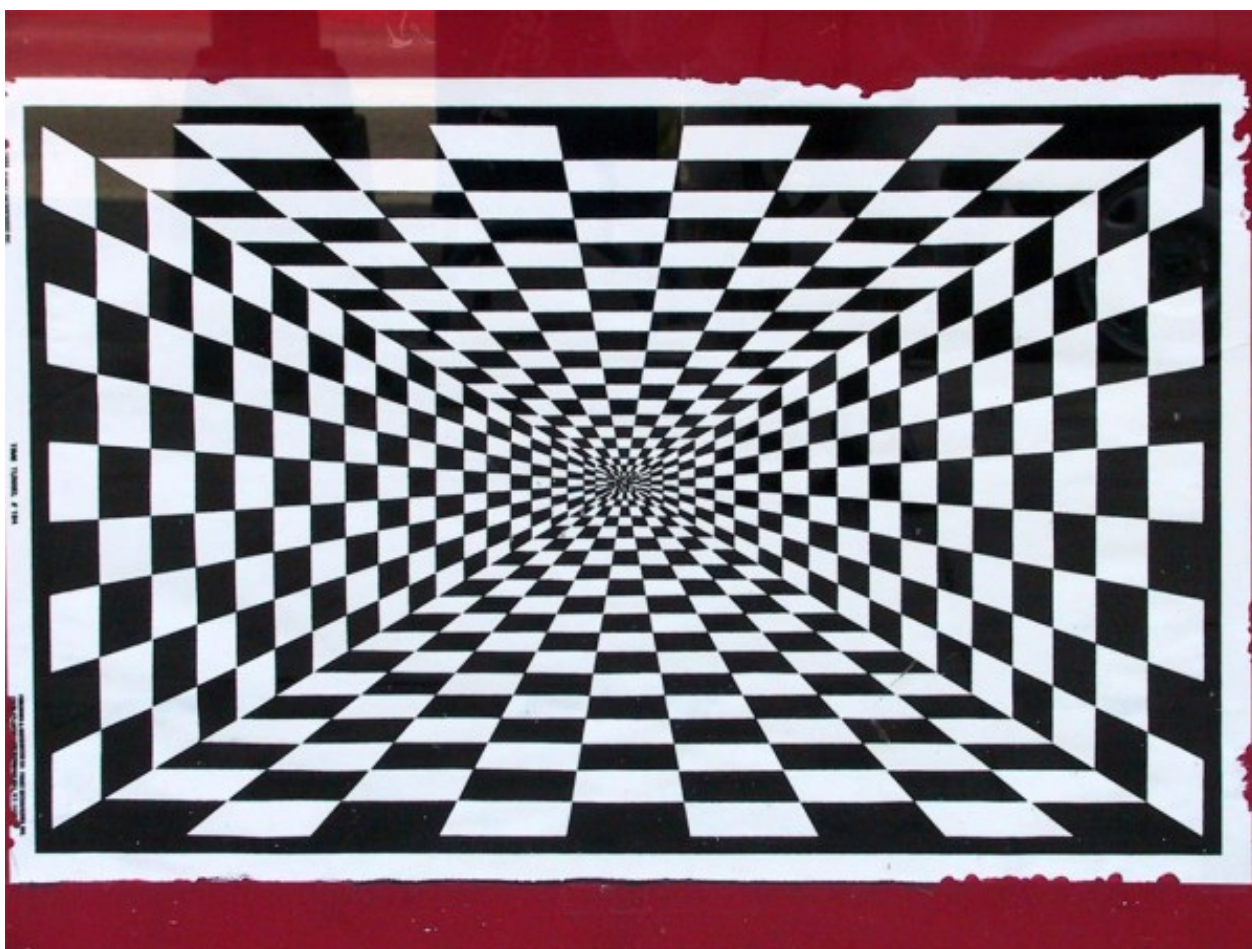




# NATIONAL STUDY ON THE PLACE OF SHORT-CYCLE HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE BULGARIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM



**INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**

**DOBRICH, 2010**

## ABSTRACT

The present study aims at providing a profound analysis of the existing forms of SCHE in Bulgarian education system and at seeking for the opportunities to introduce SCHE within the framework of the education-qualification degree “Bachelor” in compliance with the Bologna process tendencies and the socio-economic needs of Bulgarian society in the forthcoming period 2009 – 2010.

The successful achievement of the mission mentioned above the research team set out the next tasks:

- To elaborate a deepened overview of the current context and tendencies in the development of higher education in Bulgaria;
- To observe the fundamental factors that might have an impact on the introduction of SCHE according to European framework of higher education;
- To explore the general opinion and readiness of Bulgarian educational system and Bulgarian society to accept the introduction of SCHE.

The National study encompassed the period from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2009 to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2009. The applied research methods included the implementation of the following activities:

- Systematization and analysis of documents (information about the systems of higher education in Bulgaria, Europe and USA, legislative directives, studies and surveys on higher education, quantitative and qualitative data extracted from National Institute of Statistics, National Agency of Accreditation and a wide range of Bulgarian higher education schools);
- Interviews (consultations) with experts from the system of higher education and secondary professional education, organization of round tables, focus groups, discussions on the issues of quality of Bulgarian Higher Education and the place of SCHE in the system of higher education.
- Sociological research on the basis of anonymous questionnaire, target group – students, learners from VET, specialists and students from 2-year colleges.

An important part of the conclusions set out in the current study are based upon the experience of International University College and its academic partners in Bulgarian and the European Union.

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# CONTENTS:

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## **INTRODUCTION** **p.4**

---

## **I.CHAPTER ONE** **p. 5-27**

---

### **REPORT 1**

Bulgarian Higher Education System and the Place of the Short Cycle

## **II. CHAPTER TWO** **p. 28-33**

---

### **REPORT 2**

Efficiency and Quality of Higher Education and the Place of Short-cycle Education

*Roundtable Discussion,*

*November 20th, 2008, Dobrich, Bulgaria*

## **III. CHAPTER THREE** **p.34-53**

---

### **ANALISYS 1**

Results of a Sociological Survey on the Place of the Short-Cycle Education in the Bulgarian System of Higher Education

*Period of research: November 2008- October 2009*

## **IV. CHAPTER FOUR** **p. 54-57**

---

### **ANALYSIS 2**

Results of the Focus Group Discussion with Representatives of NGOs on Issues of Higher Education and the Possibility of Introducing Short-cycle Education in the frame of the Bachelor Degree.

*January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Dobrich, Bulgaria*

## **V. CHAPTER FIVE** **p. 58-62**

---

### **ANALYSIS 3**

Results of the Conducted Discussion with a Focus Group of Representatives of Local Authorities, Business Organizations and Higher education Institutions on the Problems of Higher Education and the Possibility for the Introduction of Short-cycle Education in the frame of the Bachelor Degree

*March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Dobrich, Bulgaria*

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## INTRODUCTION

Bulgaria is one of the countries who first joined the Bologna Process. The Conference of the Ministers responsible for Higher Education, held in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009, **identified the priorities of the European Higher Education Area in the next decade**: striving to maintain the high quality of higher education in a rapidly evolving society, ensuring equal opportunities for quality education and expanding access to higher education, improve the environment for learning, eliminating all barriers to learning, creation of appropriate economic conditions for widespread inclusion of students. Requirements were vested in any EU country to put its measurable targets for extending the overall participation and widening participation of under-represented groups in higher education. The necessity of expanding participation was done through lifelong learning and the accessibility, quality of education offered and transparency of information, creating opportunities to acquire qualifications through flexible learning paths, and establishment of a solid partnership between public authorities, higher education institutions, students, employers and employees. An important step in the implementation of lifelong learning is the development of national frameworks of qualifications that can be developed and prepared for self certification to Upgrade Framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area by 2012. It was emphasized that in a national context, intermediate qualifications in the first cycle may be a means of widening access to higher education.

At the meeting in Bergen /2005/ Ministers of the countries from Bologna Process accepted the *Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area /EHEA/* based on which will be developed national qualifications frameworks, which results will be oriented /output/ to the higher education.

Without being bound to a field of scholarly and professional activity the *Framework for Qualifications in ENEA* summarizes the requirements for graduates of relevant education. Descriptors in the below offer a general European framework expressions of the type expected achievements and abilities associated with qualifications at the end of each knowledge cycle. They are not intended to be followed without amendment and not prescriptive in nature, do not represent the minimum threshold requirements and are not exhaustive. Similar or equivalent characteristics may be added or replaced. The descriptors seek to identify the nature of the whole qualification.

For Bulgarian Universities achieving consistency and comparability of the educational degrees and professional qualifications offered, ensuring the mobility of students and their teachers and the development of international relations is directly related to their active participation in building the European space for higher education.

# I. CHAPTER ONE

## REPORT 1

### Bulgarian Higher Education System and the Place of the Short Cycle

Subject of this study is the status of Bulgarian higher education and the opportunities for introduction of short-cycle HE forms /within the first cycle or associated with it/ in the Bulgarian system of higher education.

**Table 1 - Qualifications framework of higher education in the European Space for higher education - short cycle**

	Results	ECTS credits
Short-cycle qualifications/ within the first cycle or associated with it	<p>Qualifications, indicating the completion of <b>short-cycle higher education</b> (in or linked to the first) are issued to students who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have demonstrated knowledge or understanding in the scientific field, upgrade and general secondary education level as a whole, secured by advanced educational materials, such knowledge provides an opportunity for practice or profession, personal development and further training to complete the first cycle;</li> <li>- Can apply knowledge and understanding in a practical context;</li> <li>- Have the ability to select and use data to formulate responses to well defined concrete and abstract problems;</li> <li>- Can communicate on topics of understanding, skills and activities with observers, managers and clients;</li> <li>- They have the ability to undertake further training with a degree of autonomy</li> </ul>	Approximately 120 ECTS credits

In Bulgaria the framework of formal qualifications officially exist only for the system of initial vocational training – from first to fourth grade - with increasing requirements towards knowledge, skills and competencies of the professionals. In higher education the levels of qualification are called degrees, according to the Higher Education Act in Bulgaria - BA, MA, and Ph.D., as well as a degree for professional higher education - professional bachelor (BA equivalent). In higher education, unlike in initial vocational training, only the direction of increase between the level of degrees is known, but without any idea of what employers and the public should expect from the higher degree.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) provides the following definition for Short-Cycle Higher Education (SCHE).

“... Level or stage of training after secondary education, which can lead to qualifications recognized in the labor market ...”, obtained in formal educational INSTITUTIONS, universities, technical schools, colleges, public and private - but also in a variety of other educational institutions including secondary schools, the workplace, through its own IT training and a number of public - private organizations.

The main characteristics of short-cycle higher education conclude in the following: it covers programs and qualifications **below level BA** and **above secondary education**. Their duration varies across countries and program areas. The structure of the Bologna Agreement (Bologna Process) indicates the growing need of three-year undergraduate programs (compared to the four-year programs). The programs of short-cycle higher education are often shorter than a three-year training course (Slancheva Snezhana-Durst, University of Toledo, Short-cycle Higher Education in the United States).

While developing the national framework of qualifications in higher education in Bulgaria and the legislative introduction of short-cycle HE qualifications either in the first cycle or as associated with it, the question of the place of the short-cycle higher education within the system higher education reasonably arises.

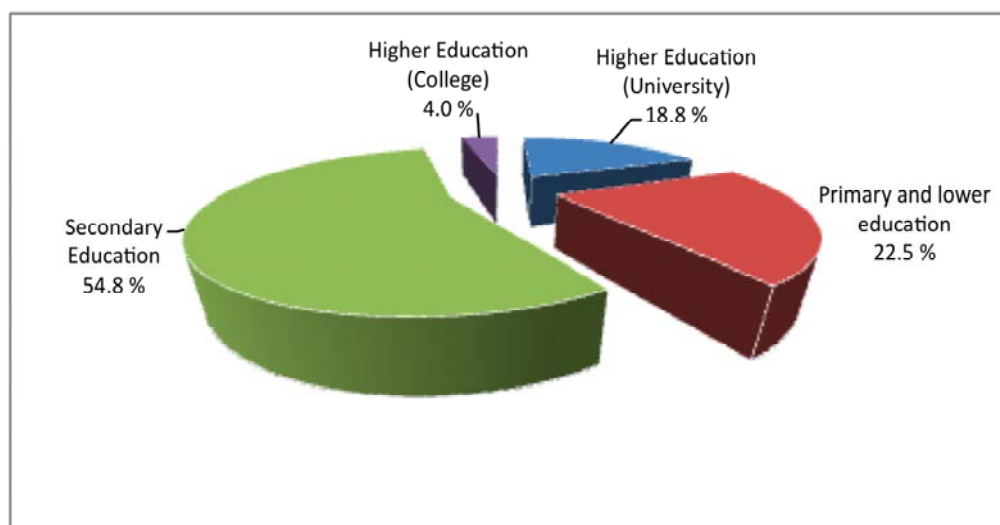
Some of the characteristics of the Bulgarian higher education system, directly related to the possibility of introducing short-cycle higher education, were considered for the purposes of the study.

## I. Current status of the education system in Bulgaria

### 1. Some quantitative characteristics of the education system in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, the share of population with tertiary and secondary education is increasing steadily at the expense of the decreasing number of people with primary or lower education. Currently, 77.6 per cent of the population in the most active age for employment – namely 25-64 years - is with secondary or higher education.

**Figure 1 – Educational Structure of the Bulgarian Population**



Source: National Statistics Institute, Bulgaria, 2009.

Changes in the educational structure of the population indicate the main result of the functioning of the educational system and the attitude of young people to education. The share of young people aged 20-24 who have completed at least upper secondary education is 83.5 percent for 2008 year. The number of students in Bulgaria in the beginning of the academic year 2008/2009, including participating in degrees (professional bachelor's, bachelor's, master's and PhD), amounted to **274.2 thousand students**.

From the students studying in BA and MA programs the highest share is occupied by the academic field "Science and Business Administration - 24.1%, followed by students in the field "Technical Studies and Technical Occupations" - 15.4%, while the smaller number of students, in field "Mathematics and Statistics - 0.4%. The number of students continuing their studies for a Master's degree completed after the Bachelor degree or a Professional Bachelor of uch.2008/2009 was 23.4 thousand, out of which 2.1 thousand or **9.1% continue to higher levels after the completion professional degree of Bachelor**.

The following tables show summarized data for the system of higher education – institutions and number of trained students for the past 10 years, and the number of institutions and students in post-secondary education, but outside of higher education.

