Key features of the Education System

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development [1] has the overall responsibility for developing and implementing education policies in Serbia. Schools and preschool institutions have a significant level of autonomy in organizing and realizing educational programmes and other educational activities. Higher education institutions enjoy wide autonomy.

Institutions at all levels of education can be state (public) and private. Public educational institutions are mainly funded from the state budget. They are financed according to an input-based system. Private educational institutions do not receive any direct or indirect public funding.

Establishment of educational institutions

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development [1] and competent authorities of the province of Vojvodina monitor the establishment of educational institutions. The procedure is the same for preschool, primary and secondary education institutions, regardless of the type of their founder. All higher education institutions must be accredited by the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance before obtaining a working license issued by the Ministry.

Educational system in Serbia

The educational system in Serbia consists of Early Childhood Education and Care [2], Primary Education [3], Secondary Education [4] and Higher Education [5]. Primary education and preparatory preschool programmes are mandatory and free. Secondary education is free but not mandatory. All citizens have access to higher education under equal conditions.

Inclusive education

As of the school year 2010/2011, there is system-wide implementation of inclusive education. The Law on Foundations of the Education System (Zakon o osnovama sistema obrazovanja i vaspitanja) [6] puts emphasis on the prohibition of discrimination and segregation, individual education plans, new assessment and evaluation policy, introduction of teaching assistants, inclusion of children with special educational needs into regular schools by providing support to schools, and new financial policy.

Initial education of preschool teachers

Colleges of applied studies (preschool teacher education colleges – visoke škole strukovnih studija za vaspitače) or universities (teacher education faculties – učiteljski fakulteti) provide initial education of preschool teachers. Teachers who teach first four grades of primary education (class teaching) earn their degree at teacher education faculties. Subject teachers (grades 5 to 8 of primary education and entire secondary education) complete their studies at other faculties for specific subjects (i.e. mathematics, biology, chemistry etc.)
For preschool teachers, there is no requirement for specialisation or Master programmes. Teachers in primary and secondary education must hold a Master degree, whereas those involved in tertiary education teaching processes are required to hold a PhD.

Teachers working in early childhood and school education must pass a licensing exam after the one-year induction period during their first employment to continue their teaching career. For tertiary education teaching staff, there is no such requirement.

Teachers’ professional development

Professional development of teachers is required and specified by law. Teachers have to dedicate a certain part of their working time to professional development training in order to keep their position and license. Professional development of academic staff is not required or regulated by law, but it is necessary for career progression and is mostly based on scientific work.

Stages of the Education System

Educational system in Serbia includes preschool, primary, secondary and higher education. The total duration of compulsory education in Serbia is 9 years. Children enter compulsory education at the age of 5½, when they start the pre-school preparatory programme, followed by 8 years of primary education. The leaving age in full-time compulsory education is 14½.

Preschool education and care is intended for children from 6 months until the primary school starting age. It comprises three levels determined by the age of children:

- nursery (jaslice) - children from 6 months to 3 years of age;
- kindergarten (vrtić) - children from 3 to 5½ years of age;
- preschool preparatory programme (pripremni predškolski program – children from 5½ to 6½ years of age).

The nine month long preschool preparatory programme is the first part of compulsory education.

Primary education is compulsory, takes eight years and is carried out in two educational cycles.

- Cycle I: 1st to 4th grade (children from 6½ to 10½ years old);
- Cycle II: 5th to 8th grade (children from 10½ to 14½ years old).

Most subjects in Cycle I are taught by class teachers. Each subject in Cycle II is taught by a different subject teacher.

Public primary education is free and the only admission criterion is the age. All children enroll in primary school between 6 ½ and 7 ½ years old with the certificate of preschool programme attendance.

Secondary education consists of the following:

- four years of general education;
- two to four years of vocational education.

There are two types of grammar schools:

- general grammar schools (gimnazija opšteg tipa);
- specialized grammar schools, intended for education of talented students in certain areas (specijalizovana gimnazija).
Children acquire secondary vocational education in vocational schools (srednja stručna škola) in 15 different areas.

Pupils are usually 15 years old when they enter secondary education and 18½ when they leave four-year programmes. They are admitted to schools based on primary school achievements and the final exam results.

Pupils who graduate from grammar schools can enroll at almost any faculty. Vocational school students can proceed to tertiary education at faculties and colleges fitting their specialisation. Students enrolled in three-year vocational education and training (VET) programmes can take additional exams to qualify for taking university entrance exams.

**The Higher Education System** has two types of studies:

- academic studies organized at universities;
- applied studies organized either at colleges of applied studies or at universities.

The reform of the Serbian Higher Education System started by joining the Bologna Process in 2003. It received its legal support in 2005 by the adoption of a new Law on Higher Education. This law introduced the following:

- European Credit Transfer System;
- three-cycle system of study;
- diploma supplement.

All newly enrolled students study under the new reformed programmes at all higher education institutions as of 2007/08.

**Academic studies**

The three-cycle system of academic studies includes:

- Bachelor and undergraduate studies (lasting 3-4 years, carrying 180 to 240 ECTS);
- Master and specialised studies (lasting 1-2 years with 60 to 120 ECTS);
- PhD studies with a minimum of three years of study or 180 ECTS.

Integrated studies are introduced in the field of medical science and pharmacy. These study programmes last 6 or 5 years and carry 360 or 300 ECTS.

**Applied studies**

Vocational studies comprise two levels:

- Colleges of Applied Studies (visoka škola strukovnih studija), where programmes last three years and carry 180 ECTS;
- Specialised Colleges of Applied Studies (specijalistička škola strukovnih studija), where programmes carry 60 ECTS and last one year.

**Adult education** can be formal or non-formal.

Regular primary or secondary schools or schools specialised in adult education provide formal adult education, while non-formal adult education is not in the school system. It is realised through different forms of professional development training.

Primary adult education takes from three to five years. It is organised by grades, with two grades in 1 school year. When they turn 15, students can be admitted to adult education. There are 14 schools
for adult education in Serbia. Regular primary schools can also implement programmes for primary adult education.

Schools for secondary adult education can offer:

- a special curriculum for adult education;
- vocational training programmes,
- training.

To implement special programmes in the areas of adult education other associations or individuals have to meet prescribed standards for the implementation of special programmes and receive approval from the Ministry.

**Structure of the Education System**

[Diagram 2018-2019]

Source: Eurydice 2018/19

**Useful links**

While the Eurydice Description of National Education Systems provides comprehensive and comparable information, further information may also be found on the website of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development [1]