



THE SLOVAK SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

A good education is necessary for success in our highly-developed society. That is the reason why all countries devote so much attention to their educational system.

There have been some serious changes made in the educational system in the Slovak Republic in the last few years. The National Curriculum has been changed and a new school-leaving exam is being introduced at secondary schools. Another definite reform is being prepared by the government and the Ministry of Education at the moment to improve the educational system and to make it more effective.

School attendance in the Slovak Republic is compulsory from the ages of 6 to 15. Most children attend state schools, but there are also newly established private and church schools. Education at state schools is free of charge but private and church schools charge school fees. All schools are co-educational. Children in our school system do not wear uniforms. Handicapped children are educated separately.

The school year starts on September 1 and ends on June 30 of the following year. The school year is divided into two terms (September – January, February – June). A school day is

different at different types of schools. Breaks between the lessons last from 5 to 15 minutes. Students are assessed by marks from 1 to 5 (1 being the best, 5 being the worst).

Education in our country includes several stages: pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education.

Pre-school education is voluntary and it includes crèches, kindergartens and special kindergartens for disabled children. Crèches are designed for children up to 3 years of age and nursery schools for children aged 3 to 6. At six, children begin primary school and they stay there until they are 15.

Primary education is divided into two stages: the first stage includes grades 1 – 4 and the second stage, grades 5 – 9. Primary school provides children with a general education in languages, History, Geography, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Arts, Religion or Ethics and Physical Education. At the age of 15 the pupils transfer from primary to secondary school. Some talented pupils can transfer to grammar schools at the age of 11 after they have passed an entrance examination.

Secondary education: At the age of 15 pupils can choose among a variety of secondary schools:

- *Grammar schools*, with a general and rather academic education, which prepare students for university study. Some of them specialize in a specific subject, like maths or languages.
- *Special schools*, including technical colleges, which specialize in building, chemistry, engineering etc., business and hotel academies, agricultural schools, nursing schools, and music and art schools, all of which offer a professional education. These schools primarily prepare students for their future professions but they also offer a general education.
- *Vocational schools* (3-year schools) prepare students for practical jobs.

Secondary education usually lasts 4 years and at grammar and specialized schools it is finished with a school leaving examination, which is required for admission by all universities and colleges. This examination is taken in five subjects at grammar schools and in five or more subjects at specialized schools. In the past, it was only an oral exam (except for Slovak and Literature), but recently, a new type of school leaving exam has been written, which includes a written test. The examination is held in May, but the written part is held about a month before. After the graduates have passed their school leaving exam they receive a School-Leaving Certificate and they can apply for study at universities and colleges.

Higher education: Universities and colleges provide higher education which lasts from 4 to 6 years. Each secondary school graduate can apply to as many universities as he/she likes but before he/she is accepted he/she has to pass an entrance examination in the subjects in which the university specializes. Undergraduates can study a variety of subjects such as economics, foreign trade, architecture, law, journalism, the humanities, foreign languages, medicine, science, music, art, drama, engineering or computer science at various schools, e.g. Faculties of Economics, Architecture, or Law, Medical or Science Faculties, Faculties of Journalism, Arts, Teachers' Training College or any of the various faculties belonging to technical universities. University or college students enroll in three-year courses for a Bachelor's Degree, followed by courses for a Master's Degree. Medicine usually takes six years. University or college study finishes with a state examination and every undergraduate also has to write a thesis in order to receive a diploma in his or her chosen field of study. The diploma is presented at the graduation ceremony. Doctoral Degrees are awarded after another few years of study.

COMENIUS UNIVERSITY IN BRATISLAVA

THE FACULTY OF NATURAL SCIENCE

Comenius University is a relatively young university, having being established in 1919. Going back in our history the first Slovak university was the short-lived Academia Istopolitana formed in 1467. The next university in Slovakia was established at Trnava in 1635. When Comenius university was first established, there were only three Colleges or Faculties: Medicine, Law and the Arts.

The Faculty of Natural Science was established in 1940 to pursue higher education and research in individual fields of Natural Science. The Faculty of Natural Science is divided into five main sections: Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Sciences, Geography and Geology. The sections are identical with the five main branches of study at the Faculty. Individual sections are composed of a number of departments and institutes. Some subjects are taught by specialists from other faculties of the university, from other universities and from the Slovak Academy of Sciences. The faculty is international in its student body, teaching staff and in its cooperation with different universities and international organizations.

The Faculty of Natural Sciences is located on a hill overlooking the Danube river in Mlynská dolina. The current facility was built in 1976.

Studies in Natural Science comprise an initial three-year program leading to a Bachelor's degree in various majors, which may be followed by a two-year program of further study leading to a Master's degree. A Master's degree is a prerequisite for entry into postgraduate studies, which culminates in a Doctoral degree (equivalent to a Ph.D. level in Britain). A substantial part of the Master's and Doctoral programs is devoted to research. A Master's degree student is expected to pursue a modest research project conducted under the guidance of a tutor and to successfully defend a thesis for the award of a Master's degree. A Ph.D. level study concentrates on the student's own research project within the framework of the research program of the tutor.

