



**National summary sheets on  
education systems in Europe  
and ongoing reforms**

2007 Edition



# GERMANY

APRIL 2007

---

## 1. Education population and language of instruction

In 2004, the number of people aged 29 or less was 26 348 000 (31.9 % of the population), and there were 8 266 339 young people in full-time compulsory education. The language of instruction is normally German.

## 2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

In 2004, 93.5 % of the pupils in general education attended public sector schools, and the remaining 6.5 % attended privately-maintained schools. In vocational education, 91.8 % of the pupils attended public sector schools, 8.2 % attended privately-maintained schools.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, responsibility for the education system is conditioned by the federal structure of the State. According to the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*), educational legislation and administration are primarily the responsibility of the *Länder* (in a system comprising the *Land* Ministries of Education, Cultural affairs and Science, the regional authorities (*Bezirksregierung/Oberschulamt*) and the lower-level school supervisory authorities (*Schulamt*)). This particularly applies to the school system, higher education and the adult education/continuing education sector. The responsibilities of the Federal Government in education are defined in the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*). Among these responsibilities are the legislation concerning the general framework for higher education, and the financial assistance for individual training, including promotion of younger academic staff. The Basic Law also provides for particular forms of cooperation between the Federation and the *Länder*, such as that which occurs in the sector of the promotion of research.

School supervisory authorities in each *Land* are responsible for inspection and exercise academic, legal and staff supervision within the school system. Each school has a teachers' council responsible for educational matters, and a school council (comprising teachers, parents and pupils), which decides on school regulations or disciplinary rules. The relative powers of these councils vary between the *Länder*.

As regards initial training in the *duales System* (the Dual System of vocational training in both the workplace and at school), which is experienced by two-thirds of all young people, the training in the workplace is financed by firms, and the school element by the *Länder*. The workplace activity follows nationally coordinated rules for training, while there are curricula for the school-based work which are adapted to these rules and established by the *Länder*.

Vocational training in the workplace is supervised by public-law corporations (such as chambers of industry and commerce, chambers of craftsmanship, etc.)

### 3. Pre-primary education

In most *Länder*, responsibility for pre-primary education lies with the social ministries. From three to six children can attend *Kindergärten* which are mainly run by non-public bodies (primarily churches and welfare associations) and to which parents are also required to contribute, despite the allocation of major public subsidies and reliance on other funds.

2002	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5
<b>Pre-compulsory education</b>	58.6 %	85.8 %	92.5 %

### 4. Compulsory full-time education

#### (a) Phases

<i>Grundschule</i> (primary education)	6-10 years of age (6-12, Berlin & Brandenburg)
Lower secondary education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Orientierungsstufe</i> ('orientation' phase within the different school types or as a separate organisational unit)</li> <li>• <i>Gymnasium/Realschule/Hauptschule/Gesamtschule/</i> Types of schools offering several courses of education such as the <i>Mittelschule</i></li> </ul>	10-12 years of age  10/12-15/16 years of age
Upper secondary education (see section 5)	15/16-18/19 years of age

Full-time education is compulsory from between the ages of 6 and 15 or 16 (depending on the *Land*), and part-time education is compulsory until the age of 18 for those who do not attend a full-time school.

#### (b) Admission criteria

Generally, children are admitted to *Grundschule* from the age of 6. At primary level, children undergoing compulsory schooling enter a local primary school, which is the same for all of them. Transition from primary school to one of the school types at secondary level is subject to different regulations depending on legislation in the *Land* concerned. The decision on the type of school attended at lower secondary level is either taken by the parents or the school or school supervisory authority on the basis of an assessment made by the primary school. Admission to the various types of secondary schools may be subject to pupils fulfilling certain performance criteria and/or a decision by the education authority. All compulsory schooling is free of charge.

