupils acquire independent attitudes that make them citizens with a sense of their civic responsibilities and who act democratically in community life.
- to provide children with special educational needs with conditions suitable for their

development and for making full use of their skills.

- to promote the constant updating of knowledge.
- to participate in the educational information and guidance process alongside families.
- to provide, with freedom of conscience, the acquisition of civic and moral education notions.
- to create the conditions for school and educational success for all pupils.

Guiding principles

The principles guiding the organisation and management of the basic education curriculum, as well as learning assessment and curriculum development, are more specifically outlined in Decree-Law no. 55/2018, 6th July, which came into force gradually from academic year 2018/2019 onwards, for the following grades:

- (i) 2018/2019 – Grades 1, 5, 7 and 10.
- (ii) 2019/2020 – Grades 2, 6, 8 and 11.
- (iii) 2020/2021 – Grades 3, 9 and 12.
- (iv) 2021/2022 – Grade 4.

Designed to reinforce and consolidate schools' and teachers' pedagogical autonomy, thus encouraging them to adopt differentiating measures that facilitate didactic and pedagogical solutions that improve students' learning conditions, the [Ministry of Education](#) ^[1] advocates some general guidelines to be applied from school year 2018/2019 onwards through its [Regulatory Decree no. 10-B/2018, 6th July](#) ^[2].

To improve student learning and foster the right conditions for educational success, the government established the following principles by:

1. defining rules and procedures facilitating the formation of educational teams to foster collaborative and interdisciplinary work on the joint planning and implementation of teaching activities, as well as teaching and learning assessment.
2. creating conditions that allow the educational teams to accompany classes or groups of students throughout each cycle.
3. providing specific occasions for teachers to share and reflect upon pedagogical practices and interconnection between the different levels of education.
4. preventative intervention that anticipates factors/predictors of school failure and early leaving.
5. implementation of measures that guarantee inclusive education that responds to each student's potential, expectations and needs.
6. promoting innovation and diversification of teaching and learning methodologies.
7. closely monitoring students that change cycle and school.
8. timely identifying students' integration and learning issues.
9. closely monitoring students with integration issues, a bad relationship with peers and teachers, and learning difficulties.
10. adjusting teachers' timetables to the school needs that arise during the school year, whenever justified.

This regulation maintains specific tutorial support, which aims to encourage educational success in 2nd and 3rd cycles for students that have been retained on two or more occasions during their time at school. This support is an additional time credit that allows the form tutor to:

- meet with the students they are monitoring.
- monitor and support the education process of each student of the tutorial group.
- help student's integration in the class and school.
- support the student's learning process, creating study habits and work routines.
- give the student appropriate educational guidance at a personal, school, and professional level, according to their skills, needs and interests.
- encourage a learning environment that allows the development of personal and social skills.
- involve the family in the student's educational process.
- meet with teachers from the class council to analyse the issues and work plans of these students.

The school should organise career guidance activities at specific times during the school year (announced to the school community in a timely fashion), to prevent school failure and early school leaving.

Education and training provision

Basic education in Portugal has a single pathway for all students (**general basic education**). However, some schools provide artistic education (**specialised artistic courses**), which is complementary to the general curriculum. There is also specific dual certification for young people at risk of dropping out of school and social exclusion (education and training courses/*Cursos de Educação e Formação* - [CEF](#) ^[31]).

Education and training provision available:

- a) General Basic Education: general basic education aims to provide students with a general education to continue their studies, in accordance with the principles, values and skills areas found in the Exit Profile of Students Leaving Compulsory Education.
- b) Specialised Artistic Courses: specialised artistic courses focus more on specific training in the areas of dance, music, and Gregorian chant.

And:

- c) Education and training courses (*Cursos de Educação e Formação* - CEF) geared towards concluding compulsory schooling and access to working life.

Part of the National Strategy for Citizenship Education framework, the citizenship and development component boasts all educational and training provision models. It is the school's responsibility to formulate its citizenship education strategy, defining the domains, topics and learning to be developed and achieved in each cycle and grade, work methods, the projects to be undertaken by students, the partnerships to be established with the community and student learning assessment.