**Table 2 - Information on the education institutions by type**

Period	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Total					
Professional Colleges after Secondary School	17	17	23	28	28

<i>Including private</i>	16	17	23	28	26
Vocational Education Centers in general	-	114	155	207	218
<i>Including Private</i>	-	102	143	188	195
Higher Schools:	53	53	53	53	53
<i>Including Private HS</i>	16	16	16	16	16
<i>Private colleges</i>	9	9	9	9	9
<i>Of the total number of universities</i>	10	10	10	10	10
* Independent Colleges	40	40	36	31	28
* Colleges within universities and specialized HEIs					

Source: National Statistics Institute, Bulgaria, 2009

**Table 3: Students participating in programs according to the levels of the International Standard Classification of Education, ISCED -97, in thousands.**

Period	1998/ 1999	1999/ 2000	2000/ 2001	2001/ 2002	2002/ 2003	2003/ 2004	2004/ 2005	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009
Students ISCED-5B,5A,6 Total	270	261	247	228	231	228	238	243	259	264	274
From these in private HEIs	33	27	28	29	31	33	39	45	51	55	58
Including Professional Bachelor Degree ISCED 5B total	22	18	16	17	15	16	18	24	26	26	28
From them in private colleges	3	3	2	3	3	4	6	11	16	18	19
Adult vocational training for after secondary school ISCED-4C	8	7	5	4	3	3	3	5	6	7	8
Form them in private VET centres	1.5	1.3	1	1	1	1	1.4	3.4	5	5.8	6.1

Source: National Statistics Institute, Bulgaria, 2009

## 2. Types of education institutions in Bulgaria, which could offer short-cycle higher education beyond the first cycle, but connected with it, as defined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

### 2.1. Institutions offering post-secondary education at level ISCED 4C according to the International Standard Classification of Education ISCED -97

The institutions offering vocational education after secondary education for persons over 16 years of age in Bulgaria are two types:

#### ✓ **Professional Colleges with a two-year course of education and qualification in a profession: 4th degree**

Professional colleges are education institutions that are created with a Decree of the Minister of Education, Youth and Science. The opening procedure is regulated by Ordinance 7/ 2001 on the Creation, Transformation, Change and Closure of Private Kindergartens and Schools. Professional colleges may be opened in school buildings and facilities that meet the relevant health conditions, applicable for education institutions, that are rented for a periods of at least two years. The vocational colleges conduct training curricula for professions which are included in the List of Professions as to Article 6 of the Law on Vocational Education and Training (The list is approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, the structural elements of the list are the professions and specialties). For regulated professions, there is a separate list and regulations governing their acquisition. The majors are classified as professional fields and levels of qualifications, degrees are from first to fourth, in ascending order. The education program must meet the state educational requirements to acquire qualifications in various majors. The conditions and procedures for acquisition of the fourth degree of professional qualification for persons aged 16 years shall be regulated by D Framework Program for vocational training to the acquisition of the fourth degree of professional qualification which is approved by the Minister of Education, Youth and Science. D Framework Program was developed under the Law on Vocational Education and Training. The curricula of the Framework Program include a mandatory vocational training, theoretical and practical training of at least 1200 academic hours and an optional vocational training at least 60 academic hours. The number of hours of practical training must be not less than the number of hours of theoretical training.

#### **Certification of education**

Completed vocational education in D Framework Program is certified by a **certificate of professional competence**, whose content is defined in Article 52 of the Ordinance 4/16.04.2003 of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science. Graduates of the training can realize themselves on the labor market to expand these qualifications, and to acquire professional qualifications in other professions.

#### **Quality control of education**

Monitoring the quality of training offered by vocational colleges is legally regulated by Order № RD09-1138/14.07.2009 of the Minister of Education, Youth and Science. Under this order are certain criteria and indicators as follows:

##### I. Criterion "Level reached in the learning process"

Indicators:

1. Relative share of the graduates of the vocational education
2. Relative share of the qualified teachers
3. Relative proportion of the pupils who attained the level of qualification
4. Relative share of the social partners involved in the conduct of public examinations for awarding a professional qualification degree
5. Relative proportion of students completed practical training in real job placement with employers

##### II. Criterion "Scope of the curricular and extracurricular activities"

III. Criterion "Provided conditions for lifelong learning" with indicators: (i) number of people aged over 16 years trained to acquire professional qualification and (ii) number of persons trained in the training courses.

Heads of vocational colleges perform an annual self-assessment on these criteria and indicators and make



them publicly known. Prominent of these criteria, quality assessment is carried out solely by the Ministry of Education and Science-based on self-assessment reports prepared. The criteria are clear and precisely defined, but only quantitative indicators are at a significantly lower number and scope of these assessment higher education.

### **Conditions for transferring or continuing in the upper levels of education**

The regulatory conditions for continuing education are covered by the Framework Program for upgrading qualifications or expansion of skills within a qualification acquired under the Vocational Education and Training Act. These rules are created only for the system of vocational training. Continuing education for the acquisition of higher education is subject to general conditions applicable to all high-school graduates. In process of education towards acquisition of the fourth degree of professional qualification vocational colleges do not apply the system of accumulation and transfer of credits and there are no legal opportunities for transfer of credits from secondary vocational education to higher education.

### **Opportunities for mobility**

The students in the colleges offering post-secondary education have the opportunity for mobility based on practical training in EU countries under the sectoral program Leonard da Vinci within the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission.

- ✓ Centers for adult vocational training, for persons over 16 years with one year of training and professional qualification in third degree of professional qualification. *(We put special emphasis on these centers because there are opportunities for recognition of part of the training offered in their frame in the system of higher education as regards individual practice or language modules).*

The order for disclosure and regulation of their activities are carried out under the Vocational Education and Training Act (VETA). Vocational training can be offered in rented buildings meeting the sanitary and health requirements for conducting the educational process. Opening of a VET programme or course is carried out after completion of a licensing process and issuance of a license for the respective VET center. The checking procedure is governed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, and by the **National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET)**. The National Agency approves the curricula of education and training. The educational content is regulated by a Framework Program, on the basis on which curricula are developed for individual disciplines and professions. The curricula include mandatory professional training, theoretical and practical training lasting at least 900 academic hours and an optional vocational training of at least 60 academic hours. The number of hours of practical training is not less than the number of hours of theoretical training.

### **Certification of education**

Completed vocational education under the Framework Program B is certified with a certificate of competence, the content of which is defined in Article 52 of the Ordinance 4/16.04.2003 of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science. The graduates of the training can decide to eventuate in the labor market, to study further to expand these qualifications, or to acquire qualification in another profession.

### **Quality control training**

Under the licensing procedures for their creation the vocational training centers can develop their own systems for quality assessment, that are not subject to regulation by the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training.

### **Conditions for transferring or continuing education in the upper levels of education**

The regulatory conditions for continuing education are covered by the Framework Program for upgrading qualifications or expansion of skills within a qualification acquired under the Vocational Education and Training Act.

These rules are created only for the system of vocational training. Continuing education for the acquisition of higher education is subject to general conditions applicable to all high-school graduates. In process of education towards acquisition of the fourth degree of professional qualification vocational colleges do not apply the system of accumulation and transfer of credits and there are no legal opportunities for transfer of credits from secondary vocational education to higher education.

### Opportunities for mobility

The trainees in the VET centers have the opportunity for mobility based on practical training in EU countries under the sectoral program Leonard da Vinci within the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission.

Data on the number of students enrolled in programs for post-secondary education in the world can be found in the following Table 4.

**Table 4: Students in programs for post-secondary education at ISCED 4, Eurostat, OECD**

Country	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<b>Austria</b>	54840	70523	73363	79337	71265
<b>Belgium</b>	53618	55788	51762	63287	70839
<b>Belgium – Wallonia and German-speaking Communities</b>	14427	13930	14453	15947	24239
<b>Belgium – Flanders</b>	39191	41858	37309	47340	46600
<b>Bulgaria</b>	<u>3165</u>	<u>2772</u>	<u>3036</u>	<u>4707</u>	<u>6419</u>
<b>Switzerland</b>	29097	28789	25231	24665	21987
<b>Cyprus</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Czech Republic</b>	73629	85836	84334	79977	80620
<b>Germany</b>	463341	494379	529626	491797	579008
<b>Denmark</b>	1015	975	1107	1116	1168
<b>Estonia</b>	11551	10787	10762	10101	9478
<b>Spain</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>EU 27</b>	1239160	1342728	1422950	1405850	1518795
<b>Finland</b>	11229	14328	17665	20183	21486
<b>France</b>	33288	35656	43473	41341	41202
<b>Greece</b>	32813	32554	36599	35560	38874
<b>Croatia</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Hungary</b>	83727	77489	75401	74547	75762
<b>Ireland</b>	50957	68660	74178	71197	68872
<b>Iceland</b>	553	577	713	866	890
<b>Italy</b>	45714	51657	57906	54774	32860
<b>Japan</b>	14398	14638	14013	13918	14471
<b>Lithuania</b>	7697	8994	10164	10426	9761
<b>Luxembourg</b>	1052	1017	931	967	892
<b>Latvia</b>	7410	6108	3934	4025	3221
<b>Malta</b>	344	425	2275	1243	271
<b>Netherlands</b>	6295	6619	7455	7370	6891
<b>Norway</b>	6150	6007	5431	8831	8931
<b>Poland</b>	215739	243389	268794	290284	304943
<b>Portugal</b>	638	1767	2175	2312	2483

<b>Romania</b>	61855	54732	48693	43617	37697
<b>Sweden</b>	11316	11196	11491	10752	11803
<b>Slovenia</b>	1550	1768	2042	2128	2101
<b>Slovakia</b>	6377	5309	4721	4802	4159
<b>Turkey</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>UK</b>	-	-	-	-	36720
<b>USA</b>	423316	428991	438754	434329	446604
<b>Australia</b>	180352	170723	160834	158090	165817
<b>New Zealand</b>	41923	37113	37185	50299	62113

The following conclusions and trends can be outlined on the basis of the above stated data from EUROSTAT and the National Statistics Institute (Key features of education in 2008) as well as regarding the state of education level ISCED 4C in Bulgaria:

- a) The professional colleges in Bulgaria in 2004/2005 were 17, including 16 private colleges. In the academic year 2008/2009 the total number of colleges increased from 17 to 28 (i.e. by 65%); 26 (or 93%) of these colleges are private.
- b) Vocational training centers started to open in 2005/2006, when they are 118, 102 of which were private. For a period of four years they became 218 until 2008/2009; 195 (or 91%) of these VET centers, are private. The share of private vocational training centers in the total number of VET centers in Bulgaria is 89% at present.
- c) 45% of the universities in Bulgaria have licensed vocational training centers offering third-degree qualification programs. The academic management of the universities designs the study plans of the degree courses at these centers and in large part these study plans are synchronized with the curricula of the major higher education courses. The training is conducted under the same conditions and logistics, as well as by the academic staff of the universities. Although legally in Bulgaria there are no education pathways linking post-secondary education to higher education and vocational education outside the higher education system, and a system of accumulation and transfer of credits is not introduced, in some rare cases, training in individual subjects, conducted at VET centers is recognized for continuing education for higher education. Good practice in this regard is the practice of the International University College and its licensed VET center that recognize identical parts of education modules within the same majors/specialization taught at both institutions - for example language training modules, hotel and restaurant practice modules, sales techniques module and other practical modules - after the relevant examinations and validation in accordance with procedures developed by the College. Another private higher education institution - the New Bulgarian University - goes even further. Applicants from the high schools, with which the University has concluded partnership agreements, may enroll in undergraduate programs directly into the third semester. [www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2008/02/12/458220\\_nov\\_bulgarski\\_universitet\\_shte\\_priznava\\_maturite/](http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2008/02/12/458220_nov_bulgarski_universitet_shte_priznava_maturite/). There are similar practices in many other universities, but the procedures for validation of earlier stages of learning and their recognition in further training and education by HEIs are very peculiar, based on a case-by-case approach and for the most part are regulated only in the inner statutes of these HEIs instead of being public.
- d) The students in the post-secondary ISCED-4C programs in Bulgaria have the following numerical characteristics: for the last 10 years their total number remains stable around 8000 people, but the number of trainees in private educational institutions after secondary education from around 1500 people in 1999 reached approximately 6100 people in 2008/2009. This means that over **76% of the students in programs for post-secondary education outside of higher education in Bulgaria are trained in private education institutions.**
- e) There is an increasing trend in the number of people participating in training programs for post-secondary education - level 4 of the International Standard Classification of Education ISCED-97. According to Table

4, for the period 2003-2007 the number of students in Bulgaria has increased from 3165 persons to 6419 persons (or by 102.81%). For the EU-27 countries the increase was only 22.57%. In the case of the Netherlands the number of trainees has increased from 6295 people to 6891 people (by 9.5 %), while the corresponding numbers for the United States show that the number of people has increased from 423,316 to 446,604 persons (i.e. by 5.5%). The comparative data show an extremely dynamic development of training towards this type of degree in Bulgaria.

- f) The data indicate a significant increase in the number of institutions and the number of students in ISCED level-4 programs in Bulgaria, including an increase in the number of trainees in the private education institutions in recent years. Vocational colleges offer training mainly in the fields of tourism, economics, business and security. According to changes in the Higher Education Act of 2004, the founders of private universities were obliged to own their premises and buildings. This change proved to be an obstacle to a number of prospective investors in the Bulgarian higher education system that chose to use the much simpler and shorter procedure for the establishment of professional colleges with two-year training programs, instead of universities. Although there are no legislative education pathways linking post-secondary to higher education, in practice a number of educational institutions, mostly private, have concluded contracts with professional colleges for recognition of separate periods of instruction conducted in the biennial colleges and vocational training centers. Examples of such agreements are the contracts for the recognition of two years' training and continuing education towards the degree "professional bachelor" directly in the fourth-fifth semester concluded between the Private Vocational College of Tourism - Sofia and Higher School Agricultural College - Plovdiv for the field "Economics of Tourism", Private Vocational College Delta and New Bulgarian University, Art College Sofia and New Bulgarian University, Private Vocational College of Tourism - Shumen and International University College. As mentioned above, there are opportunities for recognition of training periods at vocational training centers, professional schools and post-secondary schools, which are regulated by acts between the two educational institutions in the absence of an explicit legal basis.
- g) **It is obvious that the process of creating learning pathways between post-secondary education and higher education has started in Bulgaria, although the system for credit transfer within the secondary and post-secondary education, including vocational education and training has not been accepted.** In most cases the way of training and accreditation procedures of the professional colleges are getting closer to the model of community colleges in the United States, which also offer a two-year training and transfer agreements with specific universities, where the students from these colleges continue their education to obtain bachelor's degrees, which means that the community colleges conduct short training courses as part of the training for the first-cycle Bachelor Degree. The motivation of students, in the two-year colleges is the subject of a sociological study, which is presented in the next chapter of this material. Generally speaking, the main motivation of students, trained in two-year colleges, is the opportunity for continuation the training towards acquiring a higher education degree of "professional bachelor" or "bachelor". The presence of private two-year colleges justify a significantly greater flexibility in the policy of this type of schools and the main prerequisite for the informal transfer of students and credits to take place in an increasing scale.
- h) The criteria for assessing the quality in education institutions for training after high school, governed by MOMNE, are significantly simplified and limited. Under the licensing procedures for their creation, the vocational training centers develop their own systems for quality assessment, that are not subject to regulation and assessment by the National Agency for Vocational Training and Education. This implies a need for conclusion of agreements between universities and vocational colleges with significantly higher number of criteria, quantitative and qualitative indicators, largely corresponding to the criteria of quality in higher education.

## 2.2 Institutions in higher education, offering degrees in education "ISCED 97-degree 5B, 5A, 6.

The system of higher education in Bulgaria includes public and private higher education institutions. Higher education institutions are universities, specialized higher education institutions, and independent colleges. The University educates students in at least three of the four major areas of science: humanitarian, environmental, social and technical, in a wide range of professional fields. The university graduates receive the academic degrees

of "Bachelor", "Master" and "Doctor" - ISCED 97-degree 5A, 6. The specialized higher education institutions offer training in one of the key areas of science, arts, physical culture and military affairs and meet the requirements met by the university. The graduates receive diplomas for the academic degree of "Bachelor", "Master" and "Doctor" in 97-degree ISCED 5A, 6. The independent colleges train students on programmes with enhanced practical orientation. Their graduates receive diplomas for the academic degree of "Professional Bachelor", 97-degree ISCED 5B. The training meets the same requirements as in the universities and specialized higher schools as regards training facilities, library funds, international activities, research, and scientific development of academic staff. The only difference is that the academic staff with doctoral degrees that read lectures in each major in a university must be at least 75%, while for the colleges this percentage is 50%. All other requirements for opening and providing training are the same as for the universities, and the procedures and criteria for institutional and program accreditation are the same for all universities, specialized HEIs and colleges in Bulgaria.

