

Unclassified

CCNM/DEELSA/ED(2001)2

Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Economiques
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

15-Jul-2002

English - Or. English

**CENTRE FOR CO-OPERATION WITH NON-MEMBERS
DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

THEMATIC REVIEW OF NATIONAL POLICIES FOR EDUCATION - ALBANIA

Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

Table 1 - Task Force on Education

JT00129648

Document complet disponible sur OLIS dans son format d'origine
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FOREWORD

This report on education in Albania has been prepared within the framework of the Centre for Co-operation with Non-Members (CCNM) of the OECD as part of its programme of co-operation with the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. The Secretariat, as Co-ordinator for General Education Policy and System Change of the Task Force for Education on Table 1 of the Stability Pact, has carried out a Thematic Review of Education Policy of the region with sections on Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYROM, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and a chapter on regional issues. The themes covered are teachers, curriculum, governance, and early childhood education and care. Each section provides an overview of the education system, issues and barriers to reform, and recommendations. The recommendations are designed to be of use for national policy makers and to assist Stability Pact donor countries and institutions target regional assistance. In addition, the reports can serve as the basis for more detailed analysis of individual education sectors.

The transition of the region towards a pluralistic democracy and a market economy has been marked by economic, social and political changes of extraordinary breadth and depth. The talents, skills and knowledge of the population are crucial in this process; hence the ambitious scale and urgency of the reforms being advanced for education which led the members of Table 1 of the Stability Pact to designate education as one of the four priority areas.

On the basis of background material prepared by the education authorities in the region, existing reports and information supplied in meetings in the course of site visits, this Thematic Review provides an analysis of the education system in light of the social and political context of the region and priority issues of access and equity, quality, efficiency and governance.

The Thematic Reviews of Education Policy of South Eastern Europe were made possible by grants from Austria, Finland, Greece, Switzerland and UNICEF. Additional assistance was provided by New Zealand, the British Council, Bureau CROSS (The Netherlands), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the World Bank, the Open Society Foundation and the Centre for Education Policy Studies (CEPS, University of Ljubljana).

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The opinions expressed and arguments employed in this report are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the government of Albania, the OECD or the governments of its Member countries.

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ALBANIA

General Data

Area:	28 748 sq.km.
Number of inhabitants:	3 387 327 (41% urban, 59% rural).
Age structure and population characteristics:	Age 0-4: 9.70%; 5-14: 22.6%; a total of 48.86% of the population under 24 years old. Birth rate: 19.47 births per 1 000 population. Infant mortality rate: 41.33 deaths per 1 000 live births. Population of working age (16-65): 62%. ¹
Population density:	118 per sq.km.
Ethnic composition:	97.96% ethnic Albanian; 1.85% Greek (nearly all in the Gjirokastra and Saranda districts); Macedonian 0.15%; small numbers of others (Serbs, Montenegrins [near Shkodra], Vlachs, Roma) 0.04%. ²
Religion:	Muslim 70%; Albanian Orthodox 20%; Roman Catholic 10% (Statistical Yearbook 1991). Religion is not a divisive issue in Albania.
Languages:	Albanian (Tosk is the official form; Geg is also spoken widely in some parts of the country); Greek. Language is more important than religion in Albanians' sense of national identity.
GDP [1999 est.]:	USD 5.6 billion purchasing power parity, or USD 1 650 per capita.
Percentage of GDP spent on education:	2.7% (2000 est.), down from 4% at the start of transition and 3.7% in 1995. Public spending on education as a percentage of total public spending: 9.7% in 1999 (down from 11.4% in

¹ Source: Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), Albania.

² Sources: CEPS, Ljubljana, based on population census of 1989. Estimates for the Council of Europe. (J.P. Liegeois, see References) indicated that in 1994 there were some 95 000 Roma in Albania (2.5% of the population); however, many Roma are likely to have identified themselves as "Albanian" or may not have participated in the census of 1989. ("Official" figures about Roma from different sources can vary as much as 500%).

1995, when it was fairly close to the OECD mean of 12.6%). During the 1990s, total public spending on education decreased by 35% in real terms, enrolments by 15%, and spending per student by 20%.

Inflation rate [1999 est.]

0.5% (consumer prices).

Registered unemployment (Labour Force Survey 1999): 17.1%. Youth unemployment: 25.5% (below age 29), higher among males than females. 90% of all unemployed are jobless for more than one year. (1999) (Figures: INSTAT, CEPS). Only 3.5% of registered unemployed benefited from job training projects in 1999. See Table 1, below.

Unemployment:

Levels of education governance:

Three. (1.) *Central level* [Parliament; Parliamentary Committee of Education and Culture; Council of Ministers; Ministry of Education and Science; Institute of Pedagogical Research] (2) *Local level*: Districts, and Municipalities or Communes³ [Education Directorates; Municipality or Commune Councils; District Councils and their Departments for Education and Health] (3.) *School level*: [Principal, Deputy Principal(s), teachers' council, parents' council, school board⁴].

Introduction and Context

From Palaeolithic times, there has been human habitation in the lands comprising modern Albania, and many Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age archaeological sites of interest have been discovered. The most contentious issue is the appearance of the Illyrians, considered by most Albanian archaeologists as an autochthonous people who developed a common Illyrian language and culture during the Bronze Age. Others believe that the Illyrians arrived in Albania at the time of the Mycenaean civilisation in Greece, and yet others that their appearance, in substantial numbers at least, did not occur until the 10th century BC. Unfortunately, knowledge of early Illyrian language and culture is scant – there are no surviving inscriptions or written fragments.⁵ The Illyrian period lasted until 230 BC, followed by the Roman period (until the 6th century AD) and the Slavonic period (7th-15th century AD) at the end of which Albania's great hero Skanderbeg led the last resistance against the Turks.

For all their long history, of all the peoples of the Balkans the Albanians remain the most mysterious and least known. Albanian history and culture have been profoundly shaped by its geographical features – it is a harsh country, with more than two-thirds of its area dominated by mountains. In the south, the large rivers swell with winter rains from the mountains, and for centuries the marshes were flooded in

³ Albania has 37 municipalities covering 320 communes.

⁴ A school board is a consultative body representing the local community. It has powers to propose the appointment of a principal, or the appointment or dismissal of a teacher, to the Education Directorate, but not every school has a school board and by no means all boards exercise these powers in practice. Their main function is to raise extra-budgetary funds for the school.

⁵ The first documents in written Albanian language date from the 15th century and were mainly related to religious ceremonies (baptism) and Latin-Albanian vocabularies.

spring and autumn until modern drainage schemes brought improvement. However, these geographical and climatic features have made Albania a land of small isolated communities, with a long history of small kingdoms and pastoral tribes. Later, Greek influence in the south led to a certain degree of “urbanisation” and to diversification from agricultural to skilled occupations – metalwork, pottery, crafts. Such cities were often surrounded by defensive walls, creating new divisions between rural and “urban” communities. Illyria (especially “urban” Illyria⁶) embraced Christianity relatively early (2nd Century AD) although from the 16th century AD onward the influence of Islam spread, especially among Ghegs in the North.

The history of Albania since the end of the Second World War has, again, been essentially a story of isolation from the mainstream of European and international events.⁷ When the war ended for Albania in 1944, the country was economically devastated as a result of the Axis occupation, the antiquated pre-war infrastructure, and the havoc reeked by years of occupation, resistance, sabotage and guerrilla activity. There was very little capital, either in financial or human resource terms; and in this context it was natural that Enver Hoxha and the (communist) Party of Labour allied themselves, and Albania, with the Soviet Union. By December 1944 most of the means of production were under State control, followed by land reform in 1945 and elimination of the private sector by 1947. After the split in the international communist movement in 1960, the Soviet Union withdrew its technical and financial support, and Albania formed an uneasy alliance with the People’s Republic of China.

Through all these years, Enver Hoxha maintained a tight grip on power and developed an overwhelming cult of personality and an ultra-centralised, authoritarian form of decision-making that remained unchallenged until Hoxha’s death in 1985. Thereafter, a cautious “liberalisation” programme was overtaken by the much more radical changes in neighbouring countries (especially Romania) of 1989-90. Riots and mass emigration became common. In September 1990 legal reforms loosened the grip of the State on public behaviour, and during the winter of 1990-91 all remaining symbols of the one-party state were demolished including the gigantic gilded statue of Hoxha in central Tirana. The first democratic elections were held in March 1991; however, instability continued throughout the year, including a mass exodus in August when an estimated 25 000 people seized ships in Durrës and forced them to sail to Italy. Food riots and other bouts of unrest (e.g., the collapse of the “pyramid schemes” in 1997 and the reverberations of wars in former Yugoslavia, especially in Kosovo and more recently in FYR-Macedonia) have so far hampered economic and political progress. In parts of the country, continuing insecurity, the easy availability of arms and the activities of criminal gangs have led to a re-emergence of locally enforced “law and order” led by powerful families or social groups, and of traditional forms of community justice (*kamun*), to compensate for dysfunctional state institutions, in particular the police and the courts. Mistrust among these kin-based clans or social groups is pervasive, and militates against the development of a national civil society⁸.

The civil conflicts of 1991 and 1997 have created a strong sense of insecurity that continues to affect the daily lives of Albanians, and their attitudes towards – and participation in – schooling. Young men in particular are drawn more to criminal life, often in gangs, than to education; and many parents express fears about insecurity in the schools, especially for their daughters.

⁶ The terms “Albania” and “Albanian” did not come into use until the time of the Byzantine Empire.

⁷ James Pettifer, 1994, p. 41.

⁸ Nora Dudwick and Helen Shahriari, *Education in Albania: Changing Attitudes and Expectations*. February 2000. The World Bank, page v. This social assessment contains a detailed discussion of socialist and post-socialist Albanian education, tracing social attitudes, institutional relationships, access and equity and a number of other issues germane to SEE Thematic Reviews.

Moreover, the unrest of 1991 and 1997 left many schools “little more than damaged shells without any of the basic equipment necessary for good education,”⁹ and especially the violent events of 1997 further undermined people’s confidence in Albania’s political and social stability. There is still a sense that at any moment chaos may return, as to some extent it did in the north during and after the Kosovo crisis.

Legal Framework

The Constitution (1992, with Main Constitutional Provisions adopted 1992-95) lays down the right of all citizens to education; schooling is available to everyone under equal conditions, and resources for this are made available from the state budget. The Constitution further assigns the authority for passing education laws to Parliament, while the Government (in particular the Ministry of Education and Science) is responsible for formulating education policy and drafting legal and sub-legal documents.

The basic laws for the education sector are:

- The Law on the Pre-University System of Education (1995).
- Normative Provisions on Public Schools, Labour Code of the Republic of Albania (1995).
- Private Education Law (1995).
- Higher Education law of the Republic of Albania (1994).
- In addition the MoES has issued a number of rules (sub-legal acts) relating to education, such as assessment of students, rules for enrolment in upper secondary schools, standards for teachers, in-service teacher training etc.

The Education System

Education in monasteries and churches began during the Byzantine period; the first Islamic schools were founded in the 17th century. The first Albanian (secular) elementary schools appeared in the 1890s. After November 1912, Albanian became the official language, and the main municipalities all established education directorates. Teacher training institutions were opened. By 1939, 60 000 students were enrolled in elementary and secondary schools.¹⁰ In 1990, 906 000 students were registered, or about 73.3% of the school age population (3-22). This had dropped to 719 000 by 1997, a decline of 14%.

Age at which compulsory education starts:	6
Age at which compulsory education ends:	14. If a pupil fails, he/she is obliged to remain in school until the age of 16.
Structure of the education system:	Education is free at all levels. General education

⁹ *Ibid*, page 17.

¹⁰ N. Terzis, *Educational Systems of Balkan Countries: Issues and Trends*. “Albanian System of Education”. 2000: pp. 13 et seq.

	consists of lower primary 4 years + upper primary 4 years + (non-compulsory) secondary 4 years. Vocational: after primary, 3 and 5-year vocational and technical secondary. 5-year programmes lead to Maturita exams. 4-year vocational programmes were phased out after 1998.
Examination/transition points:	Class 8 primary certificates based on continuous assessment and passing marks in school-based (promotion) exams. Size of cohort approx. 54 000. Class 12 secondary Maturita exams are set by the MES (written + oral) but marked by teachers. Cohort size in general education approx. 12 500; class 13 vocational education: approx. 15 000.
Higher education:	4-, 5- and 6-year university programmes in 11 institutions (39 faculties/schools); non-university programmes (avg.) 3.5 years, in 3 institutions. Total enrolment 1999/00: approximately 40 000, 15% of 18-23 age group. Growth mostly in part-time students: from 20% of total in 1990/91 to 45% in 1999/00.
Literacy rate:	Raised from about 20% in 1945 to an estimated 89% by the end of the 1980s; but closer to 75% in recent years.
Schooling expectancy for average Albanian 6-year old child (excluding pre-school)	9.5 years (1998), 2 years less than in 1989 and 6 years less than the average for OECD countries (15.4 years).
Education attainment rates:	8 years (compulsory basic education) for 59% of the population; secondary education for 33 % of the population (20-59 year olds, 1999).
Private education:	In 2000, there were 2°543 children in private pre-schools; 4°717 in private basic schools; 1975 in private upper secondary; and no students in private tertiary education. Private schools are registered and accredited by the MoES, and are obliged to follow the state curricula although they may teach additional subjects as well.

Table 1. **Total Registered Unemployment (in 000's)**

	1989	1992	1994	1996	1997	1998	1999
Female	52	194	141	88	109	127	130
Male	61	200	121	70	85	108	110
TOTAL registered unemployed	113	394	262	158	194	235	240

Source : INSTAT: Labour Market Development, July, 2000. Cited in Francesco Panzica, November 2000, page 43.

Special features

Enrolment decline and drop-out problems. Gross enrolment rates for basic education (grades 1 to 8), (Table 3) dropped from above 100% in 1989 to 90% in 1998. Official drop-out figures for compulsory education are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. **Drop-out rates during compulsory education**

Years	90-91	91-92	92-93	93-94	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
%	3.9	6.3	4.1	4	3.1	3	3.2	3	3.01	2.8
TOTAL	21 710	34 232	21 532	20 939	17 134	17 162	18 300	16 779	16 730	15 232

Source : MoES Directory of Statistics, and CEPS-Ljubljana.

A Living Standards Measurement Survey carried out in 1996 showed that more than 35% of Albanian children who did not attend school at that time gave “lack of financial resources” as the main reason (41.4% in urban areas) while nearly 20% said they were “not satisfied with the quality of education” (21% in urban areas).

At secondary (post-compulsory) level, declines have been more dramatic, but not for all types of secondary education. Overall, the decline was from 78.6% of the cohort in 1989 to 41% in 1998. However, general (academic) secondary enrolments *increased* from 24.4% in 1989 to 34.9% in 1998, while those for secondary vocational education *dropped* from 54.1% to 6.1%. Indeed, *rural* vocational school enrolments dropped from 49% in 1990 to 2% in 1998, mostly due to the closure of many rural vocational schools and enterprises.

Enrolments at tertiary level have risen overall, but nearly all the increase is in part-time enrolment while full-time enrolments have risen only slightly. The issue of university entrance requirements and entrance examinations is discussed in more detail below.

