

The Educational System in the Slovak Republic

Education dates back to the beginning of the Great Moravia Empire (9th century). In 1496 the first university, Academia Istropolitana, was founded. The educational system continued to develop within the framework of the Habsburg Empire.

After 1918, secondary and higher education developed considerably and compulsory schooling was extended up to 8 years.

After World War II the school system became identified with the principles of Marxism-Leninism, and eventually turned into a uniform, conforming and particularly ideological institution. Though younger Slovaks have grown up under a Communist educational system, the system was based on historical roots of German and Dutch educational systems and the Slovaks are still among the best-educated people in the world, with 63% having completed secondary school.

Education is compulsory from ages 6 to 16 and is fully funded by the state at all levels. Church and private schools have augmented a spectrum of state schools and they receive subsidies from the state.

The literacy rate is almost 99%.

Current Structure of the Educational System

After the public administration reform in the country the administration and financing of all type of education is decentralized.

A. Regional Institutions of Education

Local and municipal governments are authorized to:

- Establishing and abolishing pre-school educational establishments, primary schools, primary art schools, school clubs of all types, leisure activity centers, school kitchens and cantinas, primary school language centers;
- Appointing and removing directors of schools and educational establishments;
- Supervising compulsory attendance at primary schools;
- Supervising economic management of schools and their handling of financial and material assets;
- - Allocating funds for private and church schools and establishments and supervising the use of money;
- Approving contracts on school buildings and space.

The system includes the following components:

Pre-school Education:

Pre-school establishments are composed of nurseries and kindergartens. Nurseries provide care for children up to 3 years of age, mainly for the children of employed mothers. The Ministry of Health manages them. Kindergartens are assigned for children from 3 to 6 years of age. Their main function in addition to caring for children is preparation for primary school.

Elementary School:

Elementary schools provide general, ethical, esthetic polytechnic, health, and environmental education and physical training. They also provide religious education. Elementary education lasts for 9 years and the curricula vary mainly in the higher grades.

Secondary School:

Secondary education is comprised of three types of secondary schools: gymnasium, secondary specialized school and secondary vocational school. The applicants must pass selective exams for all types of secondary schools.

Gymnasiums provide general secondary education and prepare students particularly for further study at higher education institutions.

Study at the gymnasium lasts four years and ends with the "Matura Examination". This examination is given after at least 12 years of school attendance. Students must pass this examination successfully if they plan to apply for study at a university or a college.

A new type of this school is a "long-year" gymnasium with 8 years of study, in which grades 5-8 are counted as four years at the gymnasium.

Secondary Specialized Schools prepare students mainly for special activities, occupations in technical and economic sectors, pre-school education, medical nursery care, and fine arts and design. Students at these schools must pass the Matura examination in both general and specialized subjects. They are then prepared for work in the field of study or may continue to study.

A special type of professional school is the conservatory, which provides study in such fields as singing, music, and dancing or dramatic arts. It takes as a rule 4 years to complete study at a secondary specialized school.

Secondary Vocational Schools prepare students for various occupations and working activities, which may or may not require training and the "Matura Examination". Study at secondary vocational schools takes 2-4 years to complete and is provided for those not qualified to attend a secondary school. Students who successfully complete the vocational education and pass the "Matura Examination", however, may continue to study at a higher education institution.

Special Schools are assigned for children and youth that are not able to attend regular schools because of a physical or mental handicap. The curriculum does not substantially differ from other secondary schools, but the methods of education differ. The special schools exist from kindergarten up to secondary school.

B. Institutions of Higher Education:

The Act on Higher Education defines the institutions of higher education as legal entities, providing education and research in the Slovak Republic. According to the character and amount of activities they can be divided into university type institutions, providing education up to the PhD. study, and non-university type institutions, providing education up to the Bachelor's level.

The Accreditation Commission as the advisory body of the Slovak government observes and evaluates the education and scientific or artistic activities of Slovak universities or faculties concerning degrees, levels of study, establishment of a public institution of higher education, its faculties, the approval for establishing a private institution of higher education, on changes in study disciplines and fields of study at these institutions, etc.

Members are distinguished personalities selected from academic, scientific and other communities. The number of members is 21, and 1/3 of the members must be from other institutions that of higher education. The members of AC are being proposed by the Ministry of Education and approved by the Slovak government.

There are the three types of institutions of higher education in the Slovak Republic:

1. Public Institution of higher education legally established according to the Act on Higher Education. The bodies of the academic autonomy of the institutions are the Academic Senate, the Rector, The Scientific Council and the Disciplinary Commission. They decide on the organization, activities and administration of the institution.