### 2.2.1 Features of the system of accumulation and transfer of credits - **ECTS (European Credits Transfer System)**

The ECTS is a system for accumulation and transfer of credits, focusing on students and based on the transparency of the learning process and its results. It aims to facilitate the planning, delivery, evaluation, recognition and validation of qualifications and training units, and to promote student mobility. ECTS is widely used in formal higher education and can be applied in other activities of lifelong learning. The Bologna Declaration justifies the need for introducing a system of educational loans as a reliable and effective means of increasing student mobility. The student mobility is an essential element of inter-university cooperation, which must constantly adapt to global and rapidly changing social conditions and trends: increased demand for higher education, internationalization of education and research, improving the quality of university education, offering university qualifications according to the needs of the labor market. The student mobility is one of the best ways for professional and scientific development of students through the mastery and transfer of foreign educational experience. The system of accumulation and transfer of credits allows the education institutions to facilitate arrangements for a full academic recognition of study periods abroad, and to ensure transparency in the education of students. In Bulgaria, the regulations governing the possible allocation and transfer of credits in higher education are the Higher Education Act / [http://lex.bg/laws/ Ordinance 21/30.09.2004](http://lex.bg/laws/Ordinance_21/30.09.2004) and implementing a system of accumulation and transfer of credits in higher education institutions (State Gazette 89/2004)

The Bulgarian system is built on the model of the European system of transfer of credits / ECTS / and is based on the following basic principles: full information, mutual trust and agreement, accounting the workload of students via credits. The credit system as the organization of educational process is based on the students' presence and distance learning activities for each academic discipline. It provides students with the opportunity to select subjects, forms of in-class and independent study, to receive recognition of separate periods of instruction conducted in other universities or other specialties, as well as compliance with all requirements of the curriculum and educational qualifications of a particular major.

The credit is a numerical expression of the student's full occupation needed to absorb knowledge, formation of skills and competencies identified in the major qualification characteristics and requirements of the curriculum for the acquisition of Bachelor and Master degrees.

The credit system is brought into action by the educational institution with its main departments, academic staff and students using the following documents:

- An information package;
- Application form for students from other HEIs or courses from other faculties of the HEI;
- Transcript of recognition of educational credits and study periods in other HEIs or other faculties of the HEI;
- An agreement to train students from other universities.

### **ECTS Credits**

ECTS credits are based on the workload required for the students to achieve the expected learning outcomes. The learning outcomes imply what a student must know, understand and be able to do after successfully completing the training process. The learning outcomes relate to level descriptors in national and European qualifications frameworks.

The workload represents the time from which students typically need to complete i.e. the full implementation of all educational activities (such as attendance of lectures, seminars and exercises, participation in projects and self-examination) required to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

60 ECTS credits are equivalent to the workload of one year of formal training on a regular basis (academic year) and the related learning outcomes. In most cases, the workload for one academic year is on average between 1500 and 1800 hours; this means that one credit equals 25-30 hours of work.

## Using ECTS

Credits are awarded both for whole training and educational programs as well as for their educational components (modules, courses, thesis work, work placements and laboratory work). The number of credits awarded for each component is determined on the basis of its share in the workload required from the students so that they achieve the learning outcomes in formal contexts.

The credits are allocated to individual students (regular or part-time) after completion of the training activities required within a formal curriculum or of an educational component and after a positive assessment of the demonstrated learning outcomes. Accumulation of credits for obtaining relevant qualifications is possible, if the educational institution awarding educational diplomas for the qualifications in question, decides so. If students have achieved learning outcomes in other learning contexts or period (formal, informal or prior), credits related to them may be awarded after successful assessment, validation or recognition of these learning outcomes.

Credits received under a program can be transferred to another program offered by the same or another education institution. This transfer is only possible if the institution, which awards the diploma for professional qualification/degree, recognizes these credits and the related learning outcomes. Peer education institutions should agree in advance on the recognition of study periods spent abroad.

The use of the ECTS key documents (such as the catalog of courses, published by the HEI, the application form of the student, the training contract between the student and HEI, and the university transcript) as well with the Diploma Supplement and the accumulation of credits.

Under the Higher Education Act any higher education institution is required to develop and publicize its system for accumulation and transfer of credits with a detailed description of the procedures and bodies engaged in the award of educational credit.

### **2.2.2 Accreditation procedures for the creation of new universities, professional fields, and to assess the quality of education and faculty.**

The external institution for evaluation and accreditation is the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation (NAAA) - a specialized governmental institution for evaluation, accreditation and quality control of the activities of universities and research organizations in the training and qualification of specialists as well as in the development science, culture and innovation. The status of the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation, which is part of Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, at national level, is regulated by Art. 11, para. 1, 2, 3 and 4 adopted by the National Assembly (Parliament) of Republic of Bulgaria Higher Education Act.

The mission of the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation (NAAA) is:

"To contribute to improving the quality of higher education through periodic institutional and program evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions in Bulgaria, by evaluating the projects to open new institutes of higher education and major units, as well as post-accreditation monitoring and control in ensuring independence and transparency of procedures and competence of the participating Bulgarian and foreign experts."

The assessment is understood as a comparison the standard (how things should be) with the implementation (how things actually are) and getting information about the compliance or disparity between the two. The success of the evaluation process depends on the composition and work of the team of external evaluators (EV). The accreditation procedures of HEIs are carried out on two levels - external and internal. The agency controls the capability of the institutions, their main units and branches to provide high-quality education and research through an internal system of evaluation and maintenance of quality and performance

recommendations given in the evaluation and accreditation. The NAAA is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ENQA. Bulgaria is the 21-th European country and the 1st Southeastern European country that became a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

The NAAA's international recognition as a competent public authority in the European educational area and as a national institution for external quality assessment of higher education in Bulgaria is legitimated officially through the official partnership relations with international institutions and organizations such as:

- Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEEN), of which the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria is co-founder and the chairman of the agency - a member of the Governing Council.
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), which the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria was established as a candidate member of ENQA Board, of a decision by December 12, 2006.
- Internal Quality Assurance Group of ENQA, which is represented NAAA.
- European University Association (EUA), European Students Unions (ESU), European Network of Information Centers - National Academic Recognition Information Centres (ENIC - NARIC).

The accreditation of higher education institutions is recognition by the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of the right of HEIs to provide higher education degrees in certain fields, professional fields and majors of the regulated professions by evaluating the quality of the education activities. The accreditation is made by the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation. It could be institutional and program-related. After covering one year of implementation of accreditation, whether institutional or program-related, the NAAA tenders a procedure for post-accreditation review.

#### **The institutional accreditation:**

1. Is based on the evaluation of the manner in which the University carries out its mission and objectives as an organization;
2. Is the result of assessing the effectiveness with which the University controls, maintains and enhances the quality of education offered in higher education and professional fields.
3. Evaluation at the institutional accreditation is aimed at checking the effectiveness of:
4. Internal system for evaluating and maintaining the quality of education;
5. Procedures for approving, monitoring and updating of curricula and programs;
6. Procedures for acting on and in connection with the results of program accreditation, and other external and independent audits;
7. Overall direction and control of the evaluation process in higher school;
8. Management system for accumulation and transfer of credits;
9. Management cooperation with other universities and organizations;
10. Maintenance, management and development of material base of high school;
11. Research and creative activity of faculty and learners' participation in this activity.

The opening of a new HEI is preceded by the development of a blueprint, which describes the activities of the HEI according to the above parameters. There are three regulated areas of activity that are subject to evaluation - education, research and management of the high school. **These areas are evaluated through 12 criteria, which the HEI's activities must cover as well as through 38 sub-criteria (performance criteria) and 31 quantitative indicators characterizing the performance criteria.**

The HEIs are developing internal systems for evaluating the quality of learning and teaching staff in carrying out self-assessment of the educational process, carried out by them.

**The program accreditation** is based on assessing the quality of education in particular professional field in main unit and / or branch of a HEI, the speciality of the regulated professions or scientific expertise. A program accreditation can be requested from a higher school after receiving institutional accreditation.

Within the professional field, evaluation is aimed at checking the quality of student learning in all forms of education offered by educational qualifications and the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

The evaluation in program accreditation focuses on the:

1. Structure, organization and content of curricula and programs;
2. Profile and qualifications of teaching staff;
3. Material and technical security training;
4. Methods of teaching and assessing students' achievements;
5. Quality management of education;
6. Research and creative activity of faculty and student involvement and doctoral students in it.

A HEI makes a self-evaluation report, which includes information from the same three areas, for the opening of a new professional direction even if it accredited. In addition to the three spheres of activity that are subject to evaluation - education, research and management – there are **8 statutory criteria, 20 characteristics of the criteria and 26 additional quantitative indicators** that must be met for every professional fields separately.

The evaluation in the accreditation process is carried out via a four-grade system, including the following assessments: "very good", "good", "satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory". The validity of accreditation is 6 years when the resulting estimate is "very good" or "good" and three years - in "satisfactory" evaluation. When the grade "unsatisfactory" is received, the accreditation must be refused.

The HEIs are not allowed to conduct training courses from non-accredited professional fields and majors of the regulated professions and to issue them to persons of graduates of higher education diplomas.

The post-accreditation monitoring aims to determine how they implement the recommendations of the previous accreditations.

Table 5 describes the main powers and competencies of the various organs of the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation.

**Table 5. Nomination, election, appointment, terms of office, replacement and discharge of members of the Accreditation Board, Standing Committees and Working Groups (Annex 8 of SOKD – NAEA)**

Institution/structure	Nominated by	Selected by	Appointed by	Terms of office; Replacement and Discharge
Accreditation Council	Minister of Education and Science (4 nominations for to positions);		Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria	Not more than one term of 6-year duration  Every three years half of the members are replaced via random selection  The decision to release is taken with a secret ballot by the AC and is suggested to the Prime Minister.
	Academic Council of Universities	Academic Council of Universities		
	Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2 nominations for 1 position);			
	National Center for Agricultural Sciences (2 nominations for 1 position);			
Chairman of the Accreditation Council	Minister of Education and science			
Standing committees on the different higher education areas;	Accreditation Council;  HEIs	Accreditation Council	Chairman of the Accreditation Council	3-year term of service;  Unlimited number of mandates;  Decisions for release are taken by the AC by secret ballots.
Standing committee on post-accreditation monitoring and control				



Nomination of experts	Standing Committees; HEIs	Accreditation Council		Inclusion in Bank experts
Formation of expert groups	Standing Committees; Chairman of the Accreditation Council	Accreditation Council	Chairman of the Accreditation Council	3-month term of service of the expert groups.

### Conclusions:

1. The NAAA criteria for institutional accreditation are aligned with Part 1 of European Standards for Quality in Higher Education Institutions of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The assessment of the educational activities of all HEIs in Bulgaria is consistent with exactly the same criteria. This equality in assessing the quality of education creates opportunities for establishing a shorter learning pathway. For example, the education towards the degree of "professional bachelor" provided by the colleges, could continue to study directly for a "Master" degree for a period of 1, 5 years, irrespective of the professional field, for the colleges that have international accreditation or independent accreditation by the relevant European associations and academic concluded partnership agreements with European universities, as is the practice of many colleges in Bulgaria. This means that obtaining a "Master" degree can happen within 4.5 years (at the same time according to the Bulgarian Higher Education Act for obtaining a "Master" degree the students with the degree of "professional bachelor" need at least 6 years of education). This highly increases the demand for three-year training in higher education on behalf of students who intend to enroll in MBA programs abroad (*See Results of sociological survey on the place of short-term training, presented in Part 3 of this Study*),

2. The National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation is the only institution assessing the educational capacity of universities and high schools. There are many preconditions for subjective evaluation. The procedures for opening of new universities or their transformation are cumbersome and unclear, while the selection criteria are too many and at the same time do not give a clear idea of the quality of education. The opinion of business representatives and large employers on the quality of education and professional skills of the graduates is not taken into account in the evaluation of the HEIs.

### 2.3 Degree structure

The problems of Bulgarian higher education are many and complex. One of the important issues relates to the creation of a European Space for Higher Education and Bulgaria's participation in it, which introduced the three-level higher education in the country with the degrees of "Bachelor", "Master" and "Doctor". The degree-related structure is regulated by the Ordinance on State Requirements for Acquiring Higher-education Academic Degrees "Bachelor", "Master" and "Specialist", adopted with a Ministerial Council's Decree 162/2002; the last changes of 2003 replaced the "Specialist" degree with the degree of "Professional Bachelor".

The higher education system in Bulgaria organizes the training after secondary education in the pursuance of the following degrees:

1. Academic degree "**Bachelor**", the acquisition of which requires the following curriculum specifications:
  - a) At least 180 credits for a period of training of not less than three years - a "Professional Bachelor Degree in ..."
  - b) At least 240 credits for a period of training of not less than 4 years – "Bachelor Degree";
2. Academic degree "**Master**", the acquisition of which requires the following curriculum specifications:
  - a) At least 300 credits according to a curriculum and period of training of at least 5 years;
  - b) At least 120 credits after the acquiring of a "Bachelor" degree - paragraph 1, letter "a";
  - c) At least 60 credits after the acquiring of a "Bachelor" degree - paragraph 1, letter "b".

The higher education institutions create opportunities and conditions for the transition from training towards in one academic degree to another; for acquiring a higher academic degree; for partial training of Bulgarian and

foreign students in higher education institutions, faculties and majors; for transfer of students between higher schools, faculties, majors and forms of training; for dropping of students and for post-graduate qualifications. These conditions are governed by the Higher Education Act.

Distance learning can be offered only by HEIs that received accreditation under the Higher Education Act.

The underlying idea of the Bologna process is to respond adequately to the development needs of global economy and the massification of higher education, by expanding the access to higher education and reducing the time of study (objectives served by the "Bachelor" degrees).

At the same time the higher education, which focuses on the preparation of masters and doctors, preserves its "elitist" nature. The Universities, which aim to be leaders in science and research should be equally interested in the utilization of the formula 3+2+3 years, because it provides them with the opportunity to work with young people with high academic potential for longer periods of study. Against the current European trend for three-year study for "Bachelor" degrees, the insistent retention of the formula 4+1+3 years is associated with the risk of losing the young people in Bulgarian higher education since they would prefer to the shorter periods of study under better conditions for baccalaureate abroad. Statistics confirm these findings. In the current academic year 12,500 Bulgarians are trained in Germany and 3500 Bulgarians study in the U.S. According to EUROSTAT 22,800 Bulgarians are studying in Europe and their number has doubled in the last eight years.

#### **2.2.4 General characteristics of the education towards "Bachelor" degree - ISCED-97 level 5A**

The education for obtaining a degree of "Bachelor" in Bulgaria equips the student with:

1. An overview of the nature and field of professional specialization;
2. Broad theoretical knowledge and practical skills;
3. Adaptability skills in accordance with the changing conditions for labor market realization of the professionals;
4. Skills for independent learning, professional and team work;
5. Opportunities for educational mobility, as well as international comparability of the acquired knowledge and skills.

The training allows those who acquired the academic degree "Bachelor":

1. To practice their profession according to the acquired qualification;
2. To continue training for acquiring higher academic degrees;
3. To participate in various forms of life-long learning.

The higher education for acquiring of the academic degrees of "Bachelor", "Master" and "Professional Bachelor" is offered at HEIs that meet the requirements of the Higher Education Act and the Ordinance.

The training in each major occurs through a curriculum that includes mandatory, selective and optional subjects.

The mandatory subjects provide fundamental training on selected courses from a broad-based professional field. The selective subjects provide specific knowledge and competence in the field of major. The optional subjects allow for acquiring knowledge and skills in different scientific fields in accordance with the interests of students. The ratio of the different types of subjects is defined in the curriculum of the education course towards a degree by a decision of the Faculty Council.

#### **Certification of education**

The graduates receive a Diploma of higher education and an academic degree of "Bachelor", as well as the European Diploma Supplement. The acquisition of this degree allows for further education towards a "Master" degree under the conditions regulated by each individual university as well as for continuing education for a "Master" degree in the other European countries after covering the admission requirements.