Education of minorities. Albania has two formally recognised national minorities – Greeks (mostly located in the south, *e.g.* in the Gjirokastra, Saranda, Delvina and Permeti districts; and Macedonians (mostly in the South-eastern part of Albania *e.g.* around Korca and Vernik. There are other, small ethnic groups such as Roma (both travelling and settled), Vlachs or Arumuns, etc. The Constitution (Art. 20) states that minorities enjoy equal rights and freedoms under the law; that they have the right to

free expression, and the right to protect their ethnic, cultural, religious and language identity, as well as “the right to learn and be taught in their native tongue”.

Poor infrastructure. The World Bank estimates that rehabilitating Albania’s schools to an adequate level would cost USD 270 million (EUR 299.5 million).¹¹ A combination of low-quality initial construction, at least two episodes of widespread vandalism and destruction, and chronic lack of maintenance over many years (about 35% of schools were built before 1960) means that many schools lack basic facilities and furniture, heating, water supply, electricity etc.

Table 3. Gross enrolment rates by level of education as % of cohort, 1989 - 98

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Pre-school	56.7	57.9	48.9	36.8	36.1	36.8	39.2	38.9	36.0	35.8
Primary										
TOTAL	100.9	102.1	99.3	97.3	99.4	100.4	100.3	99.5	97.1	93.9
Male	100.3	101.5	98.2	95.3	99.1	100.8	100.5	100.4	97.7	94.0
Female	101.4	102.9	100.5	99.6	99.7	100.0	100.0	98.6	96.5	93.7
Lower secondary										
TOTAL	103.4	102.5	96.2	90.8	90.7	92.5	91.4	91.5	91.1	90.1
Male	104.8	103.7	95.4	88.9	89.0	91.5	90.3	91.7	89.3	88.4
Female	101.9	101.1	97.0	92.8	92.4	93.7	92.6	92.0	92.1	92.0
Upper secondary										
TOTAL	78.6	78.0	57.3	47.0	42.4	38.1	36.6	38.5	40.3	41.0
General	24.41	25.9	28.3	29.6	30.1	29.7	29.1	31.6	33.9	34.9
Vocational	54.14	53.1	30.0	17.4	12.3	8.4	7.5	6.9	6.4	6.1
Tertiary										
TOTAL	8.2	9.0	9.3	11.9	11.7	11.1	11.8	13.1	13.6	13.3
In full-time	6.6	7.0	7.6	8.3	7.8	6.9	6.7	6.6	7.0	6.9

Source : Source: Statistical Office of Albania, cited in Palomba and Vodopivec, op.cit. page 63.

¹¹ Sue Berryman, *Albania's Education Sector: Problems and Promise*. May 2000, p.iv.

Fluctuating populations and changes in demographics. The impoverishment of rural areas, the closure of many rural schools and classrooms, and “urban drift” as a result of unemployment, unrest and insecurity have led to overcrowded urban and suburban classrooms, multiple-shift teaching, and poorer quality of learning. In addition, many ethnic Albanian refugees came to Albania during the Kosovo and more recently the Macedonia crises, most of them converging on cities (especially Tirana where urban sprawl places great pressures on local provision). Many refugee children are traumatised, come from deprived backgrounds, and have language, housing and social adaptation problems.

Education Governance and Administration

Patterns of education governance, management and administration vary among OECD Member countries, but could be set out as a continuum with strongly centralised systems at one end and fully decentralised ones at the other. Most will fall somewhere in between; in former communist countries, the trend is away from the centralised model and towards a more decentralised one, although the degree of power devolved to local authorities and schools differs among the transition countries.

The choice each government makes depends on the values to which it gives priority, although these tend to be *political* rather than educational values. For that reason, the rapid moves towards political decentralisation in post-communist countries have not always led to improved conditions for schools, teachers or students at the local level. One reason is that local budgets have not been able to cope with new demands placed on them by changes in legislation; another is that devolution of authority has only rarely been balanced by clear lines of accountability whereby local units can be held responsible for the quality of service they provide.

The Albanian Constitution provides the legal framework for decentralisation: “Local Government on the Republic of Albania is founded upon the basis of decentralisation of power, and is exercised according to the principle of local autonomy”. The main structural change was the modification of the role of the two levels of local government, (1) by strengthening the functions of municipalities and communes as the basic level of local authority, and (2) modifying the role of District Councils by giving them a mainly co-ordinating function rather than one of direct-responsibility.

In public administration, the Albanian government set up an Inter-ministerial Board for Institutional Reform (January 1999) and adopted a Strategy for Institutional Reform and Public Administration later that year. Organisational structures will be slimmed down and standardised, and the aim is to encourage horizontal liaison among central institutions as well as embark on legal reform. A series of laws has already been adopted to reinforce these changes, and to bring greater openness and transparency into public administration. In education, new laws on pre-primary, primary and secondary education were enacted in the late 1990s, and a law on Higher Education was under discussion in Parliament at the time of the team’s visit.

Levels of Education Governance

The Parliament of Albania has 155 members. There is a special *Commission for Education* with 8 members. High consensus on the importance and the development needs of education is prevailing. Laws on pre-primary, primary and secondary education have been enacted in the second half of 1990’s. A proposal for a new law on Higher Education is coming to the Parliament. *The Council of Ministers* is the national executive body.

The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) is responsible for education. *Ministry of Health* (MoH) is responsible for pre-school care and education. All schools are owned by the state. *Ministry of*

Labour has responsibilities to train unemployed people, but the volume of training is very limited. *Institute for Pedagogical Research (IPR) Albania*, under the supervision of MoES, co-ordinates the curriculum development processes.

There are 36 *provinces* and 65 *municipalities* in the country. MoES has *Regional Departments* with a mission of advising and inspecting the schools. The municipalities have *educational boards*.

Every school is meant to have a *school board*. The School Board system is important and functioning. However, these bodies are completely subordinated to MoES.

Education Finance¹²

During the transition, real resources for education have fallen from well over 4% of GDP in the early 1990s to 3.0% in 1998 (the mean level among 19 transition countries was 4.8% in 1998). Real spending per student also fell, despite a decline in the number of students. As a result, chronic lack of resources has weakened the system year by year, and the quality of education suffered. This, in turn, affects the way the *value* of education is perceived, especially by poor families, families with a number of school-age children, and families in rural areas with high rates of unemployment.

The effects of poverty on school attendance and duration of schooling in European and Central Asian transition countries are well documented.¹³ The poor face three specific problems with regard to education: (1) the system as a whole does not work well, and while this affects all children, the children of the poor suffer most; (2) the cost of education to families has gone up, so that education – as a commodity – competes with other claims on the shrinking household budget; (3) the perceived benefits of education (in terms of higher earnings or better jobs) remain low, undermining long-term incentives for families to invest in education. Although a “taste” for education remains, there is an increasing risk that poor children drop out of education and inevitably fall into poverty themselves. “The lower the quality of education and the higher the opportunity costs of attending school, the lower the probability of school attendance.”¹⁴

There is no doubt that in Albanian basic education (primary and lower secondary), the shortage of financial resources has adversely affected the demand for education. However, private returns (benefits to the individual) of basic education are much higher than those for pre-school education or post-basic education. For Albania, these rates of return have been calculated as 13 to 16% for basic education, 2 to 4% for upper secondary education, and only about 2.5% for tertiary education. The OECD team would therefore agree with the conclusions reached by both UNICEF (1998) and the World Bank (2000) that Albania’s government might do well to concentrate its resources on basic education, rather than on pre-school or post-compulsory (upper secondary and tertiary) sectors.¹⁵

¹² For a detailed analysis, the reader is directed to the three World Bank studies (see References), in particular to G. Palomba and M Vodopivec, *Financing, Efficiency and Equity in Albanian Education*, March 2000.

¹³ Nancy Van Dycke, *Access to Education for the Poor in Europe and Central Asia: Preliminary Evidence and Policy Implications*. April 2001. Technical Discussion Paper. Washington: The World Bank, ECSHD.

¹⁴ G. Palomba and M Vodopivec, *op.cit.*, March 2000, p. 19.

¹⁵ UNICEF International Child Development Centre, *Education for All?* (1998). The MONEE Project CEE/CIS/Baltics. Regional Monitoring Report No. 5. Florence: ICDC, pp. 67-71; and G Palomba and M. Vodopivec, *op.cit.*, p. 54.

Finance flows

Municipalities have no tax revenue but only miscellaneous own sources of funding. They receive an annual grant from the Ministry of Finance (MoF), which has some plans to transfer poverty tax and some other taxes to the municipalities. Salaries for teachers and for other civil servants are paid by MoF. Unlike many countries of the region salaries have been paid regularly. The municipalities are assumed to pay for other operational expenditure of the schools from the state block grant but this rarely happens so as to satisfy the necessary needs of the schools. The Economic Centre of municipality pays the bills of the schools.

Money for teachers' salaries and the grants for the municipalities come from the MoF. Funding for construction and reconstruction of school buildings comes from the MoES. During the recent years, money coming from international donor organisations (especially AEDP-Soros) has played a major role in rehabilitating schools. See section on "scattered responsibilities at the central level", below, for further discussion.

Remnants of the Past

Lengthy communist dictatorship combined with complete isolation from the rest of the world have left deep scars in the human psyches, organisational structures and all types of infrastructure in Albania. The recent history of education in Albania is still strongly affected by the legacy of the Hoxha regime.

After the winter of 1990-91, the search for stability in an often volatile political and economic context has preoccupied both the national and international community. During these turbulent years, the ability of the State to govern was placed in question, and only now is some measure of guarded optimism reappearing. Ensuring public order, controlling organised crime and reducing poverty are at the top the government's agenda. Inevitably, and perhaps rightly, these compete for scarce resources with the education sector.

Education is not viewed as a decisive contributor to economic development, but is seen as a cost rather than an investment. The governing structures of the State and its institutions remain highly politicised, and the organs of civil society (for example, non-governmental organisations) are not sufficiently supported. Community-building is not high on anyone's agenda, and civic participation in local governance in general – and education in particular – is restricted, although some success stories can be told of communities that have begun to take responsibility for the quality of their schools. The voices of various actors, stakeholders and clients are muted, and mechanisms to express these voices are to be found mainly on paper. Democratic theory and practice remain far apart. As one experienced professional educator put it, "The cultural legacy of five decades of autarchy and passivity continues to shape daily life in education and its management."

Public order, poverty reduction and, as part of it, education are said to be Albania's priorities. But as in many other transition countries, there are huge needs in Albania to build and improve the physical infrastructure of the country, including roads, public and private buildings, sewerage and water supply systems, waste and environmental management. Priority setting is therefore a very difficult and complicated issue. In addition, people's expectations are more focussed on the short-term needs than on investment in the future.

In political life, a balance must be struck between concrete improvement in living conditions, and investments in future development. "Education" is experienced by teachers, pupils and their parents as "the

day-to-day school environment”; but from the point of view of the national economy, “education” is a long-term investment. Because the education sector is so large and in such poor condition, any across-the-board improvement in Albania’s educational infrastructure would take the lion’s share of national and public resources; therefore, careful priority-setting among education’s multiple needs is of the utmost importance.

Public governance in Albania remains highly centralised. The regional levels of administration are directly connected to the relevant ministries, including MoES and MoF. Municipalities are highly dependent on the central government, while local expenditure is directly funded (and property owned) by the State. Local governments’ own revenues are very limited. This kind of political structure, and the rivalry between the two leading parties, have caused over-politicisation of public administration and services. Even if, compared with other sectors, politicisation is not as strong in education, it is still a dominant factor in the administration of the school system. Reforms are therefore discontinuous, fragmented, and uncoordinated, and the professional potential of principals and teachers is not given a chance to flourish.

For a country with 2 200 schools and 700 000 students, the organisational structure of education is weak. The MoES is relatively small and without any major capabilities to influence, for instance, funding of the schools or to make the use of existing resources more effective. The other organisations at the central level also lack human and institutional capacity to be useful for schools and teachers in their very difficult everyday work. The regional level is directly steered by relevant ministries, the Regional Departments are directly subordinated to MoES and the District Finance Offices of the MoF. Regional Departments (37) are not able to solve the problems of the schools. District Finance Offices have an important but technical task to deliver money according to the decisions of MoF. Municipalities (65) are weak and do not have so much influence on, or resources for, education. The supply of and the quality of textbooks are insufficient to give much help for the teachers without speaking of development of teaching.

Scattered Responsibilities at the Central Level

The budget preparation process is an example of how the responsibilities are scattered between the two ministries and the different departments of MoES. Each municipality gives a proposal for budget to the district office, which in turn sends a proposal for the budget to the MoF. Copies of the proposals are sent to the MoES. The Department of Budget of the MoF prepares the budget as a part of the whole budget for the state. The MoES gives also a proposal for the budget for the Department of Budget. The Director of Finance in the MoES further negotiates the proposal with the Director of the Budget Department in MoF. Eventually, MoF approves the money to be allocated to the schools. MoF pays the grants to the municipalities. These grants are for education, health services and for all other expenditures for which the municipalities are supposed to be responsible. The Director of the Budget Department in MoF negotiates with every mayor on the needs of the municipalities. Except for the Financial Department, the other Departments of MoES are not much aware of how the funding is determined for those parts of the education system for which the MoES is directly responsible.

The MoES is nominally responsible for the content of education. But considering the size of MoES and the daily preoccupation of the Departments with detailed decisions, there is no room for MoES experts to concentrate on strategic and educational management issues, or on taking leadership in setting the contents of Albanian education and training. Thus in practice it is the Pedagogical Research Institute and text book publishing houses – guided by the MoES’s approval procedures – that develop and implement curricula and textbooks.

Vertical Decentralisation

Broad consensus has been achieved on the need to decentralise central government competencies and powers. Perceptions have changed, and legislation to effect this change in education is either in place or forthcoming. Mechanisms, too, have been identified. But “decentralisation” is still little more than top-down governance.

The reason for this is that while perceptions and legislation have changed, the systems of finance and decision making have not. Local government has neither the power nor the resources to effect changes in the public education system. Similarly, schools and their stakeholders – while in principle they have a new management structure and increased management responsibilities – have been given neither an operational budget nor the power to make decisions in key areas of management, such as teacher recruitment and evaluation.

At the same time, it should be recognised that the evidence does *not* support the commonly held assumption that decentralisation will automatically promote the efficiency and equity of decision making. Indeed, with regard to efficiency, it has been shown that the notion of allocative efficiency is not relevant to child welfare in country contexts where the right of the child to basic social services has not been achieved. The impact of decentralisation on equity of access, for example, can be damaging.¹⁶

The Draft Strategy for Development of Education in Albania

The strategy was presented as a draft mid term strategy of MoES. It is a wide-ranging document containing a great deal of information on the developments of education during the last decade as well as recommendations for future directions in education development. Because it is so comprehensive, it is difficult to see clearly which are the horizontal and sector-by-sector priorities; yet clear priority setting is essential in times of scarce resources. Moreover, the OECD review team could not determine whether there is any consensus among stakeholders about the content of the strategy, and the next steps to be taken.

Whether the Draft National Strategy on Education will redress this situation is a moot point. Criticism of its conceptualisation, moreover, has centred on lack of input from other stakeholders besides government and its dependencies. One representative of the non-governmental sector, for example, ironically described it as a “top-top” (rather than a “top-down” or “bottom-up”) process. Stakeholder input has been limited. And while discussion and debate will follow publication of the draft, it is unclear whether the draft will be viewed as a government White Paper (where discussion and debate are invited, but the main parameters remain in place) or as a Green Paper (in which discussion and debate among stakeholders can lead to a restructuring of content and priorities). Nor is it clear if the anticipated change process will include an Action Plan in which the implementation process will receive the same amount of time, energy and attention as the conceptualisation process.