2. State Institution of higher education, established through the Ministries of the Slovak government. The respective Ministry sets the rules for the types of study, administering the financial means, regulating the number of students, the employees etc. supervised by respective Ministry as:
 - *police institutions* of higher education (established and supervised by the Ministry of Interior)
 - *military institutions* for higher education (established and supervised by the Ministry of Defense)
 - *health care institutions* of higher education (established and supervised by the Ministry of Health).
3. Private Institutions of Higher Education, established by non-government institutions or founders, but the providing of education and research must be approved by the Ministry of Education. The approval is based on the approval of the Accreditation Commission or the administration and operation of the institution would harm the laws or regulations of the country.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

Slovak universities offer a wide spectrum of educational programs and activities. We have 34 specialisations within 17 fields of study. Our doctoral study covers 13 fields of science. In the last decade the whole educational system at institutions of higher education in the Slovak Republic has undergone a major transformation process. The result is the establishment of new fields of study, attractive specialisations and disciplines, as well as the innovation of some traditional courses. The adoption of the *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System* (ECTS) of study is an inherent part of the transformation process.

ECTS is a student-centred system based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a program, objectives preferably specified in terms of learning outcomes and competences to be acquired.

ECTS was introduced in 1989, and is the only credit system which has been successfully tested and used across Europe. ECTS was set up initially for credit transfer. The system facilitated the recognition of periods of study abroad and thus enhanced the quality and volume of student mobility in Europe. Recently ECTS is developing into an accumulation system to be implemented at institutional, regional, national and European level. This is one of the key objectives of the Bologna Declaration of June 1999.

ECTS makes study programmes easy to read and compare for all students, local and foreign. ECTS facilitates mobility and academic recognition. ECTS helps universities to organize and revize their study programs. ECTS can be used across a variety of programs and modes of delivery. ECTS makes European higher education more attractive for students from other continents.

Key features of ECTS

- ECTS is based on the convention that 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time student during one academic year. The student workload of a full-time study program in Europe amounts in most cases to 36/40 weeks per year and in those cases one credit stands for 24 to 30 working hours. Workload refers to the notional time an average learner might expect to complete the required learning outcomes.
- Credit is also a way of quantifying the outcomes of learning. Learning outcomes are sets of competences, expressing what the student will know, understand or be able to do after completion of a process of learning, short or long. Credits in ECTS can only

be obtained after completion of the work required and appropriate assessment of the learning outcomes achieved.

- The allocation of ECTS credits is based on the official length of a study programme cycle. The total workload necessary to obtain a first cycle degree lasting officially three or four years is expressed as 180 or 240 credits.
- Student workload in ECTS includes the time spent in attending lectures, seminars, independent study, preparation for, and taking of, examinations, etc.
- Credits are allocated to all educational components of a study programme (such as modules, courses, placements, dissertation work, etc.) and reflect the quantity of work each component requires in relation to the total quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of study in the programme considered.

Key documents of ECTS

- The regular Information Package/Course Catalogue of the institution to be published in two languages (or only in English for programs taught in English) on the Web and/or in hard copy in one or more booklets. The Information Package/Course Catalogue must contain the items of the checklist attached to this document, including information for host students from abroad.
- The Learning Agreement contains the list of courses to be taken and agreed upon by the student and the responsible academic body of the institution concerned. In case of credit transfer, the Learning Agreement has to be agreed upon by the student and the two institutions concerned before the student's departure and to be updated immediately when changes occur.
- The Transcript of Records documents the performance of a student by showing the list of courses taken, the credits gained as well as the local grades and possibly ECTS grades awarded. In case of credit transfer, the Transcript of Records has to be issued by the home institution for outgoing students before departure and by the host institution for incoming students at the end of their period of study.

Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement is a document attached to a higher education diploma providing a standardized description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the graduate. The Diploma Supplement provides transparency and facilitates academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates etc.). A Diploma Supplement label will be awarded to institutions which deliver a Diploma Supplement, to all graduates in all first and second cycle degree programmes, in accordance with the structure and recommendations to be found on the following web-site:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/rec_qual/recognition/diploma_en.html

Levels and degrees of higher education:

1. level is the study leading to the Bachelor's degree which lasts 3 years, exceptionally 4 years (Architecture, Fine Arts and design).
2. Second level is the study leading to the Master's and Engineer's degrees which usually lasts 5 years, exceptionally 4 years (Teacher Training, dramatic Art) or 6 years (Architecture, Fine Arts and Design), for holders of the Bachelor's degree 2 years, and *Doctor's* studies in the fields of Medicine and Veterinary Science which last 6 years.