#### **Quality assessment of education**

The quality assessment of education is performed periodically by the HEIs under the internally adopted rules and systems for evaluating the quality of education. In addition the assessment is carried out by the National

Agency for Assessment and Accreditation under perform accreditation of professional fields in the respective educational degrees as described above in section 2.2.2 procedures.

### Conditions for transfer or continuing in the upper levels of education

The acquisition of the “Bachelor” degree allows for further training to a higher degree of “Master” under the conditions regulated by each university and for continuing education for a “Master” degree in the other European countries after covering the respective admission requirements. Between 180 and 240 credits are allocated to the baccalaureate education within the system of accumulation and transfer of credits according to the educational policy of each individual HEI. The further study for a “Master” degree requires the acquisition of another 60 credits. The opportunities for transfer of students between two universities within the same grade of education are decided by mutual agreement between the two rectors. The transfer of students from private to public universities has been accompanied by payment of additional charges in the form of “donations” to the public universities or by the requirement for standing of an unreasonably large number of paid equivalency exams. There are serious obstacles to the transfer of students in the same degrees and grades between HEIs with similar profiles.

**Mobility opportunities** - the possession of an “Erasmus” University Charter and signed partnership agreements with universities from other European countries, allows for international mobility of students to study in the partner universities or to carry out practical summer internships within the Erasmus Program. The main admission requirement for the students is the excellent command of English or the native language of the host country. A significant number of students in Bulgaria benefit from the Erasmus Program in Bulgaria benefits, the largest number of them study “Tourism” or tourism-related majors.

### 2.2.5 General training characteristics of the "Professional Bachelor" Degree - ISCED 97 - level 5B

The institutions offering training for acquiring the academic degree and vocational qualification of “Professional Bachelor” are with the educational status of “colleges”.

The procedure for opening of private colleges (HEIs) is regulated by the Higher Education Act and under this procedure the order for establishing of private colleges is identical to that for the establishment of private universities. The procedure covers the following main conditions:

The private HEIs are created on the request of physical and/ or legal persons, hereinafter referred to as the “founders.” The founders must have ownership of a real estate, movable property and buildings needed to carry out the educational activities as well as a project for financing the activities of the higher school. The founders must establish the right to use the real estate during the HEI’s existence for educational purposes only and may transfer ownership of real estate and property to the HEI itself after the publication of the Decision of the National Assembly for the establishment of the HEIs in the State Gazette. The requirements for establishment of private HEIs are manifold, and the founders of the existing private colleges classified as HEIs in Bulgaria, have invested a significant amount of resources to provide the academic and research premises unlike the two-year vocational colleges.

An independent college offers training for the acquiring of the academic degree “Bachelor” as to of Art. 42, Para 1, item 1, letter “a” of the Higher Education Act. The college avails of standing academic staff, employed on labor contracts, which teach at least 50% of the audience and practical sessions for each major. **The academic staff with doctoral degrees employed on labor contracts read at least 50 percent of the courses in each major.** The mandatory and selective subjects are taught exclusively by academics with doctoral degrees. Only 30% of the courses may be taught by teachers without academic ranks and scientific degrees of “Doctor”.

The acquisition of a “Professional Bachelor” degree via regular and part-time training is suitable for persons who have completed secondary education. The admission of students in HEIs is regulated by the Ordinance on the Terms and Conditions for Admission of Students at Bulgarian Universities and its observance is mandatory for all HEIs in Bulgaria. In addition, any higher education institution may also introduce its own criteria for admission, beside the mandatory ones, such as the average grades or the results form the final examinations in secondary education. The duration of the training in the form of a regular curriculum is minimum of 3 years with a total workload of at least 1800 academic hours and less than 2400 academic hours. The training of students occurs on a curriculum developed by the HEI in accordance with the characteristics of the major and after consultations with experts, academics, professional and business representatives in the respective field of education and qualification. The share of the praxis-oriented subjects cannot be less than 75 percent of the total workload in the

curriculum. The training leading to a degree "Professional Bachelor" ends with a state exam. The students, who fulfill their obligations in the curriculum, receive diplomas of higher education with the degree of "Professional Bachelor". The persons who acquired educational qualifications as professional bachelors can continue their education for the degree of "Master" only in the same professional area under the terms and conditions specified in the rules of the HEI offering this education and the state requirements.

The education towards the degree of „**Professional Bachelor**“ provides:

1. Theoretical and background knowledge in a professional field;
2. Specialized and technical training in accordance with the majors in a college;
3. Practical training in the respective professional area;
4. Computer training in the respective professional area;
5. Conditions for educational mobility of students, including international comparability of the acquired knowledge and skills.

The persons with a degree of “Professional Bachelor” can:

1. Occupy positions in accordance with their professional training and qualification;
2. Continue their education towards a higher academic degree in accordance with the state regulations and the regulations of the HEIs.

### **Certification of education**

The graduates receive a Diploma of higher education at the level of "Professional Bachelor" with three-year education and minimum of 180 credits. The requirements for the contents of the documents issued by higher education institutions as regards the issuance of diplomas are regulated in the Ordinance on state requirements for the content of the basic documents issued by higher education institutions (State Gazette 75 of 2004, amended with State Gazette 39/2009).

### **Quality assessment of education**

The quality assessment of education is performed periodically by the HEIs under the internally adopted rules and systems for evaluating the quality of education. In addition the assessment is carried out by the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation under perform accreditation of professional fields in the respective educational degrees as described above in section 2.2.2 procedures.

### **Conditions for transfer or continuing in the upper levels of education**

The acquisition of this degree allows for further training to a higher degree of “Master” in the same professional field under the conditions stipulated by the Higher Education Act and following a training period of one and a half year. Continuing education in another professional field is possible only after further training of one year and the acquisition of a bachelor's degree. The opportunities for transfer of students between two universities within the same grade of education are decided by mutual agreement between the two rectors. The transfer of students from private to public universities has been accompanied by payment of additional charges in the form of "donations" to the public universities or by the requirement for standing of an unreasonably large number of paid equivalency exams. There are serious obstacles to the transfer of students in the same degrees and grades between HEIs with similar profiles.

**Terms of mobility** - the possession of an “Erasmus” University Charter and signed partnership agreements with universities from other European countries, allows for international mobility of students to study in the partner universities or to carry out practical summer internships within the Erasmus Program. The main admission requirement for the students is the excellent command of English or the native language of the host country. A significant number of students in Bulgaria benefit from the Erasmus Program in Bulgaria benefits, the largest number of them study “Tourism” or tourism-related majors. In student mobility there is no difference between the grades obtained in the course of study towards a “Bachelor” or “Professional Bachelor” degree - they are subject to the same criteria and requirements.

In Bulgaria 28 thousand students (see Table 3 above), or 10.2% of the total number of students in higher education (National Statistical Institute - Key Characteristics of Education in 2008), are trained in the degree "Professional Bachelor", level ISCED 5B, for the academic year 2008/2009.

For comparison, the number of students in programs of higher education level ISCED 5B according to the EUROSTAT, OECD, for the period 2003-2007 is as follows:

**Table 4: Students in higher education programs for ISCED 5B**

	2003		2004		2005		2006		2007	
	number	% of HE(*)	number	% of HE(*)	number	% of HE(*)	number	% of HE(*)	number	% of HE(*)
<b>Austria</b>	26167	11%	25371	11%	25253	10%	23959	9%	23133	9%
<b>Belgium</b>	193063	52%	200079	52%	201509	52%	204050	52%	200935	51%
<b>Belgium – Wallonia and German-speaking Communities</b>	90003	53%	94926	53%	95084	53%	95854	53%	93273	52%
<b>Belgium – Flandria</b>	103060	51%	105153	51%	106425	51%	108196	51%	107662	51%
<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>14801</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>16294</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>18432</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>23608</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>26953</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Switzerland</b>	38231	21%	39113	20%	36347	18%	35662	17%	38154	18%
<b>Cyprus</b>	14614	80%	16739	80%	15546	77%	15726	76%	16887	76%
<b>Czech Republic</b>	29453	10%	33046	10%	32193	10%	31879	9%	31247	9%
<b>Germany</b>	339989	15%	349084	15%	341442	15%	335961	15%	328429	14%
<b>Denmark</b>	17550	9%	27810	13%	32128	14%	28520	12%	29311	13%
<b>Estonia</b>	24185	38%	24401	37%	24178	36%	23416	34%	23659	34%
<b>Spain</b>	248035	13%	255488	14%	248140	14%	240071	13%	235815	13%
<b>EU-27</b>	<b>2678183</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>2501479</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>2534804</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>2518322</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>2465873</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Finland</b>	475	0%	159	0%	95	0%	115	0%	48	0%
<b>France</b>	508932	24%	515230	24%	525395	24%	535628	24%	539907	25%
<b>Greece</b>	182692	33%	203509	34%	228910	35%	244131	37%	213721	35%
<b>Croatia</b>	41691	34%	43832	35%	47735	35%	45076	33%	42257	30%
<b>Hungary</b>	15021	4%	20321	5%	23614	5%	25039	6%	26066	6%
<b>Ireland</b>	64873	36%	63194	34%	55938	30%	54128	29%	54499	29%
<b>Iceland</b>	742	6%	699	5%	609	4%	389	2%	300	2%
<b>Italy</b>	20868	1%	21933	1%	21480	1%	13911	1%	10518	1%
<b>Japan</b>	974733	24%	983241	24%	981665	24%	967811	24%	922608	23%
<b>Lithuania</b>	48058	29%	52119	29%	56572	29%	56781	29%	56313	28%
<b>Luxembourg</b>	1216	40%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Latvia</b>	22402	19%	15191	12%	17249	13%	18017	14%	19242	15%
<b>Malta</b>	1929	22%	1143	15%	1341	14%	1205	14%	1403	14%
<b>Netherlands</b>	6603	1%	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0%
<b>Norway</b>	7178	3%	4347	2%	2667	1%	1952	1%	1811	1%
<b>Poland</b>	20745	1%	22355	1%	22429	1%	23200	1%	22933	1%
<b>Portugal</b>	5466	1%	5097	1%	4888	1%	4233	1%	2931	1%
<b>Rumania</b>	50892	8%	46172	7%	43192	6%	27872	3%	12937	1%
<b>Sweden</b>	14464	3%	16792	4%	17851	4%	20391	5%	21608	5%
<b>Slovenia</b>	50885	50%	51862	50%	55105	49%	51774	45%	48937	42%
<b>Slovakia</b>	6118	4%	5259	3%	4676	3%	2824	1%	2241	1%

Turkey	575712	30%	562677	29%	615534	29%	684986	29%	717648	29%
UK	748687	33%	512831	23%	517248	23%	511883	22%	516200	22%
USA	3871711	23%	3574027	21%	3635864	21%	3671135	21%	3725672	21%
Australia	178973	18%	164388	17%	163386	17%	159044	16%	169640	16%
New Zealand	50873	27%	59740	25%	60958	26%	63354	27%	65208	28%

(\*) HE - students in all programs of higher education ISCED 5A, ISCED 5B and ISCED 6

2.2.6 **Analysis and trends** based on the quantitative characteristics of Bulgarian higher education in accordance with the information specified in Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4

The following **conclusions** can be drawn from the above presented data:

1. No new HEI has been established in Bulgaria during the last five years. The total number of HEIs was 53 in 2004 and continues to be the same in 2009

2. The private universities, which were established as of 2004 and were 16 in number, remain the same in 2009. Of all universities in Bulgaria, 70 percent are state owned and 30 percent privately owned.

The National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation reports that it has reviewed 14 projects for the creation of new private HEIs in the period 2005- 2009, out of which 4 received positive assessment, but none has passed the formal voting procedure in the Bulgarian National Assembly as it is the procedure under the Higher Education Act. This shows the extreme conservativeness of the higher education system in Bulgaria and lack of competition between universities.

3. Among the 53 HEIs in Bulgaria there are 10 independent colleges offering three-year education at the study level ISCED 5B, 9 of which are private and one is public. **The share of colleges in the total number of HEIs is 18.9% and 90% of the colleges are private.** The number of colleges affiliated with the public universities progressively declined from 40 in 2004/2005 to 28 in 2008/2009.

4. The total number of students in higher education marks an almost continuous decline since 1999 when it was 270 000. Over the past three years the trend started to increase and only in 2009 it reached 274 000 students (including the PhD students). This means that the total number of students increased by only 1.5% over the past 10 years.

*In Bulgaria the Ministry of Education and Science determines annually the number of students to be trained in public HEIs, so that the number of newly admitted students is known. Under paragraph 31 of the current Higher Education Act the underused capacity of public HEIs and professional fields is absorbed by stages, as follows: 2007/2008 up to 25%, 2008/2009 - 50%, 2009/2010 - 75%, 2010/2011 up to 100%. This means that the public HEIs do not utilize the increased admission capacity event though they offer free education. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science applies restrictive admission measures in the private HEIs, leading to a paradox - the state does not fund private universities, but limits the number of students that they should admit. As the data indicate there is a stable trend of enrollment increase in the private HEIs, despite the restrictive measures taken by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, the significantly higher tuition fees, and the unfair competition between public and private universities.*

5. Analysis of data for the last five years shows the following trends:

The total number of students in higher education increase from 238 000 to 274 000, or by 15%, with the same total number of universities in the country.

The total number of students in private HEIs increases from 39 000 to 58 000, or by 48.7%.

The share of students in private HEIs is 21.17%, which means that of all students in Bulgaria - 21% study in private HEIs and 79% study in public HEIs.

The colleges train 28 000 students in total. In the past five years their number has increased from 18 000 to 28 000, which means that there is an increase of 55.6% in the number of students who opted for short higher

education programs. Within the total number of students in colleges, the number of students in the private colleges increased from 6 thousand to 19 thousand i.e. almost three times. The number of students in colleges is 10.2 % of the total number of students in higher education and 32.8 % of the total number of students in private HEIs for the academic year 2008/2009.

The largest share of students study in field of "Science and Business Administration" - 41.6%, followed by the students in fields of "Social Sciences and Human Behavior" - 19.6%, and "Sport, Tourism and Hospitality Management" - 12.4%.

6. According to the data from EUROSTAT and OECD in 2007 (Table 4) about 2.5 million students have been trained in programs for higher education ISCED 5B in the 27 EU countries (or about 13 % of all students in higher education programs). For the U.S, they account for 21 % of all students, while in Bulgaria the number of students studying at the ISCED 5B level was 10% of the total number of students in 2007.

Many higher education programs ISCED 5B are with duration of 2 years and can be defined as short-cycle higher education in accordance with the Bologna process. In 2005 in Denmark about 18 500 students (9% of all students) were trained in two-year programs for higher education. During the academic year 2007/2008 about 20 300 students have been trained in Latvia in this type of program (16% of the total number of students). During the academic year 2006 / 2007 in Turkey around 717 650 students (more than 29 % of all students) were trained in two-year programs of higher education towards an "Associate Degree". In Britain, a two-year degree ("Foundation Degree") was introduced in 2001 and almost 72 000 students enrolled in programs towards a "Foundation Degree" in the academic year 2007 /2008, while by 2010 that number is expected to reach 97 000 (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2007, 2008).