Issues and Barriers in Governance and Administration

Much urgent work is still needed in restoring the infrastructure of the education system. A reasonable level of infrastructure is a precondition for new content and better quality of learning outcomes, for a more efficiently structured national system of education, for renewed motivation of students to attend school, and for the development of better governance. Therefore the first priority must be to improve

¹⁶ Jeni Klugman, *Decentralization: A Survey from a Child Welfare Perspective*. UNICEF, International Child Development Centre, Florence 1997, page 46.

physical conditions in schools. This is not, perhaps, the time for sophisticated and time-consuming management development processes.

The division of responsibilities among levels and units of governance is unclear. Nor is there sufficient clarity in the areas of responsibility among various Ministries.

There seems to be no serious consideration of options and alternatives for restructuring the national education system in a coherent manner. Participation in education after basic schooling has fallen, and is the lowest among countries in transition. For example, in the Office of the Prime Minister, the review team heard that the next revisions of the Law on VET will change the structure of VET by launching 1-2 year vocational study programmes, which would be closely labour market oriented. While this may be a useful move, a more comprehensive reform strategy for the entire system is needed, rather than this type of piecemeal “change”.

Instability and discontinuity in education governance, due to political pressures. While the nature of democracy requires debate and competition among different ideologies and ideas about the development of the nation and society, it does not mean that professionalism should be replaced by political appointments of educational administrators, principals and teachers.

Financing of education and control of expenditures are poorly understood. Because the funding of education and schools is scattered among at least two ministries and many local authorities, clear information about resources and expenditures is lacking. There are no reliable, relevant data available that could form the basis for informed decision-making, for example with regard to consolidation and rationalisation of the schools network to respond to declining enrolments.

Transparency and criteria of funding are lacking. Partly due to the diversified delivery of funding, the funding and expenditure of the schools could not be reported at any level of governance. Except for one clear rule – that the MoF pays the salaries of teachers and other educational staff – no criteria for funding municipal expenditure and schools appear to exist. Somehow, the allocations are made; but the review team could not discover exactly on what basis this is done.

There is little or no reliable information available on learning outcomes. Albania has no tradition of systematic measuring and comparing educational results and trends. Except for a small unit in the Institute for Pedagogical Research (IPR), there are no organisational arrangements for external assessment of student learning, and no substantial capacity for consultative inspection of the schools.

Lack of knowledge and skills to aid the reform in the governance of education. Fluctuations in the political climate and relative strengths may be one of the reasons why a decisive launching of a reform in education has been delayed. Development of human capacity in governance of education is a precondition for meaningful reform.

Curriculum

Curricula for primary and lower secondary schools are developed by the Ministry of Education and Science. They contain compulsory and some optional subjects, their content by grade and subject, the weekly and annual number of lessons, teaching objectives, and methodology. School Boards, subject to approval by the municipality, decide on the optional subjects and foreign languages (both compulsory and optional) that will be taught in each particular school.

In grades 1-4, all subjects are taught by a class teacher, while lower secondary (grades 5-8) have subject teachers. Some schools have (some) subject teachers from grade 4 onwards. Compulsory subjects

are mother tongue; foreign language; music, art, natural science, history, geography, physics, mathematics, biology, civic education, technical education and physical education. The optional subject at basic school level is a second foreign language, which can be taught from grade 3 to grade 8 for two lessons per week.

Curriculum development is the sole responsibility of the Institute for Pedagogical Research, but there is little communication between the Institute and the University which prepares teachers. Better communication needs to be established between the two. Curriculum development should have input from both, teachers and professors. Textbooks should be objective and not politically biased. One worrying thing is that new history texts are being prepared that omit 1990-to the present! The Institute is very capable and held seminars in 2000 to inform teachers of the new strategy; however, the strategy could have been developed by a broader group.

Curriculum Reforms.

Grades 1-4 and 5-8

After 1992, changes were made in the teaching of Albanian language and literature, and military training as well as the History of the Party were eliminated from the curriculum which had been heavily Marxist oriented. New texts were written, omitting Marxist content. Sociology, applied economics and introduction to the history of philosophy were included in the curriculum. One text was produced for each class, and more than 80 new textbooks were published.

New teaching methods have been piloted in the pre-school system; the existing kindergartens and schools have been strengthened by the reconstruction of damaged buildings and the construction of new ones.

A good part of the didactic material base has been renewed and modernised, and politics has been largely eliminated from textbooks. New concepts have been introduced in the content instead. School programmes have been improved, and elements of civic education introduced. General education and vocational education have undergone basic changes in terms of both content and structure.

The school laboratories inherited by the former system were small in number and “not suitable space . . . for the ever changing curriculum”. School libraries are a very important part of the education process in schools that “helps develop reading skills and carrying out the objectives of the teaching programme of literature and also extending the knowledge in other subjects”. In the school-year 1998/99, Computer Science (Information Technology) was first introduced in 85 schools.

The draft National Strategy for Education stresses the urgent need to improve material resources (school buildings, libraries, laboratories, equipment) and didactic (teaching) resources such as teaching plans, programmes, textbooks, teachers’ manuals as well as didactic, audio visual and computer equipment. Curricula and content syllabuses prescribe teaching and learning objectives for each grade, but teachers need help in working out more detailed schedules and lesson plans.

Another new programme is the Human Rights Education Project, which was extended system wide in 2001. Several other projects have been started, but unlike its neighbours, Albania has not been able to attract many donors. Nevertheless the co-ordination among the various measures and projects of donors could be improved, and the intervention of donors should be focused on *implementation* rather than on producing more and more reports.

Curriculum for Upper Secondary, Grades 9-12

The curriculum for general upper secondary includes 15 subjects taught over 4 years, in two 17-week terms per year. The first two years include literature, history, geography, foreign language, sociology, math, physics, chemistry, biology, technology and physical training. In the third year philosophy is added and computer science (information technology) takes the place of technology. Economics is added in the fourth year. At the end of the fourth year the students sit exams in Albanian literature and language, mathematics and physics; these exams are both written and oral. They are not standardised, and therefore not reliable.

A major change in the curriculum occurred in 1999-2000. After the second year of general upper secondary education, the student may choose a “profile” in either the social sciences or the natural sciences. At the end of the fourth year the student will sit exams in the subjects in their profile, as well as in Albanian language and literature. The main objective of this change is to attract more students into upper secondary education.

Other Forms of Upper Secondary Education

Before 1990, the vocational schools provided agricultural and technical industrial training, and 70% of the cohort attended those schools. Most were subsequently closed, and today Albania has 43 vocational schools whose pupils represent about 16% of the cohort (16 500 students). Largely through the aid of NGOs, 35 profiles have been made. Some of them respond to market demand. Broad reform is envisioned during the next few years to increase autonomy of these schools and to enable them to meet the needs of the economy.

MoES has been provided with substantial support from OECD countries and from different international organisations. As a result, “pilot” schools have been established all over the country. The purpose is to test and implement the modern vocational education system of developed countries in the realities of the Albanian setting. The pilot schools and Albanian Institute for Pedagogical Research (IPR) have worked together on teacher qualification, management, curricula and the preparation of teaching materials technical and vocational schools were in need of repairs after the civil disturbances in March 1997.

There are 5 language schools in Albania with 2 366 students. These schools prepare students to teach English, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish. There are also 1 151 students in 8 schools which train students in music and fine arts. In addition, two sports schools train athletes to compete both nationally and internationally. Four pedagogical schools in four cities train teachers for basic education in rural areas. Private schools are allowed in Albania and even encouraged because of overcrowded schools in urban areas.

Textbooks

By law, the preparation and publishing of textbooks for schools is the responsibility of the MoES and its specialised institutions. The MoES determines what textbooks are needed for all grades in pre-university education, and expert panels organised by the Institute for Pedagogical Research evaluate manuscripts for their suitability for use in schools. The School Textbook Publishing House then prepares the textbooks for all levels of pre-university education, while the Publishing House of the University Textbooks (PHUT) prepares textbooks for the university education system. Their distribution is generally done by the Enterprise of School Textbook Distribution.

For the year 1998/99, 95% of the titles needed for use in basic schools were published, and the demands of the entire basic school population could be met. In addition, publishing houses for textbooks and teaching materials also prepare supplementary materials such as teachers' guides, readers, etc. For upper secondary education, publishing houses also print books for compulsory subjects, and are able to cover about 70% of the number of books needed.

Before 1990, the State Publishing House had a separate department for pre-school materials; this was dissolved in 1990 and no new books or materials for pre-schools have been published since. Recently a special department for pre-school (ages 3-5/6) has been set up to produce new books for young children which will hopefully improve the situation..

Under a World Bank project there are plans to open up textbook provision by encouraging private book publishers to enter a competitive bidding process. There are also plans to privatise textbook distribution, or at least open it to competition.

Issues and Barriers in Curriculum and Textbooks

The reforms of the political system and public administration unfortunately do not enjoy the unconditional support of the population. Due to past experience, the people do not invest either politics or administration with much trust. In various discussions with our partners there, it seems that many Albanians fall back on pre-democratic clan structures or simple corruption to solve conflicts or problems. (See recommendations.)

How society-at-large deals with the issue of which roles the present actors played in the system of Albanian communism is of tremendous importance to the whole area of the development of human resources in general and in the area of education in particular. (See recommendations.)

The understanding of teachers is often quite different from that of policymakers concerning the content and skill changes expected of them, perhaps because they receive only brief and superficial training and guidance. Thus, teachers tend to change their classroom activities, but without a conceptual understanding of the reason for these changes. The result is that activities are structured in ways unintended by the change agenda. Teachers tend to interpret and enact new instructional policies in light of their own experience, beliefs, and knowledge. This phenomenon is also the case considered in in-service training.

Planning for the future is difficult because of lack of knowledge regarding numbers of students in the country. Until an accurate census is taken, it is impossible to know how many dropouts there are or how many potential students are not in school. One of the major causes of non-attendance is poverty in the rural areas where parents need their children for work at home.

Qualified teachers are leaving the profession due to low salaries as well as lack of status. They are also frustrated by lack of input; they are not motivated as they are too often bound by the textbook and do not have an opportunity to be creative. Some school principals encourage teachers to bring outside materials to class, to find their own solutions, to begin team teaching, but these are in the minority.

Decentralisation and community involvement in schools are important issues. Extra-curricular use of schools by the community would give all people "ownership" of their local schools. The local schools could be managed as community education centres as well as service centres for pupils' learning needs. In order to accomplish these goals, a number of changes are essential: developing local leadership; educational management training for local principals as well as the directorate; the allocation of funds so

that budgets are available for use of principals without bureaucratic delays; the delineation of duties in order to avoid overlapping; and the development of quality criteria for all levels of the educational system.

Pilot Schools are considered to be instruments for innovation to show what is possible, to encourage other teachers to work with them in in-service training and in teacher training as well. An additional contribution to professional development would be evaluation and dissemination of experiences and results of the training.

Assessment of Learning Outcomes

The present system of assessment and examinations

Assessment in pre-school

No systematic assessment takes place in pre-primary schooling, which is non-compulsory and covers ages 3-6. On registration, schools may ask for medical records of the child, but teachers are not trained to observe pupils for possible learning difficulties. In any case, because only about of all 3-6 year olds attend school, nothing at all is known about the remainder of the age group until they appear in primary grade 1. Some newly introduced programmes for pre-school children, such as “Step by Step”, do assess some elements of school-readiness by the time a child reaches primary school age, but again this benefits only a small number of children.

Continuous assessment in grades 1-4

In the first four years of primary, the assessment of pupil learning is entirely school- and classroom-based. The objectives for primary education are implicit in the teacher guides for each grade (1-8) and within the various chapters in textbooks that cover the year’s content. Teachers assess their pupils using a variety of methods, including oral questioning, short quizzes or end-of-chapter tests, work done in class, or homework. Twice a year, an overall mark for each subject is given; these are aggregated into a final mark at the end of the school year. Promotion from grade 1 to grade 2 is automatic; thereafter, promotion from grade to grade is based on teacher assessment (oral tests). A pupil who fails (*i.e.*, receives less than a mark 5 on a 1-10 scale with 10 = highest) in more than two subjects must repeat the year. If he/she fails in two subjects or less, he/she is allowed to take “autumn examinations”; if successful, the pupil is promoted but otherwise must repeat the year. School-based assessment is controlled by the local education authority through its inspectorate.

End of grade 8

Examined subjects are mathematics and Albanian language. From 1996 onwards a small committee from the MoES and the IPR set the question papers for the entire country, in order to introduce some standardisation and comparability into Albanian examinations. The Examination Commission of each school (consisting of the head of the school, the subject teacher, and another teacher of the same school) writes the items on the blackboard, and all pupils copy them onto their papers. The exam lasts 4 hours. In each school, there is a representative of the local education authority to observe the proper administration of the exam. The Examination Commission marks the papers and gives a final mark to the

pupil; this mark also includes marks for the oral component, weighted 50% for the oral exam and 50% for the written part. The certificate is awarded by the school.

End of grade 12

This is the school leaving or so-called “Maturita examination. Examined subjects include mathematics, physics, and Albanian literature, written and oral. The procedure is as described for grade 8, except that a representative from the MoES or the IPR (not the local authority) serves as an external observer. During oral examinations, at least one teacher other than the student’s own teacher must be present.

University entrance

In previous years, competitions for university entrance were based on a 100-point system, of which a maximum of 30 points could be earned by a candidate on the basis of his/her performance during the four years of secondary schooling. The remaining 70 points were at the discretion of university faculties on the basis of performance on a faculty-set and -scored specialised entrance exam. Faculties issue their own ‘program’ or syllabus in each subject, and students who wish to compete for a place study these ‘programs’ in the summer leading up to the entrance examinations in early September of each year.

This system, in particular the 30 points available for school-based performance, was seen to be open to abuse. In 1998, the Minister announced on television that from 1999/2000, no school marks or leaving exam results (which used to constitute up to 30 of the possible 100 ‘points’ for University entrance) would be considered, and that the University entrance exams would be the only selection instrument. He stated that University professors would be assisted by subject teachers in setting these exams, but that every University – and indeed every faculty – would set its own without any attempt to equalise or standardise among Universities.

While involving experienced subject teachers was a big step forward, the dangers here were clear. First, the upper secondary curriculum would be entirely dominated by what teachers believe the universities will require (even though only about 30% of secondary school graduates continue into tertiary), and the universities would be *de facto* in charge of the school curriculum. Second, because everything would hinge entirely on a one-shot examination (of doubtful technical quality), university entrance would be even more of a lottery, with the stakes higher than ever, and the dangers of bribery and corruption rising along with them.

An interesting compromise was reached whereby the IPR and expert committees set the “general knowledge” part of the entrance examination across nine school subjects (60% of final mark), while the second, subject-specific part of the examination was set by each faculty (40% of final mark). In September 1999, this system was applied for the first time. There were about 9 000 candidates taking some 15 000 exams.¹⁷ Each exam took 5 hours and consisted of a great number (more than 150) questions, both duration and size of the exams seem excessive and the team hopes that they now have been reduced. Nevertheless, the process appears to have gone relatively smoothly, although the technical quality (reliability, validity) of the question papers remained doubtful, especially the part set by university faculties where there is little or no understanding of the ground rules of educational measurement.

¹⁷ Students are allowed to apply to more than one university for a place; if they are successful for more than one, they can choose the one they prefer.