#### (c) Length of the school day/week/year

The school year comprises between 188 (five-day school week) and 208 (six-day school week) days in the period from August to July. The length of the school day and week is determined by each of the *Länder*. Schools open on five or six days a week (mostly mornings). Each week entails 19-29 lessons at primary school, and 28-30 lessons at secondary level. A lesson lasts 45 minutes. The average minimum number of annual teaching hours is 698 in primary education in 2002/03, and from 875 to 987 depending on the school type in lower secondary education.

**(d) Class size/student grouping**

In 2004/05 there were in primary education 22 pupils per class on average and, in lower secondary education, on average 24.3 pupils depending on the school type and the *Land*. Pupils are generally grouped by age and, at secondary level, setting occurs in some subjects. Primary classes initially have one teacher for all subjects, whereas secondary pupils have separate subject teachers.

**(e) Curricular control and content**

The *Länder* ministries determine the curriculum, recommend teaching methods and approve textbooks. Core subjects in primary education generally include reading, writing, arithmetic, *Sachunterricht* as an introduction to natural and social sciences, art, music, sport and religious education. Secondary curricula depend on the type of institution, but usually continue primary core subjects, and include at least one foreign language and natural and social sciences.

To implement the educational standards adopted by the Standing Conference in 2003 and 2004 for the *Hauptschulabschluss* and the *Mittlerer Schulabschluss*, the subjects in the curricula are to be adapted accordingly. The educational standards binding for all *Länder* specify the goals themselves, whilst the curricula describe and structure the way to achieve these goals.

**(f) Assessment, progression and qualifications**

Continuous assessment based on written examinations and oral contributions is universal practice at all levels. Pupils may be required to repeat a school year. Pupils who reach the appropriate standard at the end of lower secondary education receive a leaving certificate. Assessment is teacher-led in most cases.

**5. Upper secondary and post-secondary education****(a) Types of education**

General upper secondary school ( <i>Gymnasiale Oberstufe</i> ) at the following school types: <i>Gymnasium/Berufliches Gymnasium/ Fachgymnasium Gesamtschule</i>	16-18/19 years of age
Vocational education	
<i>Berufsfachschule</i> (full-time vocational school)	15/16-18 years of age
<i>Fachoberschule</i> (full time vocational school)	16-18 years of age
<i>Berufsoberschule</i> (full-time vocational school)	18-19 years of age
<i>Duales System</i> (Dual System: part-time vocational school and part-time on-the-job training)	15/16-18/19 years of age

**(b) Admission criteria**

Admission to the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* (upper level of the *Gymnasium*) requires a lower secondary leaving qualification meeting certain standards of achievement. Admission requirements for full-time vocational education depend on the type of school chosen.

The *duales System* is open to all lower secondary school leavers, irrespective of their results.

**(c) Curricular control and content**

The curriculum varies in accordance with the type of upper secondary education and training. Pupils in the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* must study subjects from three groups: languages/literature/the arts; social

sciences; and mathematics/natural sciences/technology. Vocational programmes in *Berufsfachschulen* include German, social studies, mathematics, natural sciences, a foreign language and sport, as well as vocational subjects.

The vocational training in the *duales System* is organised for 350 professions following nationally coordinated training rules (the workplace element) and curricula established by the *Länder* (the school-based activity) in all economic fields.

#### (d) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Pupils who pass the *Abiturprüfung* receive the *Zeugnis der Allgemeinen Hochschulreife*, which grants access to higher education. Vocational courses at full-time vocational schools prepare pupils for a specific occupation, or for access to higher education (*Zeugnis der Fachgebundenen Hochschulreife* and *Fachhochschulreife*). Candidates from the *duales System* pass a final examination before an examination board of the competent bodies concerned (chambers of craftsmanship, chambers of industry and commerce, chambers of liberal professions or other public-law corporations), and receive a leaving certificate from the competent body. Concomitantly, the *Berufsschule* issues a leaving certificate if the trainee has achieved a least adequate performances in all subjects.