In most European countries the ISCED 5B programs are offered by universities or in cooperation with universities and are recognized as part of higher education. In the attached table Appendix № 1 are listed the institutions, which offer degree programs at level ISCED 5B. As the table in Annex 1 indicates, in several European countries, universities and other higher education schools beyond colleges offer training grade ISCED 5B, as well as the levels ISCED 5A and 6. Such is the practice in Austria, France, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Norway, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Scotland and others. Furthermore, in many other countries, other institutions of higher education beyond colleges offer these programs: Denmark, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania and Netherlands. The only countries offering training for ISCED 5B level only in colleges are Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Luxembourg and Spain. Most often the main and sometimes sole purpose of these programs is to offer short-term vocational training that is not related to previous education. This does not exclude the possibility to use credits from these programs in further education. The main objective of the short-term professional degree programs at ISCED 5B is to offer short professional courses aimed directly at the labor market. In most cases, these programs provide professional qualifications. Because most of them are related to higher education, these programs encourage young people to return to study at a later stage in their lives. Only in countries where there are flexible learning paths and smooth transition from ISCED 5B to another level of education, these programs are considered preparatory for further education.

Appendix 2 presents a table of the training duration and certification methods of ISCED 5B programs in some European countries. There has been an exceptional variety in both the training duration and certification models of the short-term programs. Now, most countries in Europe are switching to short undergraduate programs of up to 3 years (Bekh Radnia, 2004). According to Osnevski, "In Europe we have mainly the following educational scheme: 180 credits for the award of a Bachelor's degree plus 120 credits for a Master's degree, with some countries, like the Netherlands and Sweden, also offering a combination of 180 credits for a Bachelor's and a further 60 credits for a Master's degree. (*data from the Survey "Degree in "Specialist of ..." at higher professional education in Bulgaria - current state and problems", prepared by Snezana Slancheva, Julia Pashkina and others in 2005*)

**One of the main difficulties for the introduction of short-cycle education in Bulgaria is mainly due to the lack of established flexible learning paths and smooth transition to a higher level of education.** This is due to several reasons, namely:

The academic autonomy, which is incorporated in the Higher Education Act, authorizes universities, specialized higher schools and colleges to develop independently qualification characteristics and curricula of their majors. The regulation of this process is done with the Ordinance on State Requirements for obtaining the academic degrees of "Bachelor", "Master" and "Specialist" (the Ordinance was published in 2002, last amended in

2003, while the replacement of the degree "Specialist" with the degree "Professional Bachelor" in 2007 is not covered by the Ordinance. The Ministerial Council's of Decree 162/2002 adopts the Ordinance). The requirements for higher education in the relevant degrees were considered above in section 2.2.3 and 2.2.4. They indicated that there is no significant difference in the learning outcomes of the two degrees - Bachelor and Professional Bachelor. Moreover this applies to the training programs and curricula - it is difficult to distinguish between the university and non-university programs as regards their goals, purpose and functions.

Let us see a little more in detail how the new "professional bachelor" degree was accepted in the Bulgarian academic community because it is highly significant for introducing short-cycle qualifications in the first level of higher education. In 2007, the academic community in Bulgaria was divided over the issue. The private HEIs - both colleges and universities fully supported the replacement. This is understandable, since they are not financially supported by the state and the efficiency of their education programs is assessed by their customers - i.e. the students - who seek a fast realization on the labor market and opportunities to acquire a higher degree of education for shorter periods of study. In contrast, the vast majority of public universities, presented by the Council of Rectors, expressed strongly negative attitude towards the new degree. Herewith we present quotations from two interviews, which are particularly indicative of the mood in society caused by the change in the Higher Education Act:

"The Governing Board of the Council of Rectors has a completely negative position on the introduction of the "Professional Bachelor" degree and the reasons for this are the following: the introduction of the "Professional Bachelor" degree "blasted" the possibility of the universities to switch from a 4+1+3-year to a 3+2+3-year system of training. No university in the presence of a three-year "Professional Bachelor" degree will accept its "Bachelor" degree to be obtained also after a three-year period of education. In practice, the professional bachelors started to be appreciated a lot more by the business than the university bachelors. Their diplomas containing the term "professional" and therefore employers presumably decide that this is these are the men they need – professionals ..." (Quotation from the interview "A Rector - Four Years Later"; Source: (<http://www.azbuki.eu>)).

Another interview states the opinion that our colleges are now in European education level ISCED B5 and have to stay there. The emergence of a low baccalaureate does not meet the employment needs in the labor market and is inexplicable. Other representatives of the academic community strongly oppose the idea that the "Professional Bachelors" could study further to aspire after a "Bachelor" or "Master" degree, as they prepare directly for the labor market. (Publication of "Word" Newspaper - "Rectors are against both bachelors"; Source: (<http://money.ibox.bg/news/>)).

The difficulties in establishing a "Professional Bachelor" degree, again shows the need to search for a different approach when introducing the short cycle.

### **3. The place of the short-cycle higher education in the Bulgarian higher education system.**

In the statement above, we described some key features of the Bulgarian education system and in particular the system of higher education. In the attempt to define the place of the short cycle in the existing system of higher education in Bulgaria, we shall once again summarize the main features which have a direct impact on the creation of opportunities for introducing the short-cycle higher education (SCHE) in Bulgaria. Equally important are the public attitude and established traditions in higher education. In order to characterize more accurately the attitudes of young people to the opportunities that the SCHE provides, we conducted a sociological research, the results of which are presented in the subsequent chapters of this study. 2164 students were interviewed. Some of the findings are confirmed by the published results of a national survey on the professional orientation and motivation of students in Bulgaria, conducted by Mondays Inside / Hewitt Associates to Bulgaria in 2008, which was extended to 12,477 students from 37 universities and 71 majors. The following trends were identified in the course of both studies:

- Students choose to study three years instead of four years towards a "Bachelor" degree. They prefer quick access to the labor market and to an ongoing training for master's degree. Only 15 % of respondents chose as motivation cost saving and demand for opportunities to complete their higher education gradually. This conclusion is confirmed by data from national studies showing that 70% of students do not work during their studies, 30 % intend to seek permanent employment after completing their Bachelor degrees and 18% after completing their Master degrees. 42% of the students surveyed intend to seek employment abroad;
- The larger part of students (over 70%) are not familiar with the opportunities of SCHE within the higher education system;



➤ Over 69% of the respondents would choose to complete higher education abroad due to better quality, large choice of courses, credit transfer and mobility opportunities, which are among the necessary conditions, without which it is impossible to introduce the short cycle. Students emphasize that there is no flexibility in our system, there is no individual selection of courses and subjects, no real opportunities for transfer of credits, there are no good conditions for mobility between different disciplines and universities in Bulgaria, the transfer of students is accompanied by heavy bureaucratic procedures, introducing additionally a large number of tests and large-scale of equivalency fees and no real intent on behalf of the universities to assist their students in their transfer or to accept students from other schools.

➤ Over 57% of respondents confirmed their interest in two-year higher education with the expressed desire to pursue training for higher academic degrees. The students who believe that two years' training gives them little chance of a successful professional realization are not less in number - 33.15% of respondents, while 28.4% believe that SCHE is less prestigious in society than the traditional undergraduate education.

However, the benefits from the introduction of the SCHE are indisputable and are generally supported by the business, student and academic communities in Bulgaria.

According to the respondents, the introduction of the SCHE would:

- Improve the access to higher education of all social groups, including socially disadvantaged youth;
- Enable higher education to include people of all ages, including those who need retraining. Lifelong learning will actually be incorporated into the higher education system by introducing short-cycle training and short-cycle higher education;
- Create greater opportunities for mobility of students, opportunities for flexible training and positioning of students in the focus of the education process;
- Create an opportunity to reform the traditional Bulgarian system of higher education.

These conclusions were drawn by series of studies, public discussions, focus-group and round-table discussions held for one year under the project " SCHE in Europe and the US: Addressing Social and Economic Needs. The background materials of the studies are contained in subsequent chapters of this study.

### **Problems faced by the Bulgarian higher education that are limiting the introduction of the short cycle.**

- Limited access to higher education, control of inputs rather than outputs of the system regulating the admission numbers even in private HEIs, the existence of the ambition "to enter the University at any cost and as long to go stay there" in many students.
- Limited admission quotas in the private HEIs, which are more managed flexibly by definition, which obstructs the mobility of students between schools of various types, disciplines and forms of education. The state does not provide any support to private HEIs.
- The system of financing of higher education provides state subsidies based on the number of the trained students. This system leads to the policy of state universities, which are the majority in Bulgaria, to keep their students as long as possible to receive more grants. This method of funding is the main reason why HEIs are not looking for flexible learning paths and create barriers to student mobility. This system does not promote good learning outcomes and does not stimulate the competition among the HEIs.
- There is a variety of subjects; the HEIs lose their specific character; each HEI teaches almost all courses, while remaining closed and limiting the mobility of students; on the opposite the HEIs create difficulties before the transfer and continuing education of students in other HEIs. It can be assumed that this conservativeness of the education system and inefficient management foster the public HEIs to oppose the introduction of SCHE since this would entail shortening the training periods and less state subsidies.
- There is no competition between universities and no will for introducing flexible learning processes; there is a lack of motivation to improve quality and attract greater numbers of students. The establishment of new HEIs is almost impossible due to long, nontransparent and cumbersome procedures. The lack of new universities creates a sense of tranquility and absence of competition among the existing HEIs. The competition with foreign universities is missing, since the state established a number of regulatory obstacles to their opening in the country. The HEIs impose unrealistic fees for students' transfer and do not recognize credits from other universities.
- The state, represented by the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation, has monopolized the accreditation processes and the quality evaluation of education is carried out solely by national agencies. There is no external evaluation, which may require universities to change their education policies and improve their

management to the benefit primarily of the students. The participation of young academics in the HEIs' management is non-existent, since they have no legal right to participate in the management organs before they defend readership, which is a process ending at the age of 45-50 under the current procedures for academic recognition in Bulgaria.

- The professional development of young scientists is slow, performed centrally and in no way promotes the academic competitiveness in higher education. Bulgaria is currently last regarding the level of competitiveness in higher education in the European Union and regarding the level of competitiveness of its economy in general by ranking 76<sup>th</sup> among 133 countries. This is a further evidence of the lack of efficient education management in the Bulgarian HEIs.
- The students are not allowed to choose subjects in the curricula of various disciplines, which make mobility difficult even within the same university.
- The curricula in the same field of education are very diverse and incompatible, which makes it impossible to transfer credits and requires a further increase of the duration of training in the transfer of students between two universities.
- Business representatives do not participate in the evaluation of the learning outcomes; there is a considerable gap between the employment expectations of the business and the actual qualification of university graduates. The businesses do not appreciate the different degrees and put more emphasis on the acquired competencies and skills rather than the degree.

Above-mentioned problems in the Bulgarian system of higher education is giving us a reason to believe a specific approach should be applied to the introduction of SCHE, rather than mechanically transfer the good practices of some European countries and the US.

### **Possible approaches to the introduction of SCHE according to the specifics of the Bulgarian education system and its national characteristics**

The Higher School "International University College" has an established practice of introducing a two-year course of study within higher education. In 2008 a HRC Culinary Academy was established within the College to carry out professional training in cookery and culinary arts. The training is built on a modular basis. It includes the specialized professional training and practical training, courses on the theory of the profession and intense study of English as a foreign language. The students at the HRC Culinary Academy can complete their training after a two-year cycle, obtaining a third degree of vocational qualification for the profession of "Chef". The lack of a legal opportunity under the Higher Education Act for awarding a national diploma upon the completion of two-year training without acquiring an academic degree does not allow this cycle to be incorporated in the formal system of higher education. The HRC's students who wish to continue their education to obtain higher degrees continue their studies for another two-year period and along with the "Chef" qualification they receive a diploma and professional degree in hospitality management. This practice indicates a good way of introducing a short cycle based on the restructuring of the majors' curricula to introduce more practical training and internships in the first two years of study and build more theoretical knowledge over the next two years. There are various options of restructuring the curriculum. Practice and business will demonstrate the existence of a number of opportunities in the widest range of professions. The European experience shows that the short cycle does not necessarily need to be associated with a new type of educational institutions or a specific type of higher schools that offer only two-year training programs. A significantly easier and better approach would be to transform the curriculum and creating opportunities for the development of curricula, allowing for a gradual completion of higher education.

At national level it is necessary to introduce a national diploma after a two-year period of study, as it is practiced in several European countries. The adoption of this approach - to reform the education process so as the short-cycle to be implemented by all relevant institutions of higher education, and not only specifically designated institutions to be allowed to train in a short cycle - would reflect very favorably on the Bulgarian education system and the Bulgarian society.

### **CONCLUSION:**

This study is far from covering the whole issue of introducing the short-cycle higher education in the Bulgarian education system. It is only the initial step for the studying the public attitudes and opportunities. For the successful introduction of the short cycle a combination of the efforts of all stakeholders – government, universities and businesses - is required. Bulgaria can not stay away from the new developments of the Bologna process.

Outlining the place of the short-cycle higher education and the introduction of a national framework of qualifications in higher education are activities that require broad public debate and stakeholders' support. The change of laws and regulations alone cannot realize the modernization of the Bulgarian higher education system; the entire society must be included in that process. With this research Higher School "International University College" aims to launch a public debate and support the project "Short-cycle Higher Education in the U.S. and Europe: Addressing Social and Economic Needs". This is of particular importance and contribution to the promotion of short-cycle qualifications.

## II. CHAPTER TWO

### REPORT 2

## Effectiveness and quality of higher education and the place of short-cycle higher education in the system of higher education

*Round-table discussion, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Dobrich, Bulgaria*

A round-table discussion on the topic “Problems of the effectiveness and quality of higher education and the place of short-cycle higher education in the Bulgarian system of higher education” was held on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008, from 16:00 o'clock, room 203 of International University College in the town of Dobrich

The round table session was organized in the framework of the project “Short-Cycle Higher Education in Europe and the US: Addressing Social and Economic Needs” 2008-2010 in the Atlantis Programme – EU-US Cooperation in Higher Education and Vocational Training, financed by the European Commission.

#### **Aims of the round-table discussion:**

- ❖ To analyze the current effectiveness of higher education and its relationship with business and economic development;
- ❖ To identify methods for increasing the quality of higher education in Bulgaria and applicable good practices from the experience of EU member states and the United States;
- ❖ To identify the role of short-cycle higher education in the Bulgarian higher education system and the aspects for its development.

#### **Participants:**

- ❖ Joop Vinke and Silvia van der Carmen (Arnhem Business School, the Netherlands), Rodica Craciun (Ovidius High School, Constanta, Romania), Pirkko Varis and Camilla Kalevo (Pirkanmaa University of Applied sciences, Finland).
- ❖ Assoc. Prof. Todor Radev, PhD, Stanislav Ivanov, PhD, Klara Dimitrova (International University College, Dobrich, Bulgaria).
- ❖ Vesselin Blagoev, PhD (Portsmouth University, United Kingdom), Prof. Marin Neshkov (University of Economics, Varna, Bulgaria).

#### **Topics, discussed during the round table:**

- ❖ “The place of short-cycle education in the frames of European higher education systems”;
- ❖ “Effectiveness and quality of higher education in Bulgaria”

### **I. Introduction**

During the first part of the round-table discussion the regulatory framework in higher education in Bulgaria and the timeline of the development of legislation in that field was introduced.

**Exposé of the introduction, presented by Assoc. Prof. Todor Radev, PhD, Rector of International University College and Manager of the Project SCHE in Europe and the US: Addressing Social and Economic Needs”:**

“The regulatory basis of Bulgarian higher education was placed in the beginning of the ‘90’s. The new Law on higher education, adopted in 1995 was supposed to reflect the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic approach in higher education. The radical change in economic conditions – the closure of structurally determining industrial enterprises, privatization, the commencement of small and medium sized private businesses, had to find an adequate place in the educational policy of the country.

14 years have passed since the Law on higher education was passed, it has undergone 25 amendments during this time, but none of them were able to reflect entirely the contemporary requirements. The large structurally determining industrial enterprises and the well-developed heavy industry were replaced by small and medium sized companies, which currently produce more than 90% of the GDP of the country. Drastic changes occurred in the industrial development of the country – from heavy industry our economy switched to the development of the light industry, services, tourism, and agriculture. These changes on a national level had an effect on the labor market and the need of the specialists with a new profile and competences. Thousands of highly-profiled specialists appeared on the labor market, whose expertise was no longer needed by the contemporary society. The labor market needed a new type of education, new qualifications, compatible with the new technologies, introduced in Europe.