However, until there is a credible and trusted school-leaving examination (Maturita) in place, Universities are unlikely to abandon their own entrance examinations altogether.

Next steps in assessment of learning outcomes

Assessment is an important issue in Albania. There have been some positive developments; a new Centre (the Centre for Evaluation, Assessment and Examinations or CEAE), based at the Institute for Pedagogical Research (IPR) was established in 1994 with a small staff of about two or three people. A World Bank financed project supported the through training and equipment, and its expertise and staff size have grown steadily. Key staff of the Centre were trained abroad, at ETS (United States), CITO (The Netherlands), UCLES (United Kingdom), and at the National Examinations and Assessment Service (NAES) in Romania. There were also a number of in-country training workshops and seminars which allowed Centre staff, specialists and teachers to be trained in assessment issues, thereby building the necessary capacity for future work.

Aside from preparing the general part of the university entrance test, the Centre has also carried out successful sample-based national assessments at grades 4, 8 and 12 in three core subjects, for example mathematics, Albanian language, and foreign language; and Centre staff work with teachers in schools to improve their skills in assessing student learning.

Under a second World Bank project, the Assessment Centre is expected to become a semi-independent organisation, remaining under the policy control of the Ministry of Education and Science but no longer a part of the IPR. The Centre will continue its work on national examinations, on the production and maintenance of test item banks, on university entrance examinations and on assessment of pupils in grade 4. It will also take part in international comparison studies such as TIMSS-Trends and OECD/PISA, and build links with testing agencies in other countries.

Experts working in and with the Centre have already done a great deal of good work. With the independence of the Centre, however, a different set of problems will arise. The most important will be the sustainability of the Centre itself once external funding runs out. There was some question among members of the OECD team whether a system of external examinations at the end of the secondary school (as now introduced in many other countries in CEE and SEE) is appropriate for Albania. There is not only the question of starting and running costs for such a project, but also of the feasibility of running centralised exams from Tirana, considering with the very poor infrastructure of the country and the high levels of corruption reported to the team. Is there any real “added value” in changing the present system, and if so, who would benefit from this? It may be useful to look at a range of assessment methods and protocols developed around the world. Albania needs to look very carefully at the available resources, and then decide what would be most appropriate given the country’s specific circumstances.

Nevertheless, there is little point in trying to improve curricula, textbooks and teacher training if no attention is given to *results* – that is, to the improvement of *learning outcomes*, and to their reliable and valid measurement and reporting. More and more countries around the world are using sound information about student learning for evidence based policy making. Unfortunately in Albania – as in many transition countries – little use is made of outcome data for supporting strategic evaluation and policy decisions. Schools rarely look beyond their own walls; district education directors know almost nothing of what happens in other districts. However, the introduction of new management structures – especially decentralised decision-making – will require management information systems at all levels, and reliable data on student learning outcomes will help schools monitor their performance over time as well as compare their own performance against that of other schools, both within Albania and internationally.

Issues and Barriers in Assessment

National standards for content and achievement have not yet been agreed for all subjects, grade levels, and all abilities including the slow learners as well as the more able ones. Although a great deal of good work has been done, there is as yet no *system-wide*, coherent strategy for defining such standards; without them as a frame of reference, evaluation of outcomes cannot be meaningful.

Pupils are probably still over-tested but under-assessed in terms of flexible skills. Albania's young people, like those in other transition countries, need to prepare for a world where they will have to make intelligent choices, solve un-anticipated problems, and take responsibility for finding their own paths in a rapidly changing economy. None of these skills was highly prized under the old system – centrally planned economies emphasise the learning of carefully selected facts, because these leave little room for uncertainty, and do not encourage independent thought. By contrast, life in a market economy means that most young people will change jobs and occupations several times during their working lives, and to do this they need independent thinking and learning skills rather than facts.

The introduction of new-style assessments and tests must be phased so that they reflect and reinforce the new curricula and new textbooks, and so that teachers and administrators can be trained in their use and interpretation. For the time being, many teachers and students still have to work with existing resources that do not always match the changes that are being introduced.

Public and political reaction to changes in the assessment and examinations system. There are two main issues here. First, there is the *educational* concern that high-stakes external examinations may have a negative backwash effect on teaching and learning in classrooms and will narrow the curriculum to what will be tested. Second, there is the *political* concern that if exams are more rigorous, fewer pupils may pass and more will find their paths to further education and employment blocked. Both are legitimate concerns and should be openly acknowledged so that steps can be taken to minimise their effects.

There are entrenched vested interests (especially at the secondary/tertiary interface) that may resist change. Also, a more rigorous assessment may initially increase the failure rate of students, which will cause concern and put pressure on politicians to abandon the (much-needed) reforms.

Teachers and Teacher Training

The economic and social development of any country depends on well educated and trained human resources, and this can only be achieved through an effective education system which has teachers and school administrators who have received proper initial training and continue to have in-service training to keep them up to date. However, the economic situation and under-managed transition processes in Albania have a strongly negative impact on the education system, through the decline of participation in pre-university education, discrepancies in rural/urban development, migration of rural populations to urban areas, low status of teachers, poor teaching environment, poverty, and low private and social returns to education in the present labour market.

There is a need for improvement in all aspects of the system. As stated in the Mid Term Strategy of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES)¹⁸ “the situation in the pre-university education is not yet

¹⁸ Republic of Albania, Ministry of education and Science, Minister's Cabinet. March, 2000. “Mid Term Strategy of the Ministry of Education and Science” (Draft), Tirana.

brought to normal". That is why the MoES has given priority to normalisation of the education system, increasing efficiency, and raising the quality teaching and learning. Teachers are at the centre of all these crucial issues.

The current situation of teachers in Albania

In 1998/99, there were 39 417 full-time teachers (excluding tertiary) in Albania (see Table A30 in Berryman¹⁹): 4 092 pre-school, 29 428 basic education 1-8, and 5 897 upper secondary school teachers. There are approximately 450 vocational teaching staff in the 41 secondary vocational schools. 2/3 of them teaching vocational theoretical subjects and 1/3 involved in vocational practice instruction. Judging by available statistics, in contrast to many other countries in the region, Albania is delivering relatively efficient pre-tertiary education, as measured by the use of educational staff and infrastructure.²⁰ But this is at the cost of constricting the supply of quality educational services in rural areas, overcrowded classrooms in urban areas, and the ability of the sector to attract qualified teachers.

Teaching is a low-status profession in Albania; therefore the teaching profession does not attract bright university graduates. University departments that prepare teachers are not considered prestigious, and attract candidates of low or mediocre quality. Although the OECD team was not provided with exact data, the estimation by Elbasan University (meeting with the Rector) is that only 30%-40% of graduates from teacher training programmes go directly to work in schools. The difficult circumstances that the teachers are experiencing have a negative effect.

The sole responsibility for appointing (*emërimi*) school staff lies with the 37 Educational Directorates – *Drejtoria Arsimore* (an ED is essentially a branch of the MoES). The ED submits the figure required for the coming year's salary expenses to the Ministry of Education and Science. The local government *bashkia/komuna* (municipal/district authority) has no power to influence either the allocation of funds for teaching purposes or school staff appointments.

The OECD review team heard that usually a three-member committee is formed to select a teacher. When there is more than one candidate for a position, the criteria used are: (a) level of education of the candidate, (b) number of years in teaching in relevant school type and (c) non- professional factors. School Directors are appointed by the EDs on the same basis as other teachers: qualification, number of years in teaching, other non professional factors.

New teachers interested to be appointed need to register their names on a waiting list at the ED. In reality, at present – due to a shortage of qualified teachers – the selection committee tries to persuade the applicant to take the position, especially in rural areas.

The insecurities created by the present contracts system whereby some teachers are appointed *me vendim* – officially (a permanent teaching position though not necessarily in the same school from year to year), while others are hired on a contract – *kontratë* (a temporary appointment only, with lower pay),

¹⁹ Berryman, Sue E. May, 2000. "Albania's Education Sector: Problems and Promise". (Discussion Draft, not for quotation). World Bank.

²⁰ *Ibid* figures 2.11, 2.13, tables A 39.

actually helps create movement away from the countryside. Teachers who do not have the requisite qualifications are usually hired on a three or six-month basis.²¹

It can be assumed that due to low status, low salary, high proportion of unqualified teachers and temporary appointments, lack of differentiated performance-related salary schemes etc., the underlying cause of problems in education in Albania are related more to motivation rather than to poverty.

Teacher qualifications

Based on the statistics provided by the MoES, the number of teachers with higher education or professional high school diploma is decreasing. Across all levels, 22% of teachers are under qualified. In the upper grades of 8-year basic education, this percentage increases to 33. In the school year 1998/99, 90% of pre-school teachers, 50% of 8-year school teachers, and 4.3% of high school teachers did not have appropriate education. Big differences between rural and urban teacher qualifications can be observed: in school year 1997/98 in 8-year school 70.3 % teachers in urban schools and only 44% of teachers in rural school were well qualified. (see table A34 in Berryman, *op.cit.*). For example, in Mirdita's 51 basic 8-year schools in 1999-2000, 60% of the 69 Mathematics-Physics teachers were not suitably qualified (De Waal, *op.cit.*).

Teachers are neither hired nor promoted on the basis of systematic evaluation of their subject matter knowledge, skills and teaching practice, using the pre-set criteria.

Table 4. Teachers' qualifications in kindergartens

Years	1990/ 91	1991/ 92	1992/ 93	1993/ 94	1994/ 95	1995/ 96	1996/ 97	1997/ 98	1998/ 99
Number and education attainment of teachers in kindergartens									
Kindergarten teachers	5 664	5 440	5 081	4 578	4 428	4 416	4 463	4 116	4 092
Secondary					95%	94%	92%	93%	90%
Higher education					5%	6%	8%	7%	10%

Source : Source: Key Indicators 1999 – Albanian National Observatory and MoES

21 De Waal, Clarissa. January, 2000. "Report on Rural Education in Albania and Suggested Reforms to Increase its Effectiveness. (Draft). Albanian Education Development program, Tirana, Albania.

Table 5. **Teachers' qualifications in basic (8-year school) education**

Years	1990/ 91	1991/ 92	1992/ 93	1993/ 94	1994/ 95	1995/ 96	1996/ 97	1997/ 98	1998/ 99
Number and education attainment of teachers in basic education									
Teachers	28 789	29 553	30 557	32 098	30 893	31 369	30 926	30 111	29 428
Secondary					49%	48%	48%	47%	47.9%
Higher education					51%	52%	52%	53%	52.1%

Source : Key Indicators 1999 – Albanian Observatory and MoES

Table 6. **Teachers' qualifications in secondary (general and vocational) education**

Years	1990/ 91	1991/ 92	1992/ 93	1993/ 94	1994/ 95	1995/ 96	1996/ 97	1997/ 98	1998/ 99
Number and education attainment of teachers in secondary education									
Teachers	9 708	9 553	9 298	7 834	6 365	6 321	6 118	5 989	5 897
Secondary					4%	5%	5%	5%	4.3%
Higher education					96%	95%	95%	95%	95.7%

Source : Key Indicators 1999 – Albanian National Observatory and MoES

Table 7 **Percentage of Albanian teachers with higher education**

TOTAL	1997/98 Percentage
Pre-school	7.3
Basic 8-year school	52.6
Upper secondary school	95.3
Urban areas	
Pre-school	13.7
Basic	70.3
Upper secondary	96.6
Rural areas	
Pre-school	2.7
Basic	44.0
Upper secondary	92.4

Source: Statistical office of Albania. In: Sue E. Berryman (2000), Albania's Education Sector: problems and promise. (Discussion draft), World Bank.

Teacher salaries

Teacher salaries are below the already low average public sector wage, and no longer cover living expenses and low salaries have led to a great number of qualified teachers and faculty leaving the education system. Some teachers leave because low salaries undermine teachers' authority in the community. Those who leave the public education system either start businesses or take a teaching post in private schools where approximately 510 teachers are employed and some of them emigrate to other countries. Many of those who stay in the system but cannot make ends meet, take second or third jobs selling sweets, chewing gum or other items, or offer private tutoring – even to students in their own classes, which is a clear conflict of interest.

Years of experience count for salary payment. All fully qualified teachers get a 2% increase in salary annually, and all unqualified teachers get 1% annual increase. In 1998, when the teacher unions joined efforts to persuade the Government to grant a general increase, the Government increased the salary by 30% for a certain category. The present system pays in fact uniformly, whether a teacher is negligent or actively dedicated. The system also does not differentiate pay for school directors according to responsibility and time loads; the director of a small school with under 50 pupils and the director of a school with 900 pupils and two shifts, are paid the same salary.

Work environment

As people have freedom of movement within Albania, migration to the towns and cities has strained the urban educational infrastructure. Internal migration from the north and south to the centre and coast of the country has caused the formation of crowded classes. The average number of students in each class in Tirana schools, for example, is 55. Lack of instructional materials, textbooks and equipment force teachers to do their work under pressure and with difficulty. Bad roads, especially in rural areas, and lack of public transportation make teachers' commuting to school very difficult. Most of the school buildings, especially in rural areas are in very bad condition, with broken windows, falling walls, leaking taps and dripping toilets – if, indeed, the school is lucky enough to have water at all. If, in addition to these poor conditions, the teacher is under-qualified and the School Director politically appointed with low motivation and no power, the working environment of the school provides no support to teachers who might want to introduce reforms.

The MoES defines the teaching load of the teaching staff. A pre-school teacher has 36 teaching hours (45 minutes is a teaching hour) a week, a teacher at grades 1-4 teaches 23-27 hours a week, a teacher at grades 5-8 teaches 20-24 hours a week, and an upper secondary (high school) teacher teaches 20 hours a week or 620-650 a year. Supervision of the teaching work at school level is the responsibility of the Director, and Inspectors of ED.

It can be assumed that the frequent change of School Directors for political and other reasons undermines school management, and has a negative influence on teachers' motivation and student learning outcomes.

Teacher training

Pre-service training

It is the expectation of the community that the teachers employed should have a university education. Tirana University and the regional universities and secondary pedagogical schools prepare students for the teaching profession. The graduates of Tirana University are awarded a diploma that

enables them to teach in high schools, to get a teaching assistantship at a university, and to obtain other jobs where the diploma is accepted. During 4 or 5 years of training at the university, students are mainly provided with scientific knowledge and some special training for the teaching profession. For example, in the Department of Mathematics in Tirana University, the 4-year study programme leads to the diploma “Teacher of Mathematics for Secondary School”; students study two semesters of Psychology, 2 semesters of Didactics of Mathematics, and have 8 weeks of pedagogical practice in schools.

Regional universities prepare their students for the teaching profession at basic elementary education level. Teachers for pre-school (kindergartens), teachers for grades 1-4 and teachers for grades 5-8 at compulsory 8-year basic education levels are prepared for the profession at regional universities. Students at teacher training departments of the regional universities in Shkodra, Elbasan, Gjirokastra and Korça. are required to have teaching practice in relevant education institutions for 3-4 weeks during the third and fourth year of their education. However, in order to meet this requirement, there is no arrangement for university students go to local schools to observe experienced teachers and practice teaching under their guidance. Teacher training institutions have weak links to local schools and the administration of education, and lack a meaningful educational research and policy development capacity important for improving the quality of teacher education. Thus, while previously students only spent 8% of their time in schools, now they spend up to 20% of study time in observing school and classroom life, and in practice teaching. Teachers in the practice schools do not have a special status and are not qualified to lead the teaching practice process.