## 6. Higher education

### (a) Types of institution

The tertiary sector encompasses institutions of higher education and other establishments that offer study courses qualifying for entry into a profession. Higher education institutions include *Universitäten* (universities) and equivalent higher education institutions (*Technische Hochschulen/Universitäten*, *Pädagogische Hochschulen*, *Theologische Hochschulen*), *Kunsthochschulen* (colleges of art), *Musikhochschulen* (colleges of music) and *Fachhochschulen* (universities of applied sciences). The *Berufsakademie* – offered by some *Länder* – forms part of the tertiary sector and combines academic training at a *Studienakademie* with practical in-company professional training in keeping with the principle of the dual system.

### (b) Access

The *Zeugnis der Allgemeinen Hochschulreife* entitles the holder to admission to all subjects and subject areas at all higher education institutions. The *Zeugnis der Fachgebundenen Hochschulreife* entitles the holder to study particular subjects at a university or equivalent higher education institution. Admission to studies at colleges of art and music generally requires the *Zeugnis der Allgemeinen Hochschulreife* and proof of artistic aptitude. The prerequisite for admission to a *Fachhochschule* or *Berufsakademie* is either the *Fachhochschulreife* or the *Allgemeine/Fachgebundene Hochschulreife*. All applicants who meet the entrance requirements are registered for the course of study of their choice without having to go through any special admission procedures.

If the number of applicants exceeds the places available in certain subjects, places are allocated on the basis of selection procedures that are operated either at national/regional level or at the relevant higher education institution. From the 2005/06 winter semester, the criteria for the selection of applicants are the applicant's average mark in the *Abitur* (school-leaving examination constituting higher education entrance qualification, 20 per cent), the waiting period between sitting the *Abitur* and applying (20 per cent) and the result of a selection procedure of the institution of higher education itself (60 per cent).

As of 2005, access to publicly-funded higher education institutions is still free of charge up to the first academic degree qualifying for an entry into a profession. This also applies to a consecutive course of study leading to a second academic degree. On the other side this does not exclude the possibility of

administration fees for registration and tuition fees for an additional course of study or for long-term students.

### (c) Qualifications

Qualifications in higher education vary according to the length and type of course followed. Studies at a university or equivalent institution are concluded by an academic examination (*Diplom* examination, *Magister* examination), a state examination, an ecclesiastical examination (in theology) or an artistic examination. In order to adapt the higher education system to the degree structure based on two main cycles, a new graduation system of Bachelor's and Master's degrees has been implemented since 1998 in all higher education institutions.

Studies at *Fachhochschulen* lead to the *Diplom (FH)* degree, Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Students who successfully complete their examination at *Berufsakademien* may be awarded a *Diplom* degree (to which the abbreviation BA for *Berufsakademie* is added) or a Bachelor's degree.

*Universitäten* (universities) and equivalent institutions of higher education hold the right to award doctorates. *Fachhochschule* graduates holding a Master's degree or a qualified *Diplom (FH)* degree may be admitted for doctoral studies at a university with specified additional requirements.

## 7. Special needs

The main form of provision is in special schools, but programmes have been introduced to encourage the integration of pupils and students with special needs into mainstream education. In 2004/05, just less than 4.5 % of all pupils in primary and secondary schools attended separate schools and a growing number of pupils with special needs were in inclusive settings (12.9 % of all pupils with special educational needs). In the Dual System of vocational training, help is provided and regulated by law (*Sozialgesetzbuch III*) for young people who have special learning problems or who are socially disadvantaged (e.g. support in on-the-job training or vocational training in institutions outside the workplace). In 2004, 8.25 % of some 1.55 million trainees received this help.

## 8. Teachers

All pre-school staff are trained at upper secondary level. Teachers for primary and secondary schools are trained at universities and colleges of art and music, and pass the first and second *Staatsprüfung* (state examination) in usually two subjects and in educational science. Primary teachers are generalists and secondary teachers are subject specialists. Teachers are generally employed by the *Land* and have civil servant status as a rule.