The membership of Bulgarian in the European Union presented more challenges to the Bulgarian higher education. Global and European trends in social development required quick and adequate changes in the aims, forms and content of university education, the introduction of the internet and computer technologies imposed completely different education methods. Knowledge was constantly updated, every three to four years, and global access to information imposed a change in the appearance of higher education. From retention and reproduction of information, the aim of higher education was transferred to helping the students seek, find, analyze and interpret information themselves”.

*What happened to the Bulgarian universities and how did they respond to the challenges, created by the changes? How does Bulgarian society view those changes?*

It is an honor for Bulgaria that it was one of the first countries to have joined the Bologna declaration. The social expectations for changes in higher education, resulting from our forthcoming in the EU, were immense. Within a short period of time of 5-10 years, Bulgarian society had to consider and overcome all inhibitions of the totalitarian era – to embrace the idea that, apart from state universities, private universities can also be created. Society had to appreciate the fact that private universities also provide high-quality higher education, to accept new educational degrees – Bachelor, Master, and Specialist, to apprehend new types of higher education institutions – universities, colleges, and professional colleges following secondary education. Upon the introduction of the degree structure, society had to realize that the completion of higher education is a process, which can continue over the years and does not prevent young people from being successful on the labor market during the different stages of its completion. It had to accept the concept that higher education in numerous European countries is affordable for Bulgarians as well, and that young people have the right and opportunity to choose where and how to receive their higher education.

The change in circumstances in Europe, the wide open doors of European universities, and to a great extent those of American universities, also meant a change in Bulgarian higher education. It had to respond quickly to the competition on a European and global level.

## **II. Problems for higher education in Bulgaria:**

During the second part of the round table session the problems of higher education were discussed, focus accent being placed on the following issues:

### **1. Limiting the access to higher education. Control at the “entrance”, not the “exit” of the system.**

According to the participants in the round table, Bulgarian universities have continued by totalitarian tradition to narrow the entrance, not the exit of higher education. In comparison, in Germany the access at the entry to higher education is relatively wide, but all applicants know in advance that if 800 were accepted, 300 must remain. The control is mainly at the exit, not the entrance of the system. In Bulgaria it continues to be the opposite, contrary to European, as well as global trends. The efforts of young people are aimed at the entrance to higher education, instead of the exit. The ambition to enroll in a university at all cost is one of the main reasons for corruption, because once you are admitted to a university, it starts receiving financing for your education and no state university would terminate your education and consequently decrease its state financing.

In order to solve this problem, the participants believe that it is necessary to raise the assessment criteria, which will also improve the quality of higher education.

## **2. Financing of higher education institutions.**

The participants of the round table also discussed the issue of the financing of higher education institutions in Bulgaria. According to them, the allocation of state financing based on “number of students enrolled” is in need of a drastic change. As a result of the principle used, in order to protect their budget, universities decrease their requirements to students (an admission at the “entrance”, semester exams, student position, state final exams). Decreasing the level of control and maintaining low standards, the management of higher education institutions attempts to keep the students in the universities in order to preserve the financing. This common practice in state universities is one of the main reasons for deterioration of the quality and the effectiveness of higher education.

That is why the currently applied system of budget financing fails to create competition between higher education institutions and to stimulate quality.

Those present at the round table expressed the view that the available financial resources in higher education institutions are not used in a highly ineffective manner. Only a small portion of them is actually invested in the teaching process, and the share for science is minute. Frequently, there is a lack of purposeful efforts to provide sources outside the budget, or the joint use of facilities and personnel by several higher education institutions.

According to the participants, this situation is inevitably felt by the users of higher education. Those of them, who are more ambitious and seek quality education, turn to foreign universities to graduate, considering the large access to education abroad.

Mrs. Klara Dimitrova shared that the data from a survey performed among Bulgarian students indicated that more than 1/3 of them would receive higher education abroad and the only factor stopping them is family and financial problems or uncertainty in their own potential.

## **3. Types of higher education institutions.**

Those present at the round table concurred on the opinion, that the variety of higher education in Europe and the world and the requirements of the Bologna process have gradually imposed the opening of different types of higher education institutions in Bulgaria. Apart from universities and specialized higher education institutions, a different type of higher education institutions was created over the years – colleges, and the college institutes from the totalitarian era were closed.

The representatives of the academic community expressed the opinion that the democratization of the higher education system has allowed any institute and university to offer a wide range of programs. This led to the combination of academic education with professional education within the same university.

Even though they offer a wide variety of programs, the facilities of the state universities is obsolete, and lacks modern equipment, which is needed to carry out practical training. That is why theoretical education predominates at the universities, which contradicts to international practices and standards, and fails to provide students with the knowledge and skills, needed for successful career on the labor market.

According to the participants in the round table, the long imposition among Bulgarian society of a hierarchical structure of universities, according to which the most prestigious are the oldest state universities, followed by the private universities, state colleges and lastly, private colleges, has formed a negative outlook among prospective applicants. This imposed widespread social view that higher education needs to be acquired from the so-called “prestigious higher education institutions” is one of the factors leading to a lack of understanding and a negative perception of the short-cycle education.

## **4. Competition among higher education institutions.**

Another issue, which was discussed at the round table, was the fact that in Bulgaria, despite the decreased enrollment of students and the wide-open doors of the state universities, still no real competition exists in regard to the student recruitment campaigns. According to representatives of the academic community, that is so because state universities do not have the interest or motivation to strive for increasing the quality of the education offered and offering a greater variety of academic programs, conformable to the requirements of the labor market and international academic programs. The guaranteed financing from the state is one of the factors affecting the lack of motivation to offer better quality. The other reason is that, due to the low tuition fees, state universities are the preferred higher education institutions.

At this point no competition among the universities in Bulgaria and the European universities abroad exists, as the state has an active policy not to allow foreign higher education institutions to open branches in Bulgaria. In order to allow foreign universities to open branches, the procedure needs to be made easier and less bureaucratic. Those present take the view that there is a lack of a real and effective partnership between universities and other education institutions, which is one of the main obstacles for student mobility.

Practically, instead of cooperating for the benefit of students, universities impede student mobility by introducing excessive fees for transferring from one university to another and unneeded transfer exams.

For example, the transfer of a student in his second year of study in the “Marketing and management in hospitality and tourism” program from a private college to a state college costs the students a minimum of 2000 BGN /this equals the tuition fees for three and a half semesters in the private college, in addition to 7 transfer exams/. There are even more serious problems when it comes to a transfer of a student from one university to another /only for the withdrawal of his/her diploma for secondary education, the student has to pay a fee of 1000 BGN, which is a decision of the rector of the Technical University in Varna/. This is one of the main impediments for the introduction of the short-cycle education in the frame of higher education, since there is no practice for credit transfer and student mobility between higher education institutions, even though a credit transfer regulation was accepted and each higher education institution has developed a credit transfer system.

***The system for credit accrual and credit transfer*** needs to be improved by:

- ❖ acknowledging the individual work of the students, their practical training, social and work experience, related to the learning process;
- ❖ using it for sizing the engagement and level of difficulty of the academic tasks, which are included in the academic process;
- ❖ transferring credits not only between higher education institutions, but inside the institution as well;
- ❖ credit accrual in specific circumstances should be able to lead to a new academic degree in life long learning

Despite the formal existence of this system, those present believe that in Bulgaria there is no actual possibility for credit transfer between the different Bulgarian universities – i.e. the system exists formally, but an actual acknowledgement of the credits would lead to the acknowledgement of the respective study periods and would consequently decrease the financial aid for the host university. This can be classified as the greatest disadvantage of the current system and a major obstruction for the introduction of the short-cycle education. In Bulgaria the majority of universities are owned by the state, with 85% of all students studying in the state universities. These universities receive state grants for each student enrolled, regardless of the quality of the education that they provide. The introduction of a short-cycle education e.g. for the degree “professional bachelor” would be relatively easy to achieve after changing the current regulatory framework in the country, but at the same time there are no sufficient grounds to believe that the system in state universities would change to such an extent that they would accept short-cycle higher education, provided by other colleges or institutions, unless there are legal sanctions in case students’ rights to transfer to other universities or programs are impeded.

## **5. Increase of students’ access through state loans and grants for education**

During the round table were also discussed the opportunities for financial help to stimulate student enrollment and aid students' education. The short-cycle education is a good option for a lot of students. In Bulgaria, the institutions which offer a degree of professional bachelor /the existing shorter academic degree, which hosts the largest number of students/, are private institutions, which have not been aided by the state neither with financial resources, not institutional assistance. In order to establish a private higher education institution, according to the Law on higher education, the founder has to own the school premises, the equipment and furniture.

The investment of a considerable amount of resources and the long period of return is one of the issues which encourage the founder of higher education institutions to prefer long-cycle education, rather than two years. On the other hand, these institutions are more flexible and adaptive, and open for academic agreements for short-cycle education forms.

The state tried to aid the financing of higher education institutions, accepting a Law on student loans after a year-long discussion, which is not being put to practice.

According to those present, it can be regarded as a positive initiative on behalf of the state that there are student grants for state, as well as private universities, which was not possible until a few years ago.

The student grants for private schools and the introduction of student loans could be used as mechanisms for the introduction of short-cycle education.

## 6. The autonomy of Bulgarian HEIs

Another major issue, which was discussed during the round table, was the so-called autonomy of Bulgarian HEIs, which is underlined in the current Higher Education Act.

The autonomy of the universities has various aspects and according to the current law, it comprises of freedom in the choice of programs, academic documentation, academic curriculums, and management bodies, etc.

In the beginning of the democratic changes the self-governance of higher education institutions was legally supported by the *Law on academic autonomy of higher education institutions*, which was incorporated in the Law on higher education five years later.

In spite of the Law, those present were unanimous that currently Bulgarian state higher education institutions have a great degree of academic autonomy, however for which there are no clear criteria or regulatory standards. Even though they use state property and receive state subsidizing, their autonomy is not balanced to their responsibilities for the state and the users. The academic bodies for management of the state higher education institutions are comprised of individuals from the higher education institutions and are managed mainly to the benefit of their teachers and management. The academic body is usually interested in maintaining the status quo, including the resource-oriented model of institutional financing.

Another problem, which was discussed at the round table, was the choice of a rector among the individuals with an academic rank of the higher education institutions, which does not guarantee his social responsibility, but often expresses his loyalty to the teachers and employees, who have chosen him and whose interests he protects. These interests not always coincide with the interests of the users – the state, students, employers and society.

According to the representatives of the academic community who participated in the round table, the current regulatory basis and the existing practice does not provide access of young teachers to the management of higher education institutions. The current Law on higher education divides the members of the academic personnel to those owning an academic rank and those not owning one.

This practice is only typical for the Bulgarian HEIs and differs drastically from the European practice, where the PhD degree is the most endorsed one. In Bulgaria, young teachers have no opportunity to participate in the management bodies of the universities. The quota principle of representation of teachers with an academic rank for the most part (and not PhD's), and on the other hand the quotas for representation of administration, students and



PhD students, does not allow the youngest teachers most devoted to science, holding a PhD degree, to participate actively in the management of universities. It appears that the reform in Bulgarian higher education has to be done by professors and associate professors, whose average age is above 60 years, instead of the young and ambitious individuals.

All present unanimously supported the opinion that it is necessary to perform a reform in this field, to remove the age discrimination and to allow young teacher to participate actively and effectively in the management of universities.

## **7. Assessment of the quality of education**

In regard to the quality of higher education, there are procedures for quality assessment, but their performance is assessed formally. The self-assessment reports of higher education institutions on the quality of education provided by them do not affect the grade of the National agency for assessment and accreditation or the granted state budgets. More than 75% of the state universities receive a Very good grade upon accreditation, and most colleges – a Good grade. There is a conflict of interests between the assessing independent experts, who teach in other universities. There is a lack of external expert assessment by foreign experts. When assessing quality, the consequent careers of the students are not taken into consideration. The procedures are long, complicated and bureaucratic; the quantity parameters for quality assessment do not present an accurate view of the quality of the education in the universities. In this aspect, the quality of short-cycle education as a first cycle of a Bachelor degree could be assessed through the existing procedures, but the host universities themselves do not wish to acknowledge the quality of the education, offered by another higher education institution.

### *7.1. Quality management and control.*

The last issue discussed was related to the quality management and control. The academic management of each higher education institution announces to the students, the state and society the strategic aims in regard to the quality (of education, scientific research, management of the academic process), which comply with the socio-economic changes, and once per annum publicly reports how the announced quality policy was performed. However, the quality control systems are formal, since the universities do not invest any efforts in improving the quality of the education they offer. The main reason for this is the lack of actual market conditions and competition among most state universities in Bulgaria. The introduction of a short cycle without criteria for quality and procedures for quality control, developed in advance, would discredit this form of education. Currently, in Bulgaria a considerable drop in the quality of higher education can be observed, as a result of which the participants of the round table share the idea that the introduction of the short cycle must be done at a time, when the Bulgarian education system has solved its problems with offering high-quality education.

In conclusion, the participants in the round table united on the following: The Bulgarian higher education system is in need of compliance with the trends of the Bologna process. In this regard, it is necessary to adopt an overall Strategy on the development of higher education, which will facilitate the introduction of the short cycle. It is preferable to initiate a national debate to discuss the opportunities and most suitable forms for introduction of the short-cycle higher education as part of the higher education system in Bulgaria. It is of great importance to develop a short-cycle model, specific to the Bulgarian conditions.

***Klara Dimitrova***

***Vice Rector of International University College, Dobrich, Bulgaria***

### III. CHAPTER THREE

#### ANALYSIS 1.

#### Results of a Conducted Sociological Survey on the Place of Short-Cycle Higher Education in the Bulgarian System of Higher Education

Period of the conducted survey: November 2008 - October 2009

#### STAGE 1

#### INTRODUCTION

The contemporary era is marked by *EXTENSIVE* globalization and creates challenges at all levels of public life. The sphere of education and training, whose main social function is to enable the country's human resources to cope with the growing social risks and challenges related to globalization, is no exception. The key public spheres that lead this process are the systems of elementary and secondary education, the system of higher education, and the systems of vocational retraining and "lifelong learning". The modernization of traditional education and the improvement of the system of vocational retraining are essential for the successful adaptation of Bulgarian society to the new public and political realities, as well as for the prospects of long-term development.

In implementation of the Project "Short-Cycle Higher Education in Europe and the US: Addressing Social and Economic Needs", in the frame of the Atlantis Programme "EU-US Cooperation in Higher Education and Vocational Training", financed by the European Commission, a working team at the International University College has carried out a series of sociological surveys on the place of short-cycle higher education in the system of higher education in Bulgaria. The team has researched the opinion of different target groups, including students and trainees enrolled in short-cycle education programmes, as well as representatives of the academic senates of a number of educational institutions, lecturers, and NGOs working on issues related to education in Bulgaria. The survey presented here constitutes the first stage of research on the issues discussed above. Since short-cycle higher education leading to a nationally recognized higher education diploma has not been introduced in Bulgaria, this survey has focused on the opinion of students and trainees enrolled in different forms of short-cycle post-secondary education and training and on their views regarding the place of short-cycle higher education in Bulgaria.