The diplomas granted by regional universities are not very well defined in terms of the areas of competence in which they specialise, so that graduates from these courses sometimes end up teaching in the secondary education sector although they are trained as basic school teachers.

There are also some teacher training institutions where teachers for special fields are trained, such as the Academy of Arts where teachers of arts are trained and Higher Education Institute for Physical Training where teachers of physical training are prepared. From 1995, pre-school teacher education is offered in all the universities, except for the University of Tirana.

Among the vocational high schools, there are some (three) “Pedagogical High Schools” (pedagogical secondary schools for students up to the age of 18). The first one was established in 1909 in Elbasan and is still functioning; it was founded to train teachers for pre-school and primary education. Although the graduates of these high schools should go on to teacher training in the education departments of the universities, due to the shortage of teachers many of them can obtain a teaching position immediately – without a university degree – at all levels of the pre-university education. According to the information of Elbasan Pedagogical secondary school Director, about 50% of the year 2000 graduates of Elbasan secondary pedagogical school started working in rural schools, while 40% continued their education at Elbasan University. In Gjirokastra Pedagogical High School, there is a department for “Minority Teachers” where teachers are prepared to teach minorities in their language in the minority schools.

There are no national standards or requirements for pre-service teacher training. Though prescribed by the Law of Higher Education (1999), the accreditation of study programmes was not yet functioning at the time of the OECD team’s visit. The goal is therefore to establish standards for teacher training on a national basis. This requires a system of external examinations and also procedures for monitoring and evaluating teacher training. In addition there are no study programmes for education management at the universities.

In-service teacher training

In-service teacher training has changed over the last 10 years, but it remains an ill-defined aspect of Albania's education system. Currently it is a responsibility of Education Directorates (*Drejtoria Arsimore*) MoES started a new programme in 1998 for in service training. This programme empowers EDs to offer in-service training at the district level, using school inspectors as trainers. The OECD team was informed at the Institute for Pedagogical Research (IPR) that the in-service training for high school teachers and principals is provided by the MoES through IPR consultancy, based on a needs assessment. The programmes are developed by IPR and sent to EDs at the beginning of the school year. In-service training is considered by IPR as very important for teachers in vocational and professional education. But the OECD team saw no evidence of any serious needs assessment for in-service training. A report prepared by the AEDP (Albania Education Development Program, funded by Soros), states that the effectiveness of this programme has not yet been proven, and there seems to be no systematic approach to issues of teaching quality, training needs, and content of training. Besides, the inspectors themselves do not have the appropriate training and experience to carry out their new responsibilities.

The Directorates define content and purpose of training. Teachers are required to participate once or twice a year, according to the subjects they teach. The MoES (IPR) provides consultants to the EDs, and are invited to deliver training.

In-service training within the school can be done on an individual or collective basis. Individual training may involve taking an approved upgrading course, studying professional and scientific literature, professional and scientific activities such as giving experimental lessons and professional lectures, publishing professional papers or acquiring a higher level of qualification. Collective in-service training is done within the professional teachers' work groups and teachers' councils in one or several schools in the area of a municipality or region, or within professional societies. The school principal and inspectors of local education authorities and the MoES monitor this type of in-service training.

In its discussions with Albanian counterparts, the OECD team found that the concept of in-service teacher training was often confused with the programme for teachers' attestation, which is organised by local education authorities. Serving teachers are tested for competence (teacher upgrading) in their subject every 5 years, until they have completed 20 years of teaching after which they no longer have to undergo tests. Teachers without the requisite qualifications (*i.e.*, without a pre-service teacher training diploma) are also tested, although attendance at these tests is certainly not 100%. There is no evidence that any one with the requisite qualifications has ever failed these tests; they are therefore more a seniority-related "rite of passage" than a serious appraisal of competence.

No systematic reform related in-service training for teachers (for example, in relation to changes in the curriculum, the assessment system, or classroom methodology) appears to be taking place. Professional development opportunities for school principals and inspectors are not provided. There are plans to start this kind of training in Tirana University; but, in general, university departments are not involved in in-service teacher training.

Foreign NGOs and foundations, such as the Albanian Education Development Project (AEDP) and *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ), also contribute to teacher training activities in co-operation with government institutions or Albanian NGOs. However, these projects are scattered, poorly linked and solely depend on donor preferences. At the moment there is no strategy for integrating those efforts into mainstream in-service training.

In-service training does not appear as a separate item in national or local budgets, so it is not possible to determine how much is being spent on it.

Teachers and teacher training in the Mid Term Strategy of MoES

The draft Midterm National Strategy of MoES identifies teachers as the most important element to ensure and improve the quality of Albania's education system. Decentralisation to distribute powers between central and local administration in a balanced way and to create community participation; privatisation to increase choice and competition; and evaluation to promote performance development and career planning are emphasised in the draft Strategy.

One important aim is to increase the number of qualified teachers. The MoES considers putting in place a quota planning policy to attract young people to teacher training programmes in higher education institutions; continuous in-service teacher training will be provided. Specialised training Centres at local and national levels will be established. A distance education project called "*Kualida*" is aimed at teachers from remote areas.²²

Early Childhood Development and Care*Importance of early childhood education*

An important starting point in respect of children's rights to and need for early education is found in the UN "Convention on the Rights of the Child" (CRC) (1989). The CRC regulates the children's rights and parents' obligations. Article 28 points out "The right to free education" and Article 29 "The objectives of education".

In Albanian pre-school education, certain curricular innovations have been made with the help of NGOs. The more successful include "Step by Step" which is a child centred methodology programme begun in 1994 in pre-school; in 1996 in grade 1, and in grade 4 in 1999. In 2000 it was offered in 7 districts.

The MoES has prepared a short-term strategy for the development of pre-school education, based on several considerations, such as:

- The role of the first years of education as the foundations for adulthood;
- The contribution early childhood education provides to developing skills and creating values like co-operation, solidarity, and respect for others opinions;
- The importance of quality institutions for pre-school children with a direct positive impact in the cultural, economic, and social life of the children, family, and society.

Facts and figures

The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) is responsible for pre-schools in Albania. They include children of ages 3 to 6. Children from 0 to 3 years old may attend nursery schools/day care centres which are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health. The nursery schools have never been considered

²² AEDP for several years has run a very successful and popular programme called "TV for Teachers", which concentrated on improving teachers' knowledge of teaching methods and innovative approaches to the teaching and learning of thinking skills. The programme was accompanied by excellent training materials developed with the help of the Open University in the UK.

part of the educational system. All teachers are, according to present data, female. They are trained in 3-year courses in pedagogical schools or universities.

The OECD review team learned that more private pre-schools are opening. Parents perceive these schools as offering better quality, and if they can afford it they prefer to send their children there. The emergence of private pre-schools also helps the state budget, which at present allocates a substantial portion of all education funds on non-compulsory sectors of the system (pre-school, post-compulsory upper secondary, and tertiary).²³

In 1991 60% of the children aged 3-6 attended kindergartens. By 2000, this had dropped to 36%. Before 1990 there were 130 000 3-6 year olds in kindergartens; the number in 2000 was down to 80 000 children. There were 70 nursery schools in 1990; now there are 40. Even though there has been great migration to Tirana from the rural areas and many parents would like their children in both nursery school and kindergarten, not enough places can be found today.

Governance and administration of the pre-school sector

The MoES makes all decisions about the pre-schools concerning budget, staff and curriculum and local municipalities still have very little power. They collect certain taxes but only for the central government. However, the Law on Local Government is due to be amended, and if these changes are implemented local municipalities could have more say about pre-schools within their jurisdiction.

The general impression is that devolution of powers to the local level will have a positive effect on education, but it was often said that such changes should come slowly. One person in the MoES said: "You should not sell your old shoes before you buy new ones".

Pre-schools are still known by a number, as under the communist regime (*e.g.* Kindergarten No. 42, etc). There is great demand for kindergartens from parents, but there are no figures on how many children cannot attend pre-schools due to lack of provision. Unemployment and poverty seem to be the overriding problems for parents in not being able to send their children to kindergarten, apart from the lack of places.

The state stipulates that each group of children should be no more than 25 but in what are considered good kindergartens there are often many more children in a group. In one of the pre-schools visited, as many as 50 children 3-4 years old were in one group; in another group of 5 to 6 year olds, they had 54 children. They had two staff for these children. According to national statistical data, the average Pupil:Teacher ratio at pre-school level is 20:1. That obviously was not the case in the five pre-schools visited by the OECD team. The national average probably reflects lower attendance figures in rural areas.

In each school, there is usually one large classroom with another room as a dormitory, as all children in pre-schools sleep for two hours every day. As the school yards mainly consist of mud, chickens and weeds there is nowhere for the children to play outside. Only one of the five schools visited had a good playground with equipment for play. That school is supported by UNICEF, and works according to the "Reggio Emilia" pedagogical method. "Step-by-Step" schools (supported by AEDP-Soros) also tend to have better furniture and equipment.

²³ Palomba and Vodopivec (*op.cit.*) gives the following ratio: if spending on basic 1-8 education is 100, then spending on pre-school is 85, upper secondary 144, and tertiary 596 per student. World Bank, 2000, p. 73.

In Albania there are 18 “Step by Step” kindergartens, set up by the Soros Foundation. The Foundation finances the equipment in the schools, while the state provides the rest of the funds. Parents pay 2 000 leks (15.9 EUR) for food per month. According to statistics, the number of kindergartens with food provision totalled 97 in the urban areas, and 0 in the rural areas in 2000. This is a drop from 665 in the urban areas and 351 in the rural areas in 1990.²⁴

Concerning the curriculum, the educational programme for kindergartens is prepared in the MoES and all kindergartens implement it. The “Step by Step” methodology was introduced in 1994. The Reggio Emilia method (from Italy) came later, but both these methods are now being developed and used. They both focus on children, and are action-oriented which is a totally new concept for most teachers.

Other private pre-schools have been set up by religious organisations, and these schools are very popular. In Elbasan, that parents register their children for such a pre-school as soon as they are born, so that they will be assured of a place when they are older.

Number of kindergartens and children

Table 8. **Pre-schools**

Year	Enrolment			Number of Teachers	
	Number of schools	TOTAL	Female	TOTAL	Female
1990	3 426	130 007	62 148	5 664	5 664
1991	3 174	108 889	51 784	5 440	5 440
1992	2 784	81 117	41 549	5 081	5 081
1993	2 656	80 395	41 154	4 578	4 578
1994	2 668	80 348	39 685	4 428	4 428
1995	2 669	84 026	41 589	4 413	4 413
1996
1997	2 408	80 240	41 006	4 116	4 116
1998	2 048	80 418	39 952	4 116	..
1999	2 330	81 734	40 950	4 092	..
2000	2 111	80 337	40 788	3 806	..

Source : MoES Directory of Statistics

²⁴ Source: mid-term Strategy, MoES 2000.

Issues of Equity and Access

Universal access to free basic education (primary and lower secondary, or on average the first 8 or 9 years of education) is a key element of human rights recognised in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. By the early 1980s this was largely achieved throughout the socialist bloc. In Albania, about 80% of the population was still illiterate after World War I; by 1955, with the introduction of rural schools and adult literacy classes, illiteracy among Albanians under 40 years old was said to have been nearly eradicated. By 1990, pre-school enrolments were about 60%; compulsory enrolment 100%; and post-compulsory secondary enrolment 80%. About 45% of the population between 35 and 45 had completed at least upper secondary education.²⁵

Recent studies, however, have found growing marginalisation of disadvantaged groups, in particular the poor, those living in rural areas or areas of high instability, criminality and unrest; migrants living in semi-squatter communities especially around Tirana; and others seen as “outsiders” in Albanian society. This fragmentation creates closely-knit sub-communities with strong in-group loyalties and rules, but limited trust and co-operation between groups. It is therefore difficult to speak of “community” or “society” values on which a national education reform strategy could be built.²⁶

The severe marginalisation of rural migrants in cities, as well as of Roma, need active and positive measures if the cycle of exclusion and self-exclusion is to be broken. Efforts are being made by NGOs, but the school system itself has yet to take responsibility for creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment. The “child-friendly school”, one of UNICEF’s main goals for education in the 21st century, seems a long way off.

Roma children

A 1994 estimate for the Council of Europe stated that there were then some 95 000 Roma in Albania.²⁷ Although the actual number can be (and frequently is) debated, there is no doubt that there are at least four distinct Roma “tribes” and communities of different types (urban/rural, assimilated/non-assimilated) in Albania. Nearly all these communities are settled (as distinct from travelling “gypsies”). Roma in Albania have been “so isolated that they are only dimly aware of their millions of Romani brethren in diaspora throughout the world. Still, the Roma of Tirana have more in common with those far-flung Romani than with their Albanian neighbours, among whom they have lived for nearly 600 years. They get along – but they remain apart.”²⁸

The OECD team saw few Roma children in pre-schools, and there was almost no information available on Roma participation. From what little anecdotal information could be gathered, it is clear that they seldom attend school and if they do, they were either pointed out to visitors or they were talked about by teachers as having been pupils in the past. Either way, they were treated as something of a curiosity. A real change in attitudes is needed in this area.

²⁵ Nora Dudwick and Helen Shahriari, *Education in Albania: Changing Attitudes and Expectations*. 2000. The World Bank, page 2.

²⁶ *Ibid*, page 8.

²⁷ J-P. Liegeois, *Roma, Gypsies, Travellers*. 1994. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

²⁸ Isabel Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and their Journey*. London: Vintage Press, 1995, page 22.

Children with special educational needs (SEN)

It was similarly difficult to gain any up-to-date information on children with special needs in Albania. It was however clear that children with disabilities have no status, and that some parents still hide their disabled children. A real change of attitude is therefore needed. No SEN children seem to be integrated in ordinary schools; those who attend any kind of education are in special schools. These are specialised in the care for blind or vision-impaired, deaf or hearing-impaired, and mentally impaired children.

According to the “1998 Annual Report” from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (published in 1999) there are 7 centres for mental and physical development in the country. They serve children aged 6 to 14, but up to the age of 18 some can stay on in these centres. Of these 7 centres, 5 are residential and the others are day-centres. The total capacity of all the residential centres is 250 beds but the demand for placement is far greater. The day centres can serve about 400 children more, but again this is quite insufficient in a country the size of Albania. Clearly a large number of children with special needs are hidden away at home and are not in any type of education at all. Moreover, despite legislation to the contrary, students with diagnosed disabilities are rarely offered opportunities to attend non-vocational upper secondary schooling or higher education. It is often assumed that children with SEN can expect no more than to finish basic education, with perhaps a little vocational training if they are lucky. This is often a matter of physical access and unsuitable facilities, but also a matter of social attitudes towards disabled persons. Under Hoxha’s regime, families with “defective” children were ostracised; the stigma of mental or physical handicap extended to the entire family as well as the handicapped child her/himself. Such social habits die hard, and it will be some time before SEN children are accepted as valued members of the educational community.

On the other hand, there is also special legislation which favours disabled students, orphans and those persecuted by communism. This legislation is applied in allocating places in institutions for disabled children and special schools, and (more rarely) in mainstream schools and universities.

In the pre-schools, no psychologists are employed at present. The first psychologists graduated in 2001, after five years of study and it planned that some should be employed in schools.