The degrees offered are academic degree of "**Magister**" (abbr. Mgr.) in Magister's programmes, in the fields of art the academic degree of "**Magister of Art**" (abbr. Mgr.

art.), academic degree of “**Engineer**” (abbr. Ing.) in technical, agricultural and economic fields of engineer’s programs, and in the fields of Architecture and Town-Planning the academic degree of “**Engineer Architect**” (abbr. Ing. Arch.), academic degree of “**Doctor of Medicine**” (abbr. MUDr.) in Medicine, and the academic degree of “**Doctor of Veterinary Medicine**” (abbr. MVDr.) in Veterinary Medicine. Holders of the academic degree of “magister” may take *examina rigorosa*, which also include the defense of a dissertation. Upon successfully completing it, higher education institutions award the following academic degrees: RNDr. in Natural Sciences, PharmDr. in Pharmacy, PhDr. in the Humanities and Art, JUDr. in Law and Security courses with legal concentrations, PaeDr. in Teacher Training and Sports, ThDr. in Theology.

3. Third level is the study leading to *PhD.* degree which takes usually 3 years to be completed by dissertation examination, including the defence of a dissertation. PhD study is the highest form of higher education. The aim of PhD. study is to prepare its graduates for independent creative scientific research work or excellent work of art by acquiring comprehensive theoretical knowledge and mastering the methods of scientific or artistic demonstrating them in a scientific (artistic) project.

PhD. study may also be organized by the Slovak Academy of Sciences or other institution of science, education, research, technology or art that is approved by the Ministry of Education and upon the proposal or statement by the Accreditation Commission with the right to provide PhD. study in one scientific discipline or field of art at least.

Faculties or higher education institutions, in case that the higher education institution is not divided into faculties, award to the graduates of PhD. studies in the scientific disciplines the degrees of “**philosophiae doctor**” (abbr. PhD.), in the fields of art the degree of “**artis doctor**” (abbr. ArtD.). The scientific-academic and artistic-academic degrees are shown in abbreviation after the candidate’s name.

Financing of Institutions of Higher Education:

The Public and State Institutions of Higher Education are financed mainly from the state budget. The finances are transferred to the institutions either through the budget of the Ministry of Education or other Ministries.

1. Public Institutions of higher education are financed mainly from the state budget. The finances are transferred to the institution through the budget of the Ministry of Education as grants or subsidies for the administration of established by law, financed through state donations, independently managing property and financial means.
2. State Institutions of higher education are established through respective Ministry, financed from the state budget, without own property and financial means. They are directly supervised by respective Ministry as:
 - *police institutions* of higher education (established and supervised by the Ministry of Interior)
 - *military institutions* of higher education (established and supervised by the Ministry of Defense)
 - *Health care institutions* of higher education (established and supervised by the Ministry of Health).
3. Private Institutions of Higher Education secure its own financial means. Based on the approval of the government and the representation of the institutions of higher education award partial grants for development of accredited programs, research, and the development of the institution. The Ministry also supports the social aid for the students.

Tuition and Fees connected with the Study:

The base amount for establishing the tuition and fees connected with the study on a public institution of higher education are 10% from the average amount of all expenses given by the Ministry of Education to the public institutions from the state budget, based on the allocation from the previous fiscal year.

The students can study free of charge on the first, second or third level in case they do not exceed the standard amount of necessary for accomplishment of the respective level.

In case the student will exceed the necessary time, he/she will pay the total of 5x of the base amount.

There are several regulations defining the payment of tuition and fees for foreigners studying at institutions according to bi-national agreements, for self-paid students. There are several types of fees that the institution can charge for certain services provided to the students (copies of documents etc.) The rector can decide on the terms and the waiver of tuition and fees due to social, health or other conditions.

The tuition and fees connected with the study at a private institution of higher education are defined by the respective institution.

Financial Aid for the Students:

- direct ways through stipends either from the state budget or from the means of the public institutions
- indirect ways for helping with costs connected with accommodation, food, sports and cultural activities, and for impaired students
- student loans from the state budget.

Public Institutions of Higher Education:

Comenius University in Bratislava (www.uniba.sk)
Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice (www.upjs.sk)
University of Prešov (www.unipo.sk)
University of Constantine Philosopher in Nitra (www.ukf.sk)
Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (www.umb.sk)
University of Trnava (www.truni.sk)
University of St Cyril and St Methodius in Trnava (www.ucm.sk)
Slovak Technical University in Bratislava (www.stuba.sk)
Technical University in Košice (www.tuke.sk)
University of Žilina in Žilina (www.utc.sk)
University of Trenčín in Trenčín (www.tnuni.sk)
University of Veterinary Medicine in Košice (www.uvm.sk)
Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra (www.uniag.sk)
Technical University in Zvolen (www.tuzvo.sk)
University of Economics in Bratislava (www.euba.sk)
Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava (www.vsmu.sk)
Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava (www.afad.sk)
Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica (www.aku.sk)
Catholic University in Ružomberok (www.ku.sk)
J. Seley University in Komárno (www.seleyuni.sk)