## 9. Current reforms and priorities

By virtue of the federal structure of the German state, discussions on reform are carried out at both *Länder* and Federal level. Although the individual *Länder* are initially responsible for the implementation of reforms in their education systems, they cooperate with each other within the framework of the *Kultusministerkonferenz* (Conference of Ministers for Education and Cultural Affairs) on matters of importance for all *Länder* in order to prepare educational reforms by means of joint recommendations. The discussion forum responsible for all educational issues jointly affecting the Federal Government and the *Länder* is the *Bund-Länder Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung* (Bund-Länder Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion), in which the Federation and the *Länder* cooperate under the provisions of Article 91b of the German Constitution. The permanent advisory bodies of the Federation and the *Länder* also include the *Wissenschaftsrat* (Scientific Council), which

draws up recommendations concerning development of the content and structure of higher-education institutions, science and research.

Only a number of the points being discussed in the ongoing debate on reforms in all areas of the education system can be presented here. The following overview therefore sets out only those reform plans that are of supra-regional interest and are being dealt with at Federal level or in the *Bund-Länder* bodies and are of particular significance.

The education levels affected by reform plans are pre-primary and primary education, secondary and tertiary education.

#### a) Reduction of inequalities/equity

- Reduction of the close relation between the socio-economic background of pupils and their performance by all-day schooling and facilitating the transfer between different educational pathways.
- Furthering children at an early age and improving individual support by increasing care provision from age three up to school entry.
- Furthering of children from migrant families, especially in the knowledge of the German language by pre-school language tests and early promotion in day care centres and improved methods for language skill diagnosis.
- Furthering of literacy in reading, mathematics and science by general remedial instruction during school hours or complementary remedial instruction after hours. Both types concern German, foreign languages and mathematics.

#### b) Establishment and development of schools offering all-day activities and care

The half-day school is the traditional form of teaching and all-day schools are still the exception in Germany. The extension of all-day schooling is intended to have lasting effects on the process of educational reform. The individual support of pupils shall move towards the centre of the schooling process in order to break the strong link between social background and educational success.

The establishment of all-day schooling is intended to achieve the following goals: individual support for all pupils; reform of teaching and learning through the combination of lessons, additional offers and leisure time activities; integration of the school into its social, cultural and economical environment; qualification of pedagogical staff.

#### c) Shaping future-oriented teacher training programmes

Development of new approaches regarding

- the implementation of standards for the effectiveness and professionalism of teacher training;
- a more extensive practical orientation during teacher training;
- intensification of the relations between the theoretical and practical phases of training;
- measures to improve teaching practice with regard to diagnostic and methodical competence;
- particular significance of the induction period for newly qualified teachers;
- qualification of higher education graduates without formal teacher training (*Seiteneinsteiger*).

#### d) Reform of Vocational Training

- Training Pact

In the face of the persistently tense situation for the provision of places for in-company training, the Federal Government and the major trade organizations concluded a 'National Pact for Career Training

and Skilled Manpower Development' in Germany (*Nationaler Pakt für Ausbildung und Fachkräftenachwuchs in Deutschland*) in summer 2004.

The partners will continue the pact in 2006 with the aim to strengthen in-company training and to offer career prospects to all young people who are willing and able to receive training. The main focus here is on measures for increasing in-company training. Reflation gives an important encouraging signal to support this end.

The Federal Government and the Trade Associations will therefore continue and partially extend their quantitative and qualitative commitment set down in the Pact to provide in-company training, job entry qualifications and support measures. Complementary to the commitment of the industry, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has started a new programme called 'Jobstarter' to create additional opportunities for in-company training and to improve regional support structures with an amount of 100 mill. € total. The Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs continues with the new programme for job entry qualifications.

In 2006, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research will launch a new initiative for a further structural development of vocational education and training at the interface of education and employment which shall involve all the actors in the field of vocational education and training.