Diagnosis and placement are the responsibility of a medical/pedagogical commission in each local authority. Curricula for SEN are supposed to be adapted to the type and degree of disability, but the logic of such adaptations is not clear. For example, children in special schools for deaf and hearing impaired children, and mentally impaired children, are expected to complete the regular 4-year primary curriculum in 9 years, while the school for blind or vision-impaired children uses the regular 8-year basic school curriculum, with appropriate teaching methods and materials. The assumption seems to be that deaf children are less able to handle normal school programmes than blind children.

There is no discussion of integrating (mainstreaming) disabled children into regular classrooms. Partly this is because school buildings in Albania are generally in poor repair with few facilities even for healthy children; but the chief reason is strong social prejudice, and resistance from teachers and the parents of able-bodied children. Nevertheless, the Constitution states clearly that *all* citizens of Albania enjoy equal rights to be educated in all levels of education, regardless of their social or economic status *or their health*; and Albania is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which similarly emphasises equal rights to education for all children.

There is now a clear need to put this issue on Albania’s educational agenda.

Children with social problems and children at risk

Some institutions for children with social problems have been set up. Residential institutions for children have a “theoretical capacity” of 595 places. Foreign NGOs have started to work in this area to set up some smaller institutions for these children.²⁹ The concept of “children with problems” has recently changed. It used to mean orphans and children born out of wedlock. Although it was pointed out to the team that the number of children born out of wedlock has increased in the last 10 years, it is now recognised that even children who live in families with both their parents can also have problems. These are categorised as: poverty; illnesses (especially psychological); family break-up; emigration, especially where parents have left for an unknown destination. A Central Commission has been set up to co-ordinate the movement of persons in institutions of social protection.

There is an increase in the number of children who are abandoned or left in such institutions, often because their parents or young mothers believe they will be better looked after there. Because the number of institutions and places are so limited, it is also difficult to put children in the same age group in the same institution, and therefore there are groups of children of mixed ages, which is not beneficial for the children’s development.

It is also obvious to the observer that, especially in cities, a number of children and school-age youngsters live in the streets, apparently without parental care or control. In Albania after the 1997 crisis, when hundreds of thousands of weapons were looted from arms stores, such children are at serious risk of becoming involved in serious criminal activity, including armed robbery, drug trafficking and prostitution. Especially in the south and near borders with neighbouring countries, boys who have dropped out of school see contraband smuggling as a an easy way to make money. Drug use is also rising. Parents often express fears for their children’s safety, even in schools as well as on the streets.³⁰

Apart from the AEDP (Soros Foundation) and UNICEF, according to the 1998 Report by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, a considerable number of other international donors are active in institutions for children with social problems. Among these can be found the Danish Red Barnet (Save the Children) and “Mother Theresa” Mission, and bilateral projects *e.g.* with Swiss, Austrian, and British funding.

The national NGOs are mainly focused in Tirana, with networks spread also in big cities. Their main purpose is to help in offering better possibilities for children, especially less empowered sectors of the society, such as children with disabilities, homeless children, Roma children, other minorities. These organisations also work for children’s rights. The organisations and other individuals are organised in Albanian Children’s Alliance, which is an open forum for all children of Albania. The steering Committee is selected by the General Assembly, which gathers once a year.

When the Soros Foundation’s “Step by Step” method was introduced as a pilot scheme, a family co-ordinator was added to support the teachers’ work and relations with the community. In the schools using the “Reggio Emilia” method a teacher for the atelier was added to the teaching staff to document what the children tell the teacher about the work they are doing in the atelier, where four children always work together. In Reggio Emilia classes there can be 35 children and two teachers.

Quite clearly, the Soros Foundation with its “Step by Step” method has had the strongest impact on pre-school education. They are active not only in pre-schools but also in primary schools. An evaluation is being done by the Soros Foundation and the MoES on the impact on pre-schools. It was stated that

²⁹ The 1998 Annual Report, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

³⁰ Dudwick and Shahriari, *op.cit.*, pp. 12-13.

foreign expertise is needed for evaluating the system but there is no line in the budget for this. A similar monitoring of management should also be done on the “Step by Step” method, and the project should include all of Albania. Foreign experts are needed to introduce “Step by Step” in grades 5-8.

The “Reggio Emilia” method has not been evaluated and there is as yet no follow-up in primary education.

Issues and Barriers in Early Childhood Development and Care

Governance and finance. Some municipalities are said to “re-direct” funds allocated by the central government for education to other purposes. At present, the MoES has no mechanism to ensure that local governments fulfil their obligations.

Facilities. School rehabilitation has been financed by international donors, but other issues have lagged behind such as teacher training and curricula. This applies to pre-schools as well as to primary and secondary schools. The State pre-schools are badly in need of repair, and need teaching and learning materials. Many lack basic facilities such as electricity, running water and functioning toilets. (Even in schools that do have running water, it can be turned off for several days at a time, and power cuts are routine.) There is also a lack of proper heating in the winter. Heating stoves have, in many cases, been looted or vandalised in recent crises, and there is no money to replace them. Fuel is also difficult to obtain, and expensive.

Textbooks in the “Step by Step” pre-schools the children are encouraged to make textbooks themselves. Otherwise the schools use books from the official State textbook publishing house. The manuals for teachers in kindergartens also come from the State publishing house. In some of the schools visited by the team there were no books apart from those in English and German which had been given by foreign donors. All children buy the set of textbooks in the school in the beginning of September when they enrol for next school year. There are a number of quality books especially for children ages 5-upwards, for younger ones there are fewer books.

There is an almost total lack of teaching materials and toys in pre-schools. Equipment has mainly been provided by foreign donors. The state funds available are insignificant compared to the needs. The calculated financial needs for infrastructure and equipment for pre-schools are huge. The MoES has calculated that the total needs for the year 2000 would be USD 1 172 000 (EUR 1 285 440). The state budget covers USD 380 000 (EUR 416 781), which leaves a deficit of USD 792 000 (EUR 868 659). Initiatives for involving private enterprise should be encouraged.

Process issues: curriculum, teaching, overcrowding. The quality of education is suffering due to poor teacher training and low teachers’ salaries. Many teachers are forced to leave the profession because of low pay. Curricula are being updated, in some cases with the help of international donors, but there is often no co-ordination of such projects and implementation is uneven especially when curriculum changes are not accompanied by appropriate teacher training and materials (books in particular).

The pre-school state curriculum is in the form of a manual prepared by MoES in 1993 and it is the actual curriculum in use. The quality of this manual is not up to acceptable standards. The MoES is aware of this problem and it has given space for new methodologies in pre-school education recognising them officially and being the only level of education with a decentralised programme. Step by Step and Reggio Emilia methodologies have this status. These two models are the basis for the compilation of the national pre-school standards, which are being finalised. There is a lack of resource books for teachers, even though many projects have published high quality ones.

There is a lack of additional extra and cross-curricular materials. The literature published by the State institutions is relatively poor. Many NGOs have published updated literature for teachers and students, which is in a small number mainly for pilot schools and teachers involved in projects and it doesn't satisfy the needs of the market.

In the "Step by Step" pre-schools the teachers received 80 hours per year in-service training. These teachers are trained to become trainers themselves. UNICEF offers seminars for teachers as in-service training three days per year for the five schools in Tirana and two schools in other cities that use the "Reggio Emilia" method. One teacher in a newly opened UNICEF supported "Reggio Emilia" school had spent three months in Italy learning about the method.

Overcrowding is a problem in pre-schools. It is not possible to teach 54 young children in a single classroom, in particular where there is poor or no equipment and little room for children to move and play. Teachers with poor training do not know how to teach children in such circumstances. Someone expressed the children's situation as "benign neglect". After the 1997 upheaval people migrated from the rural areas to the urban in large numbers which has put a tremendous strain on the entire education system, including the pre-schools. In the rural areas there are fewer children in the schools. Parents in rural areas often cannot afford to send their children to pre-school, and in the new urban shanty towns around Tirana the situation is no better.

Gender and work conditions All pre-school teachers in Albania are women and there is no association for pre-school teachers.

Vocational Education and Training

Governance

Initial vocational education and continuing vocational training fall under the purview of the MoES, in charge of the entire education cycle including higher education and secondary VET. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) is responsible for adult and continuing training.

Secondary education is divided into general and vocational education. General education programmes last 4 years, and vocational study programmes from 3 to 5 years. The total number of students at secondary level (in 2000) was 102 971 of which 14 501 were VET students.

Prior to 1990, vocational schools provided agricultural and technical industrial training, and 70% of the cohort attended such establishments. At present, VET does not play an important role in the context of secondary education in Albania and there are only 41 VET schools, of which 30 are 3-year vocational schools and 13 are 5-year technical schools. Enrolment has dropped to 15% of the total number of students in secondary education. A huge number of children (around 50%) do not participate in post-compulsory education and training and a large number of students leave education and training prematurely.

Table 9 **Enrolment in education/training (14-25 years old) 1999-00**

Years	General Education			Basic Vocational		
	Males	Females	TOTAL	Males	Females	TOTAL
14	8 032	8 777	16 809	1 903	852	2 755
15	9 723	10 625	20 348	2 303	1 032	3 335
16	8 454	9 239	17 693	2 003	897	2 900
17	7 609	8 315	15 924	1 803	807	2 610
18	2 959	3 233	6 192	701	313	1 014
19	1 268	1 386	2 654	300	134	434
20	760	832	1 592	180	80	260
21	930	1 016	1 946	220	98	318
22	803	878	1 681	190	85	275
23	878	970	1 848	210	94	304
24	423	462	885	100	45	145
25	435	463	898	103	48	151
TOTAL 14-25	42 274	46 196	88 470	10 016	4 485	14 501

Source : Francesco Panzica, Albania Labour market and VET Sector Assessment. ETF: 2000, p. 44.

Albania does not thus far have a specific strategy for VET, although at the time of the team's visit there was a draft to be discussed with stakeholders before it was published. The Albanian government has set up a working group aimed at preparing a strategy paper on education that will include also the VET sector. The paper should be ready in July 2002.

MoES has been provided with substantial donor support and pilot schools³¹ have been established in various parts of the country to test and implement modern vocational education systems of developed countries in the realities of the Albanian setting. There are currently a total of 41 VET schools some of which are well supplied, able to hire qualified teachers, and able to implement new curricula. The pilot schools and Albanian institutions, in particular the Institute for Pedagogical Research (IPR) have worked to upgrade teacher qualifications and have provided management training, consultancy on school management, the introduction of new curricula, and the preparation of teaching materials. These schools have been partially reconstructed with donor assistance. Many if not most technical and vocational schools were in need of repairs after the civil disturbances in March 1997, when much of the equipment and furniture was stolen or vandalised.

There are 5 specialised language schools in Albania, with 2 366 students for English, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish. There are also 1 151 students in 8 art schools which train students in music and fine arts. In addition, two sports schools train athletes to compete both nationally and internationally. Teachers are trained at 4 pedagogical high (upper secondary) schools in 4 cities; graduates are qualified to teach in basic education, and many go to rural areas. Private schools are allowed in Albania and even encouraged because of overcrowding in the cities, but there is no significant private VET sector at present because VET schools tend to be expensive and "resource-hungry". Some private institutions offer training courses in languages and information technology (computer) skills, but these are all in the larger cities and not in the rural areas.

³¹ See Francesco Panzica, *Albania labour Market and VET Sector Assessment*, ETF, November 2000, p. 45. Most active have been the World Bank, the European Union, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNDP and a number of European bilateral donors and NGOs.

National VET Council

A proposal to establish a tripartite National VET Council was being discussed in Parliament at the time of the OECD team's visit. Due to complexity of the law and the new elections in June 2001 the regulation was only approved in March 2002. The Council will be a body convened to provide a tripartite forum to advise the Government on policy, strategy, and resource allocation. It would promote VET across the economic and social spectrum and ensure that the needs of the social partners are taken into account. Duplication and fragmentation of current national and international agencies, donors and the public sector would be reviewed and monitored through the Council. The World Bank may also provide funding to establish the Council.

Curriculum development, standards and assessment in VET

As for general education and secondary VET, the MoES is responsible for curricula design, which is carried out by the Institute for Pedagogical Research (IPR). Since 1998, there are 5 and 3-year technical and vocational programmes; the 5-year technical education programme leads to the Maturita examination set by the MoES (through the IPR), and gives access to higher education for successful candidates. Four-year programmes have been phased out as of 1998.

Concerning VET centres for adults, the competence is with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, also with regard to curriculum development. In reality, however, MoLSA does not take a strong role in this, so that the trainers themselves are directly responsible for curriculum design and delivery. There are 9 training centres offering short-term vocational courses for different categories of adults, a total of about 70 instructors are teaching in such training centres. The real local needs of the market are poorly represented. There is no recognised methodology for curriculum development and there is a lack clear approval procedures and infrastructure for delivery. In the private and NGO sector, the curriculum situation is characterised by confusion. Without a national qualification framework, training centres operate in complete freedom.

There is a lack of continuity between initial VET and further/adult training, and the concept of "lifelong learning" is totally unknown in the curriculum environment. Vocational/professional curricula at higher education level give more priority to academic knowledge than to the practical and technical skills needed in the labour market. Theory still outweighs practical training by 80% to 20%, which is a serious constraint on the acquisition of marketable skills. Youth unemployment in Albania is high, and many young people (even with VET qualifications) are unable to find employment.

EC-Phare assistance to VET Reform in Albania

The EC-Phare Project met its objective by improving the capacity of the VET system to deliver critically needed skills development to a small group of recipients. However, initiated reforms may not be sustainable without significant additional finance and technical assistance. Pilot projects were supposed to prepare for a larger Phare intervention in the VET sector; this, however, did not materialise as expected due to recent political developments in the Balkans.

The team who provided technical assistance to the programme was obliged to spend considerable time and energy on unnecessary administrative and logistical problems, such as customs clearance of equipment, which detracted from the overall success of the project.

Course length in each pilot school exceeded the duration of the project and funds for the provision of equipment were insufficient to cover the needs of the courses being developed.

Guidance and counselling, as foreseen in the programme, has not been systematically addressed by the training providers. Staff of each of the pilot locations were reluctant and/or unable to establish a linkage with the National Strategy on Education or with the employers in their immediate vicinity.

The civil unrest in the spring of 1997 caused major disruption to the timing of the EC-Phare Project's activities. However, this problem was overcome by the positive and flexible attitude of all contributing parties involved in the project. Now a new programme has been launched within CARDS 2002-2004 (a regional EU programme) which will include both VET and TEMPUS projects.

State Training Centres are located in 6 cities (Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan, Vlorë, Korça and Shkodra); they have trained a total of about 27 000 trainees in 16 specialities including automobile repair, electronic and TV repair, plumbing etc.). There are also a number of private training centres, especially for occupations such as foreign languages, computers, and fashion design/tailoring. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have supported courses on business administration, human resource management, computer networks, industrial management etc. In 1999, a total of 634 trainees were in public training institutions, most of them enrolled in secretarial courses (more than 50%) with the remaining trainees taking courses in hairdressing, fashion design/tailoring, and electric and car repair.

Issues and barriers in vocational education

Lack of long term integrated economic development and/or employment policy or strategy at State level; this affects the VET system which does not have sufficient guidelines from the demand side to direct its development. Young people are confronted with the uncertainties of the labour market and need to be provided with transferable skills and a broad knowledge which will permit their flexibility.

Absence of structured involvement of social partners representing the demand side in developing employment policies. Provision of management training in Albania is inadequate to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by the adaptation of existing and developing companies to technological change and the international market.