#### I. THE PLACE OF SHORT-CYCLE HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE BULGARIAN SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

##### 1. Purpose, theses, target group and methodology of the survey

**1.1. Purpose:** To verify the general research thesis and the additional hypotheses.

**1.2. The general research thesis, supported by most of the representatives of the target group,** is: Since short-cycle higher education is not introduced and is not widely known and popular in Bulgaria, short-cycle higher education in the frame of the Bulgarian higher education system and leading to a national higher education diploma has to be offered by existing established and accredited higher education institutions. These institutions should be allowed to offer two-year programmes leading to higher education, without the acquisition of an education and qualification degree, and allowing a relatively faster entry into the labour market.

**1.3 An additional hypothesis complementing the general thesis:**

1. The character of higher education in Bulgaria is still “elitist” and students prefer traditional universities and higher education institutions, as well as traditional education modes and educational degrees that are currently well known and perceived as prestigious in Bulgarian society and business.
2. Specialized vocational training is offered by institutions outside the higher education system. This training leads to a qualification degree / from first to fourth qualification degree/ and is recognized by business, as well as by other EU countries /with the exception of training in the regulated professions/ and is perceived as prestigious by society and by employers. In spite of all this, **educational pathways** connecting the different forms and levels of post-secondary vocational training with higher education currently **do not exist** in Bulgaria.
3. The mobility of students in Bulgarian universities is limited. There are no possibilities to select among different educational courses and to transfer credits between different types of educational institutions in Bulgaria or between different degree programmes offered within a single institution, and this is one of the main factors for the introduction of short-cycle forms of education within higher education.

1.4. **The target group** of the survey: 1152 students and 124 students enrolled in specialization courses, studying at 6 higher schools that offer 3-year long study programmes; 8 students studying at 5 colleges in the system of vocational training that offer 2-year long study programmes; 642 participants in vocational training offered by 11 Vocational Training Centres (VTCs); and 148 former students that have graduated from 3-year long higher education programmes.

2. **Research methods:** In order to investigate the opinion and the needs of the consumers of educational services, namely the target group mentioned above, three general methods are used:

- ❖ observation
- ❖ investigation of documents,
- ❖ sociological research.

3. For the purposes of the present research, an integrated approach combining the opportunities provided by all of these three methods has been applied.

At the beginning of the research the working team used the first two methods:

(a) **Observation**, a direct method to collect data to assess the opinion and the perceived needs for short-cycle education among the students and the lecturers at International University College

(b) **Investigation** of the current regulatory framework for higher education and the internal regulations of higher school related to the possibilities for introducing short-cycle higher education in Bulgaria.

***The two abovementioned methods have been used in order to formulate the main the research thesis.***

In order to objectively verify this thesis, the working team has opted to utilize the third method – **the sociological survey**, which is a frequently used method for collecting information in order to access opinions, needs and attitudes. The method was selected due to its well-known advantages in the process of obtaining quantitative data, with a view of enabling the team to objectively test the research hypothesis

The present survey is based on the use of different techniques such as inquiries and interviews. With that end in mind, our team has prepared a questionnaire structured in such a manner as to achieve the objectives of the research, (see the Appendix). We have also made a number of interviews covering the questions in the questionnaire

The inquiry was anonymous and we think that has increased the probability that the respondents have given straightforward answers. We have asked many questions that require brief and clear answers.

Since this technique has been very labour-intensive, apart from the inquiry, we have also investigated the opinion of the target group through interviews referring to the same issues: Out of the total of **2164** of respondents, about **28%** received a questionnaire, and about **72%** were interviewed by members of the working team. Interviews were made primarily with students at International University College /IUC/, students enrolled in specialization courses at IUC, trainees at the Vocational Training Center of the IUC, the Vocational Training Center of HRC Culinary Academy, Bulgaria, the Vocational Training Center of MK OOD - Dobrich and the Vocational Training Center of HM TOMI Ltd. - Dobrich, as well as students at the Vocational College of Tourism in Shumen.

## 2. Results of the conducted survey

### 2.1 Types of educational institutions

In the period between November 2008 and June 2009 we sent the questionnaire to 9 colleges in the system of higher education, 10 vocational colleges and 20 centers of vocational training in Bulgaria and we asked the students and the trainees to answer it anonymously and to return it by e-mail. Telephone interviews were also carried out. The survey team also conducted personal interviews with the students from the target group.

#### Higher schools – colleges within the system of higher education, awarding the educational degree “Professional bachelor”:

1. International University College
2. Higher School Agricultural College – Plovdiv
3. Drama College “Lyuben Grois” – Sofia
4. College of Management, Trade and Marketing – Sofia
5. College of Telecommunications and Post – Sofia
6. Technical College – Jambol

#### Vocational colleges outside the system of higher education:

1. Private Vocational College of Tourism „K. Fotinov” – Varna
2. Private Vocational College of Tourism „Shumen” – Shumen
3. Private Vocational College „European College Fumi Intellect”- Sofia
4. Private Vocational College MTRH „Interbusiness”- Sofia
5. Private Vocational College „Icom Intellect” - Montana

#### Vocational Training Centers:

1. International University College
2. VTC belonging to MK OOD – Dobrich
3. VTC belonging to HM TOMI AD –Dobrich
4. VTC belonging to HRC Culinary Academy Bulgaria OOD – Dobrich
5. VTC belonging to SD „Interbusiness –Ivanova and Co.” – Plovdiv
6. VTC belonging to Exelia EOOD – Varna
7. VTC belonging to Albena AD – Albena
8. VTC belonging to Non-profit Union „Business Centre” – Dobrich
9. VTC belonging to High School in Insurance and Finance – Sofia
10. VTC belonging to Non-profit Union of the European Institute in Culture Tourism - Albena
11. VTC belonging to NTPP office Dobrich

## 2.2. Profile of the respondents, participating in the survey:

### 2.2.1. Types of respondents

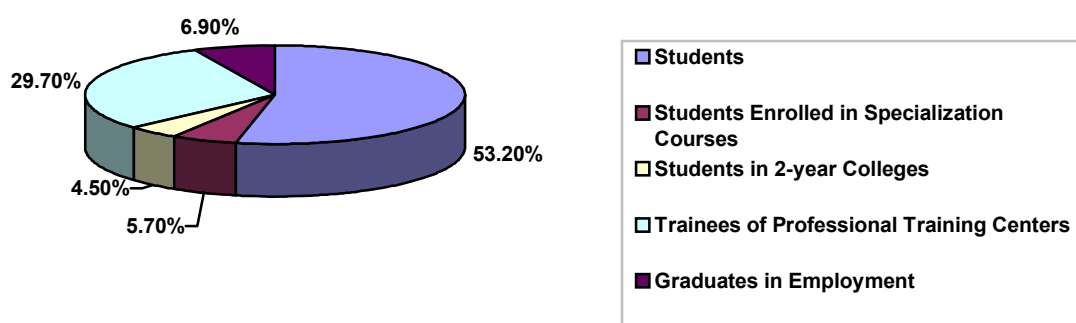
A total of **1152** students, studying for a “Professional bachelor” degree of higher education, **124** students enrolled in specialization programmes, **98** students at two-year vocational colleges, **642** trainees at VTCs, and **148** former students, graduates of 3-year colleges currently in employment, have filled in a questionnaire or have been interviewed.

Total number respondents – **2164**

## 2.2.2. Status, age profile and field of education of the survey respondents:

Figure 1

Distribution of survey respondents according to the type of education institution in which they study or from which they have graduated



The distribution of the respondents is as follows: Out of the total 100% of respondents, 53.2 % are students, 5.7 % are enrolled in specialization courses, 4.5 % are students at 2-year colleges, 29.7 % are trained at VTCs, and 6.9 % are employed graduates.

Compared to the total number of students at each respective type of education institution, the proportion is as follows:

In the 2008/2009 academic year, 27.7 thousand students have studied for a “Professional bachelor” degree and 19.3 thousand students have studied at private colleges in the system of higher education, that is to say that the cross section is 6 % of the total number of students in the country.

The number of students in the school year 2008/2009 includes 3.6 thousand students over 16 years of age participating in programmes for vocational training but against payment, aiming to obtain third or fourth level professional qualification offered by VTCs, vocational gymnasiums, and vocational colleges, that is to say that the cross section is of total of 740 peoples, namely 20% of the total number of the trained students.

It is not possible to show the proportion of the group of the graduated students because of lack of data, in addition: the graduated student ended the education not in the same year and it is difficult to determine the proportion.

In spite of that the cross section is very wide and embraces a considerable number of representatives of the relevant group.

Table 1. Profile of respondents according to mode of study

Profile of respondents	Fulltime	Extramural	Distance	Individual	Other	Total
Students at colleges in the system of higher education	749	390	0	13	0	1 152
Students enrolled in specialization courses	0	83	0	41	0	124

Students at two-year colleges outside the system of higher education	73	25	0	0	0	98
Trainees at vocational training	642		0	0	0	642
Employed graduates of colleges in the system of higher education	121	27	0	0	0	148
Total	1585	27	0	54	0	2164

### Distribution of survey respondents according to education status

#### College Students

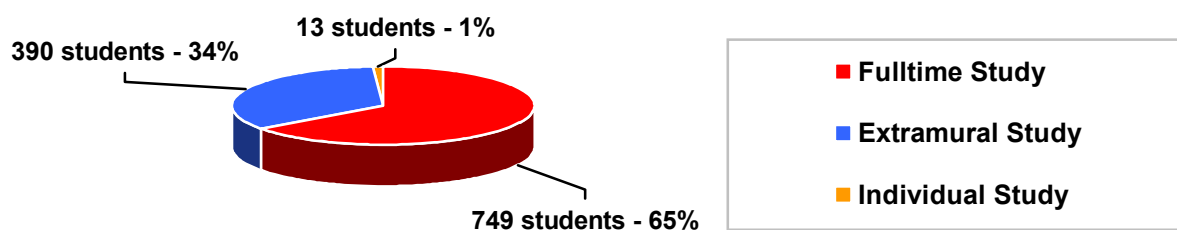


Figure 2.1

#### Students Enrolled in Specialization Courses

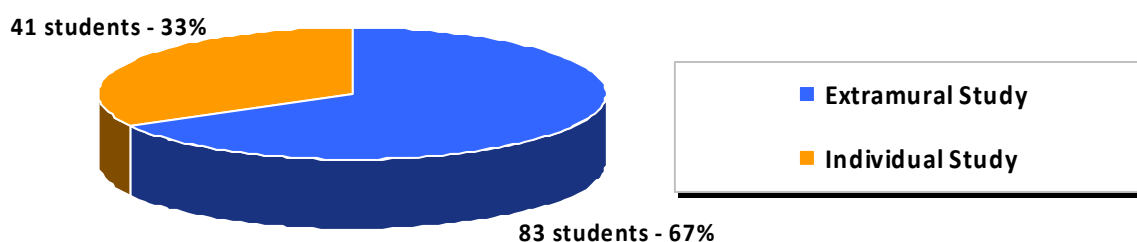


Figure 2.2

### Students in 2-year Colleges outside the System of Higher Education

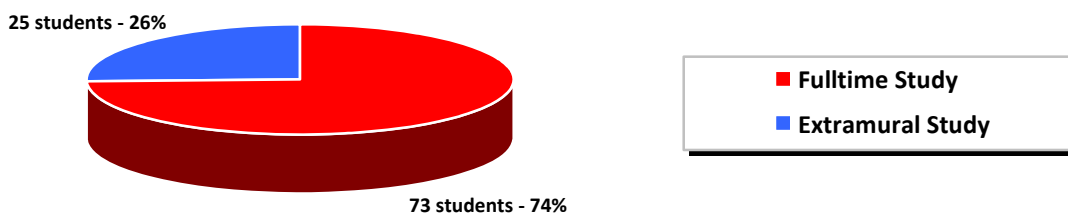


Figure 2.3

### Employed Graduates of Colleges in the System of Higher Education

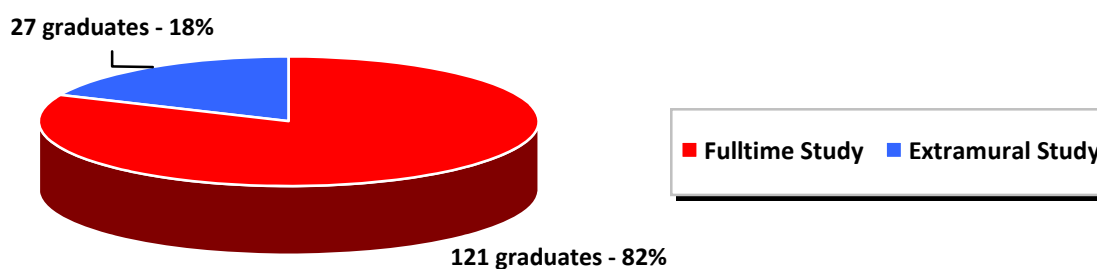


Figure 2.4

### All Respondents

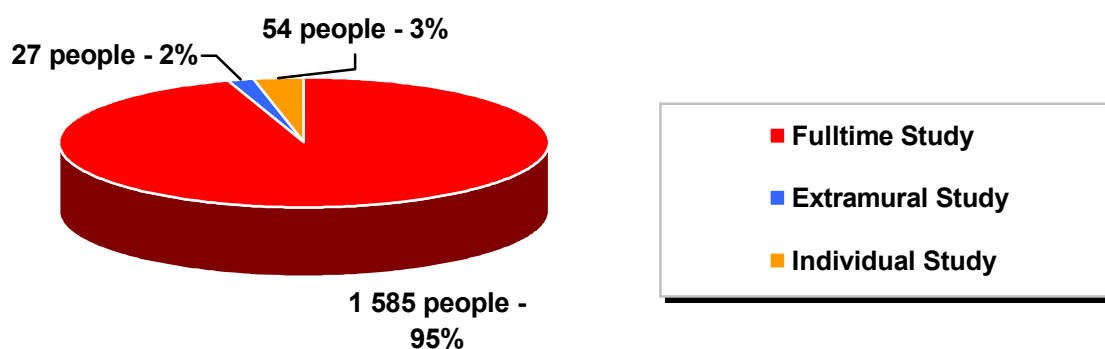


Figure 2.5

**The following trends are observed according to the representatives of the different groups:**

1. For students at colleges in the system of higher education the trend is as follows:  
From the respondents studying at colleges in the system of higher education, 65% selected the regular education mode, 34% selected the extramural educational mode, and 1% selected individual or other educational mode.

2. For students enrolled in specialization courses at higher education institutions:  
100% of the students enrolled in specialization courses at higher education institutions selected the extramural educational mode or the individual educational mode.

3. For students aiming to obtain third or fourth level professional qualification in 2-year vocational colleges outside the system of higher education:  
The students selected as follows: 74% selected the regular education mode and 26% selected the extramural educational mode.

4. For trainees at the Vocational Training Centers aged over 16: All respondents selected the regular education mode.

\* respondents at the VTCs receive full-time education because their training is sponsored by the Operative Programme "Human Resources Development" and it is obligatory to use full-time education. The students are trained to obtain a qualification in a specific profession and the duration of the training is at least 960 hours/per year in order to obtain third qualification degree, or training in one part of the profession only without obtaining a qualification degree.

5. For Employed graduates of colleges in the system of higher education  
Out of all respondents 82% were educated in the regular mode and 18% have studied extramural.

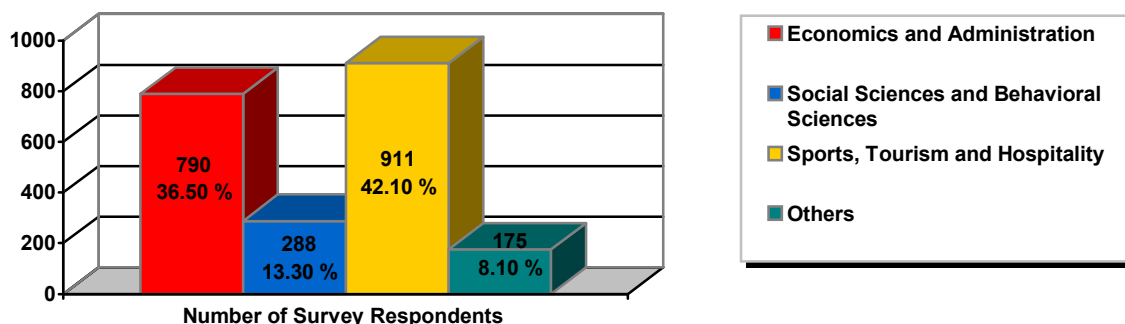
There are no representatives of the distance educational mode out of the total 2164 representatives of students and trainees in various modes, types and levels of education.