- **Support Measures for the Less Privileged**

For a comprehensive modernization and structural development of the support measures for the less privileged in the area of vocational training, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research has launched the programme 'Promotion Skills – Vocational Qualification for Target Groups with Special Learning Problems and for the Socially Disadvantaged' (*Kompetenzen fördern – Berufliche Qualifizierung für Zielgruppen mit besonderem Förderbedarf – BQF-Programm*). Co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF), the programme will run through 2006. This programme shall offer new starting points and qualification pathways to youths who have not yet completed a vocational training. The model measures funded within this programme concentrate on optimising support structures, improving the work of the educational facilities, strengthening approaches to prevent lack of vocational training (*Ausbildungslosigkeit*) already at school, as well as improving the vocational training prospects of immigrants.

## e) Higher Education

- **Excellence Initiative**

On 23 June 2005 the German federal and state governments agreed on an initiative to promote top-level research in Germany.

The total budget of the initiative will be €1.9 billion for the period 2006 through 2011, which will be split between three lines of funding:

- Graduate schools to promote young researchers
- Clusters of Excellence to promote world-class research
- Institutional strategies to promote top-level university research

Plans include the establishment of approximately 40 graduate schools, each to receive an average of €1 million annually, and approximately 30 clusters of excellence, which will each receive an average of €6.5 million annually.

- Two calls for proposals are planned, with approvals for the first round scheduled for October 2006, and 2007 for the second round. Cooperation with non-university research institutions is encouraged. The funding period for each round is five years.

f) Essential issues being dealt with in the consultations/public debate related to the planned reforms or the education sector as a whole

- Participation in international and national comparative studies of pupils achievement

The results of comparative tests of school performance have made clear that various reforms are necessary in order to develop and enhance the quality of the German education system. The required measures include strategic educational objectives, output-oriented control for central areas of the education system, the focusing of all available resources as well as the evaluation of the reform measures based on previously established criteria. Additionally, empirically based research into the causes of success or failure of pedagogical processes is required.

- Quality assurance through educational standards

The *Länder* believe that the development, the implementation and the evaluation of educational standards (*Bildungsstandards*) is a central element in order to assure the quality of the German education system. The necessary basics and requirements for the introduction of educational standards already have been scientifically elaborated (on the concept of the standards as established by the Standing Conference see <http://www.kmk.org/schul/Bildungsstandards/Argumentationspapier308kmk.pdf>).

In 2003 and 2004, the Ministers of Education agreed on educational standards at three key stages: at the end of the primary level after grade 4 in the subjects German and mathematics and at the end of the lower secondary level for the leaving certificate of the *Hauptschule* in the subjects German, mathematics and first foreign language (English, French). For the school leaving certificate obtained on completion of grade 10 at *Realschulen* educational standards for the same subjects (German, mathematics, first foreign language) as well as for the natural sciences (biology, chemistry, physics) have been adopted by the *Länder* for implementation in the school year 2004/05 and 2005/06 respectively. The standards are based upon the areas of competence of the individual subject and take up the basic principles of the respective subject. The Institute for Quality Development in Education (*Institut für Qualitätsentwicklung – IQB*) is to regularly examine whether the educational standards have been met.

- Standards for teacher training programmes

With regard to the improvement of diagnostic and methodical competence, the development of standards for teacher training provides an additional basis for a teacher training aimed at professionalism. The Standing Conference of Ministers of Education has commissioned a working group including external experts to develop standards relating to professional theory (*Bildungswissenschaften*), which comprises educational science and subject-related didactics. In December 2004 the Ministers of Education adopted the standards which will be implemented by the *Länder* in teacher training comprising the study courses at higher education institutions and the preparatory service (*Vorbereitungsdienst*) as the second stage of teacher training.

In 2006, the *Länder* and the Federal Government agreed on a 'general strategy of education monitoring' which defines aims for the individual school and the whole education system and ways of observing and monitoring the improvement. They also agreed on an indicator – based report 'Education in Germany' including an analysis of education and migration as a data – based, problem – centred examination of the German education system. This report is the first volume of a permanent series which will be published every two years and present a permanent set of core indicators in order to guarantee the consistency of educational reporting.

*Unrevised English*

Information provided by the German Eurydice Units

For more detailed information on the education systems in Europe, you may consult the EURYDICE data base, EURYBASE (<http://www.eurydice.org>)