Responsibility for VET centres for adults, including curricula, is with the MoLSA. There is no recognised methodology for curriculum development and there is no centralised infrastructure in the Ministry so individual trainers are directly responsible for curriculum design and delivery. Without a national qualification frame, training centres operate in complete freedom.

There are many unemployed qualified teachers for the VET sector, and a huge number of teachers in the system, not fulfilling the requirements for teaching according to the needs of change and reform. As there is no possibility to dismiss them, there is an urgent requirement for an action plan, including in-service training for part of them and social measures for those who cannot be reconverted through appropriate training to the teaching staff.

Higher Education

In 1999/2000, a total of 39 848 students were enrolled in tertiary education of various kinds (5% of the total number of students in the education system in Albania). Of these, 60% were female. Higher education is offered in 4, 5 and 6-year courses in universities (ISCED 5A) and in 3.5 year courses in non-university tertiary institutions (ISCED 5B). Doctoral studies take on average 3.5 years (ISCED 6).

There are (2000) 8 accredited universities and 3 non-university higher education institutions and a lack of vocationally oriented non-university higher education institutions. Just over half the students are

full-time. The number of students nearly doubled between 1990 and 2000 (from 21 000 to 40 000), but almost all the growth is in the number of students studying part-time (4 000 to 18 000). There are no private tertiary institutions in Albania. There is an awareness that students will be exposed to the market and that its challenges and that reforms are necessary.

Issues and barriers to higher education

The most recent education law was passed in 1999, but changes are under preparation and a Bologna Process oriented reform of higher education is planned for 2003. The 1999 law reflects a number of improvements according to the identified priorities in a strategy paper elaborated with the Council of Europe (1996-98). Following this, legal changes will be necessary in the fields of quality assessment, election of governance bodies, financial and institutional autonomy and improvement of admission procedures.

The structure of the HE system remains very centralised and university autonomy is very limited, especially with regard to financing issues, although this was foreseen in the 1999 law. The university is free to choose its staff, but the number is limited by the Ministry. The State is the only source of funding, there are no private institutions funding HE although possibilities were given by the law. The existing tuition fees do not significantly contribute to funding.

The setting up of a National Accreditation Council and a quality assurance system is foreseen by the 1999 law, but not yet fully realised. The Accreditation Agency exists (through an EC-TEMPUS project) but has so far achieved limited results. The aims of the National Council are supposed to be to examine the results of the Agency, the evaluation of the quality of the universities and to report to the Council of Ministers.

Higher education has attracted little support from the donor community over the last 10 years, particularly when compared to basic and secondary education. The corroding impact of that fact on the quality of teaching, research and service is very much in evidence. Infrastructure (laboratories, libraries etc.) are in a poor state, and as a consequence, the conditions for students and young professors are hardly motivating. Experience of university staff and academic knowledge is not used to a wider extent on large scale infrastructure projects currently being carried out in other sectors of the economy.

The economic development of Albania is rather weak, nevertheless slowly increasing. The future labour market, foreign investment and the democratic reform process of society will create more and more need for highly qualified (academic and vocational) professionals. The relationship between universities and civil society as well as with enterprises is not very developed. These questions do not seem to have priority for the government, but have a negative impact on the general development of the country.

Recommendations by Section

Governance and Administration

Develop basic structures. The post-1997 pessimism is receding and progress can be observed, for example in the legal framework that is emerging and giving shape to governance structures in education and training. A mid-term financial framework for the years 2001-2003 has been drafted. The budget now reflects both investment and operating costs. Education is seen as a major instrument of reform in the reduction of poverty and the decentralisation of power. Proposals suggest raising the percentage of GDP allocated to education and also raising the very low salaries of teachers by 10-20 per cent. There is

evidence that the reconstruction of school buildings, which has been a high priority since 1997, is paying off in terms of an improved physical environment for learning and teaching. In higher education, institutional autonomy has been confirmed, governance structures put in place and curricular reform introduced.

Develop and strengthen the mission of the MoES and its departments. Even if the State treasury system and the delivery of money under the supervision of MoF cannot yet be changed, more responsibility of funding for education should be given to the MoES. Inside the Ministry, the line departments should be given full responsibility for the planning of and the decisions about the allocation of money. School by school allocation of the budget should not in the longer run be decided by MoES, but the review team considers that (for the time being) this may remain necessary due to the lack of a competent intermediate body.

Policy and standards, the Ministry of Education and Science should concentrate on strategic issues and on the steering of the education system by setting policy and standards. The leadership position of the MoES should be strengthened in the governance of education. A framework budgeting procedure is needed to make it possible for the Ministry of Finance to decentralise planning and decision making on funding to the line ministries.

Clarify the roles and relationships of the various “actors” in education governance. Besides the MoES, there are four levels of actors in the governance of education: the Institute for Pedagogical Research of Albania, Regional Departments of the MoES, municipalities and School Management Boards. In higher education the actors are universities and faculties. Their respective missions and roles should be reformulated, concentrating on the type of expertise expected from them and on the most important and urgent issues.

The expert organisation at the central level should be under the supervision of the MoES and focus on the quality of education and training by developing a coherent curriculum framework, subject curricula and standards for learning outcomes, and by disseminating good practice, results and materials. It should also support the development of the contents and quality of textbooks.

The Regional Departments of the MoES should focus on reporting and giving information for the MoES on the state, development and needs of the schools in their districts. They should also assist the municipalities and the School Management Boards in solving problems. In addition, the Departments should, in co-operation with the central expert organisation, disseminate the changes in the national curriculum framework, the subject curricula, and learning standards.

The municipalities and communes should focus on guaranteeing the safety and the maintenance of the schools and the welfare services for students, and on mobilising additional resources for schools.

The School Management Boards should be given more power, for instance the appointment of principals and teachers, use of funds, and planning of the school year.

A new and firm formulation of missions and responsibilities, combined with the strengthening of the power of the School Management Board, would create a solid basis for decentralisation of governance in education both during and after the implementation of the mid-term strategy.

Create a Task Force for the National Strategy of Education. Consensus and commitment on the strategy of education in Albania are needed, and can be reached by bottom-up discussions and initiatives on the issue. For the implementation of the strategy, an action plan must be developed. Therefore, a Task Force for the implementation and follow-up of the Strategy should be established by the Minister of Education and Science. The mandate of this new strategy unit of MoES should, in close co-operation with

the line departments and the other levels of education governance, give first priority to developing the infrastructure of education, crucial issues like the school network, rehabilitation of school buildings, reformulation of the structures of education and training, retraining of principals and teachers according to the strategy, developing the quality of the production of text books.

Improve co-ordination of reform projects. The central government's efforts to co-ordinate its priorities and projects with those of the donor community are laudable. Joint projects between it and the Albanian Education Development Programme (AEDP-Open Society Institute,) are exemplary cases in point. The establishment in 1999 of the Ministry of Education's Office of Monitoring and Evaluation and its co-operation with the Donor Board (23 main donors have been identified) are also promising in terms of reducing overlays between projects. So are the guidelines and procedures for data collection which it has developed. These technical functions, moreover, could usefully be joined by a much-needed strategic function – namely, the carrying out of horizontal as well as vertical evaluations in which the input, output and impact of projects are assessed. Such assessments could then be used to inform the transfer of the findings of successful innovative projects into more system-wide application.

A strategic function should be added to the Ministry of Education's Office of Monitoring and Evaluation by the introduction of horizontal assessments (as opposed to the vertical assessment of individual projects) leading to the more system-wide application of successful, innovative projects. This new function would give added value for the overall steering conducted by the Ministry and assisted by the strategy unit recommended above.

Develop criteria for and transparency of funding. The present methods and delivery of funding are highly centralised. In addition, the money flows to the schools from at least three different sources (MoF, MoES, municipality) supplemented by the funding provided by parents and other private sources. Closely connected with the recommendations made above, the models of funding should be altered so that there would be only one flow of money for the school from the central level. The responsibility for funding schools should be strictly defined and given to the State and the local authorities so, that there is no doubt as to which body and who is responsible for funding a given expenditure. A formula based funding model should be developed for the MoES to give an objective and administratively helpful method for funding different kinds of schools in different regions of the country. Also, a new formula based funding model for the subsidies for the municipalities should be developed by MoF. Alternatively, the present grant for municipalities delivered by the MoF could be altered into a system whereby earmarked money for schools is included in the formula based funding delivered by the MoES.

Structure an outcome-oriented information and evaluation system. Measures to raise quality, efficiency and accountability of the education system and the schools should be launched. A declared goal of the Draft Strategy on Education is to raise educational standards to the level required for eventual integration into the European Union and world system of education. A good start is the agreement whereby the Open Society and the MoES initially helped finance the national costs of participation of Albania in the OECD/PISA (the Programme for International Student assessment) project. Although additional funding will be necessary if Albania is to remain in PISA³² for a second round. In addition, internationally comparable standards of achievement must be introduced and applied throughout the school system on a systematic basis, with learning outcomes used for evidence-based priority setting in the allocation of scarce resources.

The MoES should introduce, as a matter of urgency, internationally comparable measures of learning quality, efficiency and accountability at all levels of the school system. Professionals, administrators and teachers should be trained to apply them on a regular, systematic and transparent basis,

32 The international costs of the PISA project are covered by a grant from Finland.

with results being made readily available to interested stakeholders. The education management information system should gradually be developed to contain performance indicators of schools.

Build human and institutional capacity at the tertiary (higher education) level. The governance and management of higher education were addressed legislatively in 1995 and again in 1999 University autonomy was confirmed and elected governing structures have recently been put in place. Curricular reforms have been carried out. What is now needed is the introduction of financial management systems, and capacity building in this area for senior university administrators and their staff.

A capacity-building programme should be introduced to back up to the introduction of the Strategy steps. Separately, a similar programme should be developed for senior university administrators and staff in the area of financial management systems and their operation. These programmes could be provided by either the State or international donors or a combination of both, but in either case, supported by international experts.

Review financial support for higher education. Higher education has attracted little if any support from the donor community over the last 10 years, particularly when compared to basic and secondary education. However, World Bank figures³³ show that private returns for investment in higher education are only about 2.5% (compared with 13-16% for basic education), while social returns are only 1% (compared with 11% for basic education). Therefore, in Albania's current circumstances, state financing should concentrate on compulsory (grades 1-8) education, while other options (*e.g.*, means tested tuition fees) could be considered for tertiary education.

At the same time, Albania needs its higher education sector in order to secure the country's economic and social development. Lack of funding has had a corrosive effect on the quality of teaching, research and service. Laboratories are in a poor state of repair, modern scientific equipment is conspicuously absent, and IT networks and access to electronic libraries are weak. These weaknesses, coupled with the brain drain of young professors (about 40% have been lost to the University of Tirana over the last decade) have cast serious doubt over the timely replacement of senior academics. It is no exaggeration to say that the critically important contribution of higher education to the nation's economic development and prosperity is being needlessly jeopardised.

On a more pressing and practical note, it is difficult to understand why more use is not made of university staff on the large-scale infrastructure projects (highways, ports, etc.) currently being carried out. Several experienced observers and government officials confirmed this anomaly but could offer little in the way of explanation.

National capacity building and a more equal regional development of the country need the scientific knowledge and practical skills available among university staff. Therefore, the National Strategy should not neglect a solid development of the higher education sector. In addition, government and donor projects of all types (but especially those in public works) should routinely make use of the skill, competence and experience of the staff of Albania's scientific institutes.

Curriculum.

Simple and transparent structures and processes need to be created at all levels of politics and public administration in order to enable every user of the system to contribute input and control the processes. The participation of the local actors – parents, teachers, pupils and representatives of the local

³³ G. Palomba and M. Vodopivec, *op.cit*, page 14.

public administration – should guarantee the possibility to co-determine agreements and processes that affect them in their own areas. (For example, setting up the selection criteria in the case of insufficient places in kindergartens, schools and universities). Comprehensive information in readable form is a necessary precondition for building trust.

In order to prevent the recurrence of past experiences that have yet to be worked though or taboos that have yet to be removed from becoming an unbreakable barrier in the present level of communication, an attempt should be made to confront and work through the themes of continuity and disruptions in the transition from the old to the new political system on a scientific, systematic and public basis (by broad public debate). Civic education projects should be provided for all the levels of the (educational) system in terms of life long learning and adult education.

The Midterm Draft National Strategy for Education is a good beginning as a plan for the future; however, since it was written by only a few people, the document should be made available to teachers, parents and administrators and their input should be included in the final document. For further projects it is recommended to involve all possible partners in terms of horizontal and vertical co-operation. Then an action plan to accomplish prioritised goals can be put in place as quickly as possible. The ultimate goal, as stated, is more effective education for all by increasing the efficiency of the system, which can only be accomplished with concerted effort.

Decentralisation is a goal of the Draft Strategy, but in order to make it effective, training in management and leadership skills should be given to those with new responsibilities and relationships. For example, the local government will now be working more closely with the Education Directorate which works directly with school principals. Each needs to clearly understand their roles in the system. The inspectorate will report to the Ministry; again the roles need clear definition and elimination of overlapping duties. People in leadership roles of any kind need training, especially coming out of an extremely authoritarian society.

Involve teachers successfully in co-operation at the local level and contribute to professional development. An increase of salary should be provided that would require teachers to spend additional time each week in the school (two afternoons) for planning work, team preparation, advisory discussions with colleagues, parents and pupils, for in-service training, and for curriculum development adapted to the local needs of the school.

Establish “quality circles” for internal feedback on the performance of local administration and of instruction, to benefit curriculum development and better quality. (Teachers quality is also stressed in the Draft Strategy paper). In these circles all relevant actors at all levels of the educational system should be involved. This could also contribute to normalising the educational system and to raising internal efficiency.

There is little communication between the Institute for Pedagogical Research (IPR) and the universities which prepare teachers. Better communication needs to be established between the two. The universities also need to work with the MoES to co-ordinate training for an effective preparation for the labour market.

Based on work in the pilot schools, curriculum reform in vocational training should lead to national standards that are worked out in close co-operation with all partners involved. In order to implement these ideas, autonomy and responsibility in all schools (not only vocational ones) need to be increased.

A part of teachers' in-service training should be shifted to local centres and offered to single schools. To be able to focus more on local needs, there should be more flexibility in realising in-service training. (See also recommendation on teacher salary and presence in school.)

The IPR has been given the responsibility for curriculum development as well as other duties such as teacher training, writing the Draft Strategy, and textbooks. It needs more technical support as well as contact with similar organisations in other countries, to determine exactly what role it should play. They need more direction and monetary support from the government in order to speed the pace of curricular reform. Improved communication between the universities and the Institute, with clear definition of responsibilities of each, is necessary to avoid overlapping, particularly in teacher training – which is an essential part of curricular reform. The system today is focused on inputs rather than outputs; the majority of teachers must teach the text page by page rather than the subject as a whole. Curricular reform would establish accountability at each level, but freedom of choice in methods and materials are also needed.

Internet servers should be established outside Tirana. To permit, students and teachers learn the latest advances in any field; at present, students are obliged to use Internet cafés rather than school computers. Communication advances are important in modern education. Both teachers and students need computer skills.