In general, basic education and specialised artistic courses, the syllabi can also include Portuguese as a foreign language (PLNM) for students whose mother tongue is not Portuguese and/or who have not had Portuguese as a school language and for which, according to their academic path and sociolinguistic profile, the school considers to be the most appropriate curricular provision.

There are also benchmarked schools for bilingual education and teaching. This specialised educational provision offer access to the national curriculum with curricular matrices that include Portuguese sign language as a first language and written Portuguese as a second language.

Basic education includes the following types of education:

1. Distance learning.
2. Individual tuition.
3. Home schooling.

Once other school inclusion measures have been excluded, an Integrated Education and Training Programme (*Programa Integrado de Educação e Formação* - PIEF) can be adopted, which enables students to conclude compulsory schooling and promotes social inclusion. This is both a temporary and exceptional socio-educational and training measure for inclusion.

Alternative curricular pathways (*Percursos Curriculares Alternativos* - PCA) Alternative Curricular Pathways (PCA) are also an alternative, as stipulated in Decree-Law no. 55/2018, 6th July. As part of their pedagogical and curricular options, basic education schools can adopt different organisational solutions if none of the existing educational and training provision is suitable for a group of students attending the same school grade. As part of schools' autonomy and curricular flexibility, [Ordinance no. 181/2019, 11th June](#) [4] defines the terms and conditions under which schools can manage over 25% of the basic curriculum of basic education provision.

Detailed information on this education provision is presented in [Subchapter 5.4. Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Single Structure Education](#). [5]

Types of institutions

General basic education and specialised artistic courses are taught in:

- public schools/school clusters.
- private and cooperative schools.

Education and training courses can run in:

- private and cooperative schools.
- public school clusters and non-clustered schools.
- public or private vocational schools.
- private and cooperative schools.

The [Training Provision Portal](#) [6] provides a list of available courses and schools/ training bodies for all basic education level schooling and training.

Reference legislation on basic education

[Education Act](#) [7](Law no. 46/86).

[Decree-Law no. 55/2018, 6th July](#) [8] - establishes basic and upper secondary education curriculum, the guiding principles of its design, operation, and evaluation of learning to ensure that all students acquire the knowledge and develop the skills and attitudes that contribute to acquiring the skills set out in the Exit Profile of Students Leaving Compulsory Education.

[Decree-Law no. 139/2012, 5th July](#) [9] - establishes the guiding principles for the organisation and

management of curricula, the assessment of knowledge and skills to be acquired and developed by students in basic and upper secondary education (includes the basic and upper secondary education curriculum matrices).

[Ordinance No. 181/2019, 11th June](#) ^[4] - defines the terms and conditions under which schools can manage over 25% of the basic curriculum of basic and upper secondary education.

[Ordinance no. 223-A/2018, 3rd August](#) ^[10] - regulates basic education provision, as stipulated in no. 2 of Article 7 of Decree-Law no. 55/2018, 6th July, namely general basic education, and specialised artistic courses. It defines the rules and procedures for the design and operation of the curriculum, as well as the evaluation and certification of learning, as stipulated in the Exit Profile of Students Leaving Compulsory Education.

[Decree-Law no. 54/2018, 6th July](#) ^[11] - establishes the principles and rules that ensure inclusion. Such inclusion is viewed as a process that responds to the different needs and potential of every student via increased participation in learning processes and the life of the educational community

[Exit Profile of Students Leaving Compulsory Schooling](#) ^[12]

[Decree-Law no. 17/2016, 4th April](#) ^[13] - makes the third amendment to [Decree-Law no. 139/2012, 5th July](#) ^[14], which establishes the guiding principles for the organisation and management of basic and upper secondary education. This includes curricula, assessment of the knowledge to be acquired and capacities to be developed by students, as well as the basic and upper secondary education curricula development process.

[Normative Order no. 1-F/2016, 5th April](#) ^[15] - regulates the evaluation and learning certification of basic education students, as well as the measures promoting educational success that can be adopted when monitoring and developing learning.

[Normative Order no. 13/2014, 15th September](#) ^[16] - regulates the evaluation and certification of acquired knowledge and abilities developed by the students of public, private and cooperative basic education schools.

For more reference legislation, see the [Directorate-General for Education](#) ^[17] website.

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