State Institutions of Higher Education:

Military Academy of Slovak National Uprising in Liptovský Mikuláš (www.valm.sk)
Police Academy in Bratislava (www.apz.minv.sk)
Slovak Healthcare University (www.szu.sk)

Private Institutions of Higher Education:

Bratislava Law School (www.uninova.sk)
College of Management in Trenčín (www.cityu.sk)
College of Public Administration Management and Economics (www.vsemvs.sk)
College of Healthcare and Social Work of St. Elisabeth www.vssvalzbety.sk
College in Sládkovičovo (www.vssladkovicovo.sk)
College of international trade ISM Slovakia in Prešov (www.ismpo.sk)
Central-European College in Skalica (www.sevs.sk)
Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts (www.bisla.sk)
Dubnica Institute of Technology (www.dti.sk)
College of Security Management (www.vsbm.sk)

Links on Education in the Slovak Republic and in Europe:

Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic: Ministerstvo školstva Slovenskej republiky is the central authority of state administration for overall strategy, educational policy and the preparation of appropriate legislative standards and executive and operational activities. Most information is on its homepage and it also contains Higher Education Act.

<http://www.education.gov.sk>

The Higher Education Council of SR

<http://www.tpl.ukf.sk/rvs/>

The Accreditation Commission

<http://www.akredkom.sk/>

The University Student Council of SR

<http://www.srvs.tnuni.sk>

European Commission DG for Education and Culture: Education

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/index_en.html

Council of Europe on Higher Education

<http://culture.coe.fr/her/index.html>

EURASHE -The European Association of Institutions in Higher Education

<http://www.eurashe.be>

OECD

<http://OECD.org>

UNESCO

<http://www.UNESCO.org>

Sorbonne Declaration

http://www.unige.ch/cre/activities/Bologna%20Forum/Bologna_welcome.htm

Bologna Declaration

http://www.unige.ch/cre/activities/Bologna%20Forum/Bologna_welcome.htm

Magna Charta Universitatum

http://www.unige.ch/cre/activities/Bologna%20Forum/Bologna_welcome.htm

Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (so called Lisbon Convention) - important document concerning recognition issues in HE

<http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/EN/cadreprincipal.htm>

Eurybase: Comprehensive information on Slovak educational system along with basic statistical data in English is available in EURYBASE – EURYDICE Database on Education Systems in Europe on. www.eurydice.org/Eurybase/frameset_eurybase.html

Academy of Sciences of the Slovak Republic
www.sav.sk

Library of Congress: Created and maintained by the European Division
www.loc.gov/rr/international/european/slovakia/sk.html

Useful Hints

Most universities have no campus in an American sense. The university buildings may be spread throughout the city, or in one general area, but students live in off-campus dormitories or with their families.

Students are admitted to the universities through highly competitive exams but generally attend the university located nearest to their homes. Once admitted to a course of study, the students stay with the same group of students throughout the next years, with the exception of a few independent study courses in the fourth and the fifth years.

The academic calendar consists of two semesters: the fall semester which starts in October (Jan-Feb: exams = written and oral testing), the spring semester starts in mid February (May-June: exams).

Students take 10-12 and even 15 courses a term. Course scheduling and student registration are not done centrally or much in advance. The only information kept by the central register of students is who has passed courses.

Each lesson is 45 minutes long. You will usually teach a double-lesson to several different classes of 5 to 20 students every week. The courses are given the status of either compulsory (mandatory) or optional (elective).

Faculty keeps office hours, during which times students may visit. Otherwise, faculty members are generally not around outside of the class. There is not a strong research tradition at the universities in certain fields (in such cases, research is done at the individual institutes of the Slovak Academy of Sciences).

Exams are usually held for four to five weeks following the end of the semester (January, June). Most visiting lecturers are not expected to give exams. If you choose to do so, or are asked to do so, you should “negotiate” early for an acceptable examination date and ask your colleagues about exam procedures and content.

At the beginning of your courses you need to establish exactly what you expect of your student (e.g. regular attendance at your seminars and workshop, you might like to tell your students what “regular” means). You may be asked to sit on a thesis board or act as a thesis advisor if you have the rank of professor.

Students must write a thesis in their fourth and fifth years, under the supervision of an advisor.

Students are well trained, interested, and eager, though they may need to be encouraged to take a more active role in class. They are free to take electives, which is most

likely what a grantee might teach. But you can also ask to teach a required cluster, or introductory course. Make sure that an announcement of your lessons is made available (send your syllabi to your contact person ahead and ask to post these on the bulletin board so students become aware of your arrival).

There is no central library or "open stacks" type of library at most Slovak universities. University buildings and libraries usually close after 6.00 p.m. and on weekends.

Source:

*Fulbright Commission
in the Slovak Republic
www.fulbright.sk*