Assessment of Learning Outcomes

In response to educational concerns about the influence of external exams on the curriculum, assessment and curriculum specialists in various subjects should work together in Subject Working Groups to ensure that all important content and skills/competencies set out in curriculum objectives are also covered in explicit assessment objectives. These assessment objectives should be contained in subject specific syllabuses which are, in effect, “contracts” whereby the examining body says clearly what the student will be expected to know, understand, and be able to do in that subject, so that teachers in turn know clearly which content and competencies they should work on with their pupils. As long as the assessment objectives include the important objectives of the curriculum, teaching and learning will in fact be better-focused and less dependent on a particular teacher's preferences.

Political and public reaction to change is more difficult to overcome, certainly at first. Pass rates of the present Maturita examination are high, and there are re-sit opportunities for failing students. If external exams are to be more rigorous, and if classroom teachers have less control over the giving of marks and grades to their own students, it is likely that failure rates will rise. Two actions can be taken in response. One is to make sure that everyone knows what to expect (through a positive, open information campaign); and another is to ensure that failing students are offered chances for remediation and re-examination.

The second Government of Albania/World Bank Project has a substantial assessment and examinations component with a great deal of foreign technical assistance built in. It will be essential to use this assistance intensively to build capacity at the Centre for Evaluation, Assessment and Examinations (CEAE), but also to introduce an evaluation culture³⁴ into the Education Directorates, (EDs) the schools

³⁴ “Evaluation” differs from “inspection” in that it seeks to look at system, school and learner *outcomes* in relation to national standards. “Inspection” usually looks at inputs (buildings, materials, textbooks, number of teachers) and processes (class sizes, time-tables, teaching methods, student attendance). Albania has a system of inspection (delivered through the EDs. There are also “formators” in each district who serve as subject advisers and in-service trainers. What is needed is an *evaluation* function to complement the present inspection/formator approach.

and the classrooms so that, along with decentralisation, the accountability for delivering high-quality education can be backed up with reliable evidence of student learning.

It is of the utmost importance that Albania continues to participate in international studies of learning achievement. Albania did not take part in the 1999 grade 8 international study of achievement in mathematics and science (TIMSS-R), although efforts were made to train key staff and find the necessary funding. However, Albania will, in 2002, complete participation in OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA measures how well young adults at age 15 – therefore near the end of compulsory schooling – are prepared to meet the challenges of today's "knowledge society". The assessments are focussed on students' abilities *to use* their knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges, rather than on the extent to which they have mastered a specific school curriculum. The first PISA 2000 assessments were carried out in 32 countries; another 13, including Albania, will complete in 2002. The tests relate to reading literacy, mathematical literacy and science literacy, and will be extremely helpful to policy makers and schools in Albania by offering a worldwide comparison with student outcomes in other countries. The PISA surveys will be repeated every 3 years to monitor trends over time, but Albania's continued participation and will require funding.

Teachers and Teacher Training

Low status, low salaries, emigration, unqualified teachers, private tutoring, shortage of teachers, teachers with second or third jobs, teachers on the waiting list . . . Even the terminology used indicates how difficult the situation is. However, during the last few years the Government in co-operation with some NGOs and International Organisations has gradually introduced some changes. Those in charge of teachers and teacher training are well aware of the challenges, and are trying hard to find solutions. The following suggestions are intended to support those efforts.

Hiring and firing. Criteria and minimal requirements should be developed, to be used in the hiring, transfer and dismissal of professional staff. To this end, a national working team might be formed, and expertise can be obtained from an international organisation or an NGO.

Staffing of education positions should be professionalised and de-politicised by developing and publishing hiring criteria based on skills and knowledge. Dismissals should be based on clear evidence of incompetence or wrongdoing.

Supply of qualified teachers. The number of qualified teachers should be increased, and efforts should be made to keep qualified teachers in the profession. Mandatory work assignments of qualified teachers to rural schools ended with transition: as a result, rural areas have a much smaller percentage of teachers with higher education than urban areas. As an incentive to work in rural areas, qualified teachers can earn a bonus of up to 25%. Other incentives could be considered as well.

Good-quality pre-service training of teachers is always cost-effective, and a better way to ensure a qualified teacher cadre than to try and "pick up the pieces" later through in-service training. Close school-university co-operation should help by exchanging information, experience and even staff. The Government might also encourage co-operation with international institutions and with partner countries. Training of trainers should also be considered, through project activities within Europe.

To attract bright promising young high school graduates to teacher training departments in universities, scholarship grants are already available for students of mathematics and physics at Tirana University. This scheme should be expanded; in addition, incentives (such as job guarantees) should be established for young qualified teachers to work in rural areas or places where the needs are great.

Continuous in-service training. Emigration, internal teacher migration, and teachers leaving the profession because of low pay and poor conditions, have created a system where there is an over-supply of teachers in some areas, and a lack of teachers in others. In particular the rural and more difficult areas of Albania are poorly provided.

Training for unqualified teachers should be given due importance. Basic training course programmes should be developed by the IPR or a university department, to be offered to unqualified teachers in rural areas, preferably in summer. Classroom management, use of active teaching/learning approaches, and related techniques, community relations, and subject teaching methodology could be included. A flexible, perhaps modular programme would be best, based on the needs of the teachers.

At present there is no reliable system of in service training. The education sector has to establish mechanisms that can be used to help teachers integrate the new curricula, teaching materials, and teaching methodologies into their classroom practice. Most of all, provision of in-service training should be *demand-driven* – *i.e.*, based on the real needs of teachers – rather than *supply-driven*, which means that teachers are merely given a chance to choose from whatever courses or seminars might be on offer. A great deal of time and money is wasted on in-service training that is not related to what teachers *themselves* say they need. School based in-service, whereby the whole school (including the director) participates in a training programme carried out in the school itself, has proved effective in other countries and should be far more widely used in Albania.

School Boards. School directors should have increased powers of decision making and financial authority. School Boards made up of parents, teachers, ED representatives and where appropriate one or two senior students, could work with the director on the development of school policy and the use of resources, in particular where schools are given greater autonomy and directors have greater powers over the way their schools are run and financed.

Early Childhood Development and Care

Set priorities. When making recommendations for the education system in Albania, it is important to remember a comment made by a member of Parliament interviewed by the OECD review team: “There is a big gap between the Albanian reality and Western thinking”. His list of priorities for changing Albanian society was as follows:

1. Reinstate public order,
2. Fight corruption and organised crime,
3. Improve education; and
4. Reduce poverty.

Meet basic needs. The schools desperately need funds to make basic improvements, as there is an almost complete lack of the most essential ingredients for educational quality. Most school buildings do not have a separate dining room or activity room for all the children; few functioning sanitary units; unsafe and inappropriate school yards or playgrounds; unreliable heating systems, and few materials for teaching and learning. There is not enough in-door space for the children to play. It was suggested that disused buildings could be renovated and used for kindergartens.

Co-operation and co-ordination. Extend the joint projects of the MoES together with UNICEF (Reggio Emilia) and AEDP (Step by Step). Both models should be evaluated and monitored, and then

extended to many more state pre-schools as well as primary schools. All joint projects should be speeded up, and others could be developed.

Improve communication and co-operation among various ministries involved in education. These include the MoES, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. International NGOs, too, should co-operate and co-ordinate their work to the utmost. With the small resources available, it is necessary to co-ordinate much more than in the past. The special directorate at MoES for donor co-ordination and monitoring should take the lead in this.

Explore regional initiatives. With shrinking resources, it is necessary to cross borders and work together. Co-operation with neighbouring countries within the pre-school area should be developed.

Promote civil society and environmental issues. Pre-school education is important in many respects. As Albania is a young democracy, civic education should start in pre-schools. Albania has little experience of civil society and it is important to build up relationships with national NGOs that can work with children (from pre-school onwards) on the principles of democracy. The same applies to environmental education, which is an area that will be even more important in the future for sustainable development.

Address the critical shortage of textbooks, children's books and other teaching materials. The great lack of teaching materials text books and children's books must be changed. Again it might be necessary to appeal to foreign donors in the short term, but the target must be to produce these pedagogical tools within the country. The state publishing house has not produced new books for pre-schools in 10 years, and it will presumably take some time before they can develop new books based on the new curriculum. In the meantime alternative approaches should be explored.³⁵

Vocational Education

Formulate an integrated approach to reform the VET sector. This approach should firstly focus on a close synergy between reform in labour market, VET system and the general socio-economic context; and secondly integrate VET reform into a lifelong learning system.

Consider a substantial institution building programme with a view to bringing them into line with international approaches in key policy areas, such as counselling and guidance, (re)training for employed/unemployed.

Develop a second chance VET programme to integrate children who do not participate in education and training at the secondary level and who leave school prematurely, as the percentage of children in VET education is very low.

Increase accountability of principals and teachers for the learning of their students and reinforce their competencies. Provide training in school management, budgeting, efficient use of resources etc. and envisage a greater role for them in hiring teachers, organising in-service-training etc.

³⁵ An example is the 5 000 children's books given by the Swedish NGO "Kvinna till Kvinna" (Woman to Woman) (very active in SEE countries since the Bosnia-Herzegovina war). A Swedish publishing house, together with the author and the translator (Swedish into Albanian), have all contributed their work for free. The Swedish airforce has flown the books to Albanian pre-schools in Kosovo. Maybe similar donations could be obtained for Albanian pre-schools, from Swedish and other European NGOs.

Evaluate the impact of decentralisation on the current system and formulate reform proposals which address issues regarding the balance of responsibilities between the different actors. This evaluation should be carried out with full participation of the different stakeholders in the system.

Assure (MoES) quality of input and output by setting standards, developing policies and assessing outcomes. Performance standards must be designed and a systematic and reliable information system to assess how students are performing should be in place.

Improve accreditation of teacher programmes, adequate knowledge and skill criteria for selecting teachers, principals and inspectors, and develop the monitoring of the functioning of the system, including dissemination of the results of the monitoring activity.

Enhance the links between curriculum reform and the labour market. Current progress in VET curricula and qualification reform should be more focused on bringing them into line with prospective labour market needs. To achieve this, structured consultation in the field of curriculum reform with key stakeholders, including social and economic actors should be introduced as an integral part in the curriculum and qualification review and development process at State, local and school levels.

Review the teacher training system, including both assessment of teacher training institutions and skills and qualifications audit of the personnel in the schools. Set up a State level regulatory body to define common standards for teacher and school manager training with a special focus on modern formative learning methodologies.

Provide in-service training to teachers and principals who are involved in the implementation of new curricula. To achieve this, an intensive programme of focused actions (seminars, conferences, coaching) to upgrade current standards would probably be required.

Higher Education

Strengthen university autonomy and the new institution (according to the 1999 law), the Conference of Rectors, which is supposed to co-ordinate relations between the Ministry, universities and other institutions.

Decentralise the structure, especially concerning financial issues and improve the relationship between the Ministry, universities and faculties. A framework budgeting procedure is needed to make it possible for the MoF to decentralise planning and decision making to the line ministries.

Introduce a capacity building programme for senior university administrators and staff in the area of management and financing. This programme should be provided by the State but supported by international donors and experts. This should be linked to increasing funding of higher education and improving quality of teaching, research and service.

Reinforced involvement of national academic capacity into the development of the country which should rely more on the scientific knowledge and practical skills and experiences of university professors and assistants. To increase skills, competencies and experience of the university staff they should be routinely considered and employed on governmental and donor projects of all types.

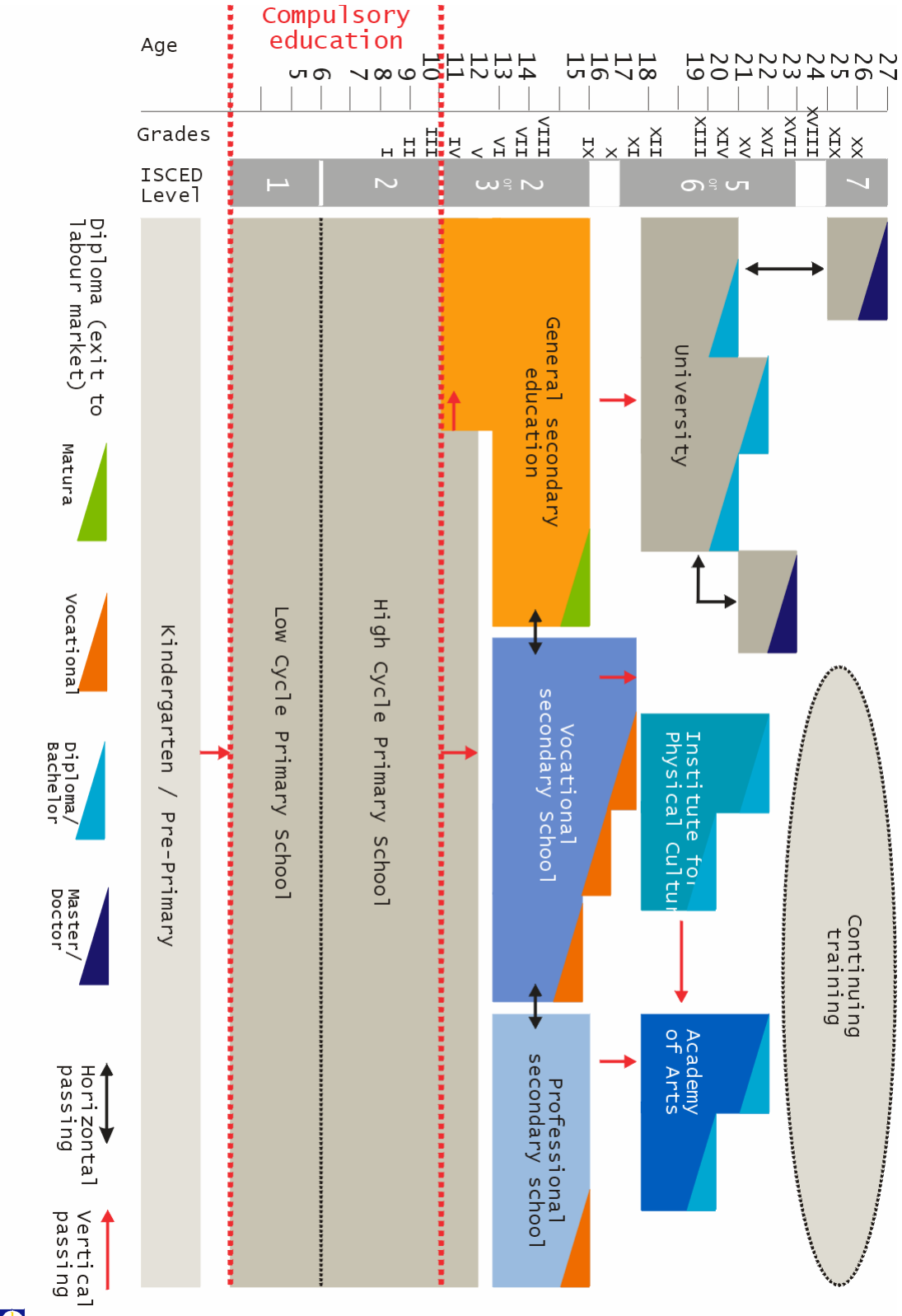
Improve management and quality assurance at all levels; strengthen the role of the National Accreditation Agency. The governing bodies should assign priority to the introduction of internationally comparable measures of quality, efficiency and accountability at all levels of education.

Renew curricula according to the Bologna Process.

Support research at universities, the setting up of a scientific research network within Albania and other countries of the region and with international universities and institutions.

Develop a post-university qualification system as well as instruments for in-service learning and further qualification.

Establish vocationally oriented non-university higher education institutions to meet the growing needs of the changing economy and labour market.



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