**Table 2. Number of respondents according to the field of education**

Field of education	Number of respondents	Share of respondents
Economics and administration	790	36.5 %
Social sciences and behavioural sciences	288	13.3 %
Sports, tourism, hospitality	911	42.1 %
Other	175	8.1 %



**Figure 3. Distribution of Survey Respondents according to Field of Education**



Most considerable is the share of the respondents who are educated in disciplines in the field of sports, tourism and hospitality– 42.1%. The structure of the respondents shows a trend to look for short-cycle educational modes and degrees, as well as for qualification in the field of tourism, economic, administration and management.

In accordance with the data of the National Agency for assessment and accreditation up to 30.08.2009 /[www.neaa.government.bg/](http://www.neaa.government.bg/), the higher schools and universities in Bulgaria offer education in 52 accredited professional directions. 25 of the higher education institutions offer education in professional direction 3.7 Administration and management. Other 25 of them offer education in professional direction 3.8 Economics. 14 higher education institutions offer education in professional direction 3.9 Tourism. In proportion: out of the total of 52 of the accredited higher education institutions, 47% offer education in professional direction Administration and management, 47% offer education in professional direction 3.8 Economic, and 26% offer education in professional direction 3.9 Tourism. The remaining professional directions are offered by a limited number of higher education institutions.

Three-year higher education programmes are offered at higher schools and colleges as follows:

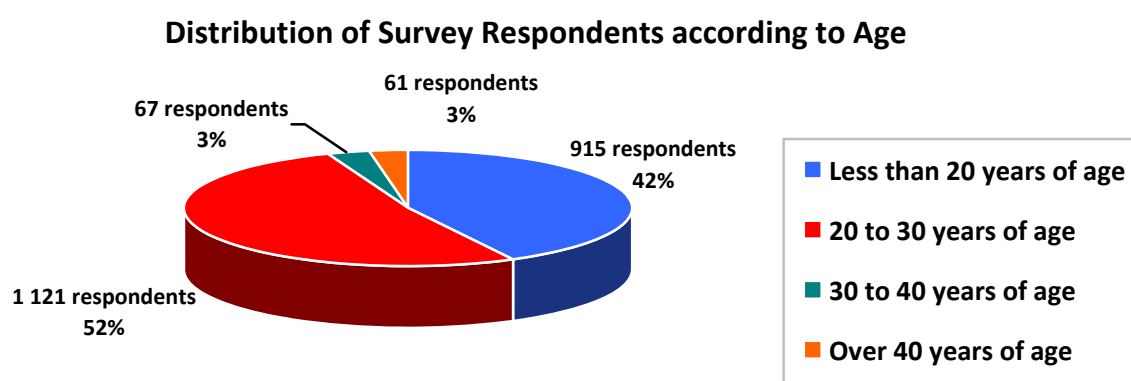
- ❖ Specialties of the professional direction 5.1 Machine engineering are offered by a total of 10 higher schools, including **7 colleges**;
- ❖ Specialties of the professional direction 5.2 Electrical engineering, electronics and automatization are offered by a total of 11 higher schools, including **7 colleges**;
- ❖ Specialties of the professional direction 5.5 Transport, navigation and aviation are offered by 7 higher schools, including **4 colleges**;
- ❖ Specialties of the professional direction 3.7 Administration and management are offered by 25 higher schools, including **6 colleges**;
- ❖ Specialties of the professional direction 3.8 Economic are offered by 25 higher schools, including **4 colleges**;
- ❖ Specialties of the professional direction 3.9 Tourism are offered by 14 high schools, including **2 colleges**.

According to the statistic is to be made the conclusion that in Bulgaria within the higher education system, **out of the 4 and 5 year training for bachelor and Master most popular to be offered as short-cycle are the specialties in the professional directions: Machine engineering, Electrical engineering, electronics and automatization, Transport, navigation and aviation, Administration and management, Economics and Tourism.** Even though a larger share of the colleges offers technical specialties, the largest numbers of students in colleges are enrolled in specialties of the direction Administration and management, Economics and Tourism.

The students in professional direction Tourism predominate in the survey, because the largest share of the respondents is comprised of students at the International University College, who study in professional directions Tourism, Administration and management and Economics.

**Table 3. Number of respondents according to age**

Age	Number of respondents	Share of the respondents
Up to 20 years	915	42.3 %
20- 30 years	1121	51.8 %
30- 40 years	67	3.1 %
Over 40 years	61	2.8 %

**Figure 4.**

According to the age structure, the predominant share of the respondents is that of the young people under 30 years, and the respondents aged over 30 years constitute a considerably lower number.

Among the inquired young people is observed a trend, which is typical for the age structure of the population and its participation in the various educational modes of Lifelong Learning. According to the investigation of the National Statistic Institute about the year 2008, the following trend has been observed:

During the year 1999 is the net coefficient of the population in the age 19-23 years to apply for education was 27.2%, but during 2008/2009 the same increases to 38.3%. A new trend has appeared, namely the participation in higher education of a larger number of young people under 23 years of age.

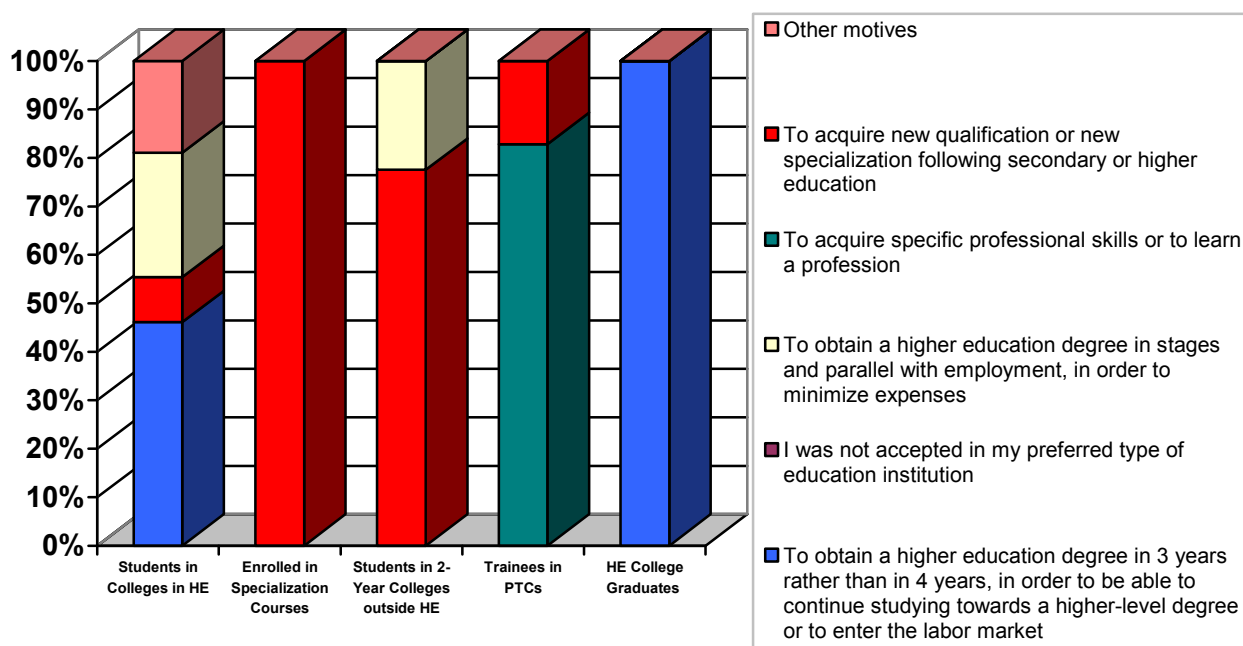
Because of the fact that the mentioned age group includes students in the system of higher education and vocational education after secondary education, for the most part, the following conclusion can be made: among the young people in Bulgaria there is still a predominant interest to the traditional educational modes – over 95% of the respondents selected the regular educational mode and less than 5% selected the extramural and individual educational mode.

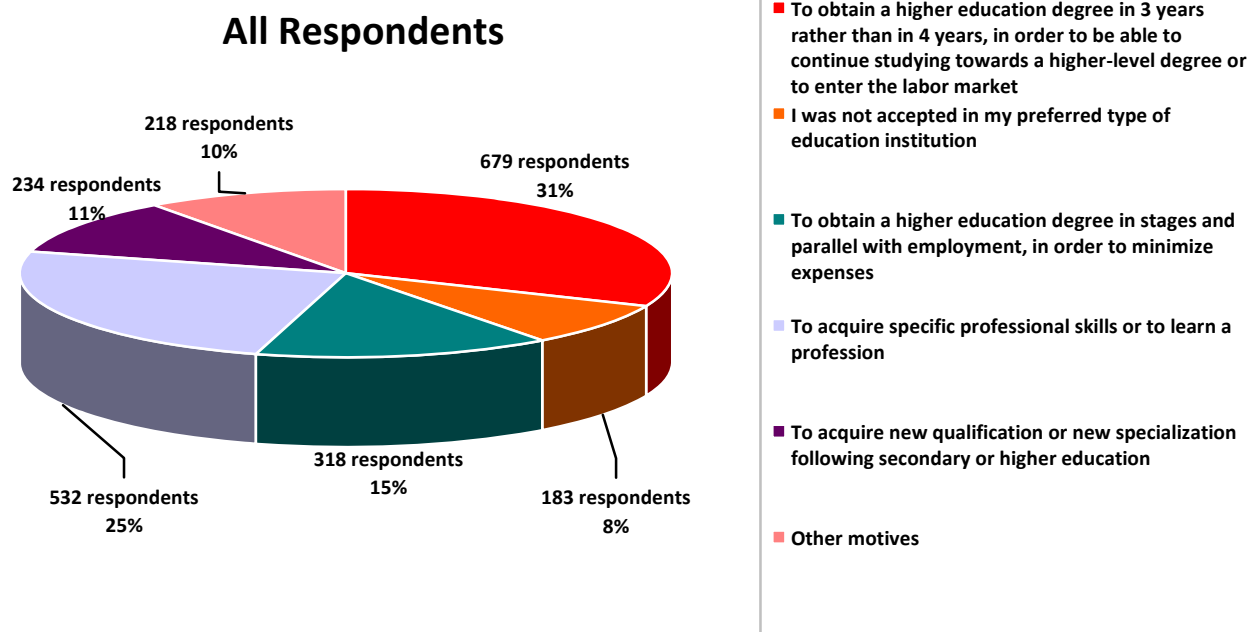
## Motivation for choice of an education institution, education or qualification degree, and form of education

The summarized data from the surveys points the following:

**Table 4. Motives for choice of education institution**

Respondents	Obtaining higher education for 3 years instead of 4 years aiming continuation of a higher educational degree or realization on the labour market	I wasn't approved for the desired school	Obtaining a higher education in phases and combined with an employment	Obtaining concrete professional skills or adoption of a profession	Obtaining a new specialty or specialization after graduating from the university/ higher school/	Others	Total
Students at Colleges in the system of higher education	531	107	296			218	1152
Students enrolled in specialization courses					124		124
Students at 2-year colleges outside the higher education system		76	22				98
Students at Professional Training Centers				532	110		642
Graduates of colleges in the system of higher education	148						148
<b>Total</b>	<b>679</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>2 164</b>





**Figure 6.**

Data in the survey points the following trends:

The largest number of respondents – 679 persons, or 31%, has graduated or study in colleges with a three year-course of study from the higher education system as they want to receive a Bachelor degree within shorter time which grants them faster access to a professional realization and a possibility to continue for a Master's degree. Among students studying at colleges with a three-year course of study 183 people, or about 8%, have entered in the respective college – 3 years for a higher education and 2 years for a professional education as they didn't have the grade to enter in a four years Bachelor degree and in a higher education college and 318 people, or about 15%, have consciously chosen a short-cycle education aiming cost saving and combination of education with employment.

532 people, or 24%, of the respondents have chosen an education which enables them to obtain concrete professional skills and qualification which they need for a professional realization outside the higher education system.

234 people or 11% have chosen a mode which enables them to obtain a second specialty or qualification different from the obtained ones, and the selected short-cycle education is outside the higher education system.

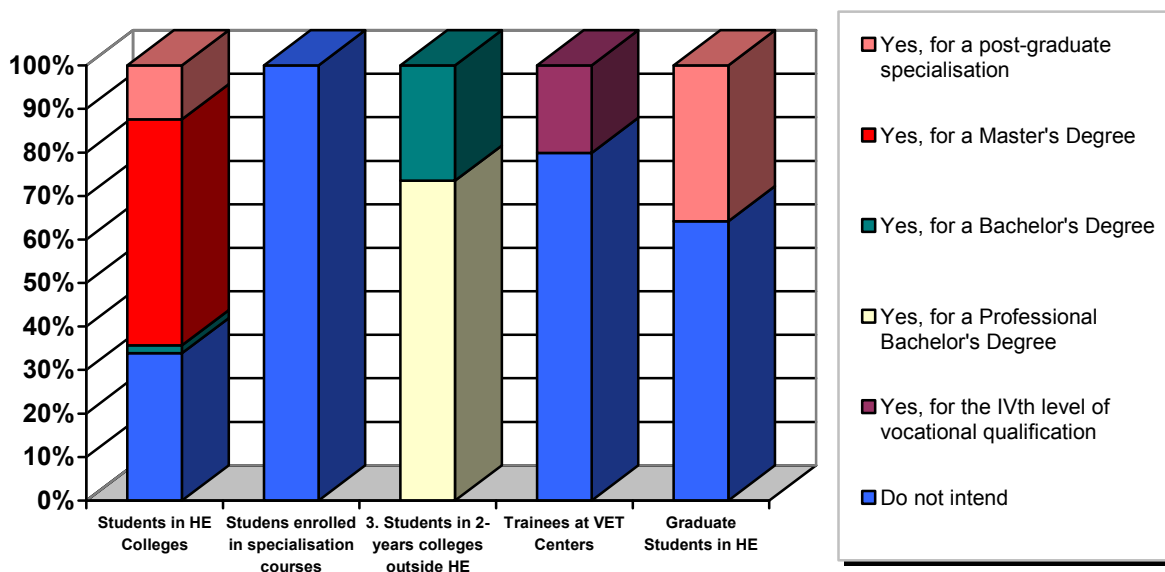
In total, 218 people from the inquired students in colleges with a three-year course of study have another motivation for choosing a short-cycle higher education.

The more in-depth analysis of the motives for selection of a school and education degree type according to the educational status of the respondents shows that the main motive of students is to obtain a higher education for a shorter period of time and a possibility for continuation of the education and a fast professional realization, for students enrolled in specialization courses the main motive is the obtaining of a new specialty, wanted at the labour market, for the students of the professional colleges important is the possibility for education and employment in phases, for the students in courses for professional education the main motive is the obtaining of concrete professional skills and qualification.

Although the motivation is different for the different representatives of the target group, essential is the fact that **only 15% of all respondents pointed as a motive cost saving and a possibility for a study in phases and this is indicative of the attitude of the target group by the choice of a short-cycle education. The largest share of the respondents -31 % have chosen a three-year course of study instead of four years study with the aim to continue their education for a shorter time and a fast realization on the labour market.**

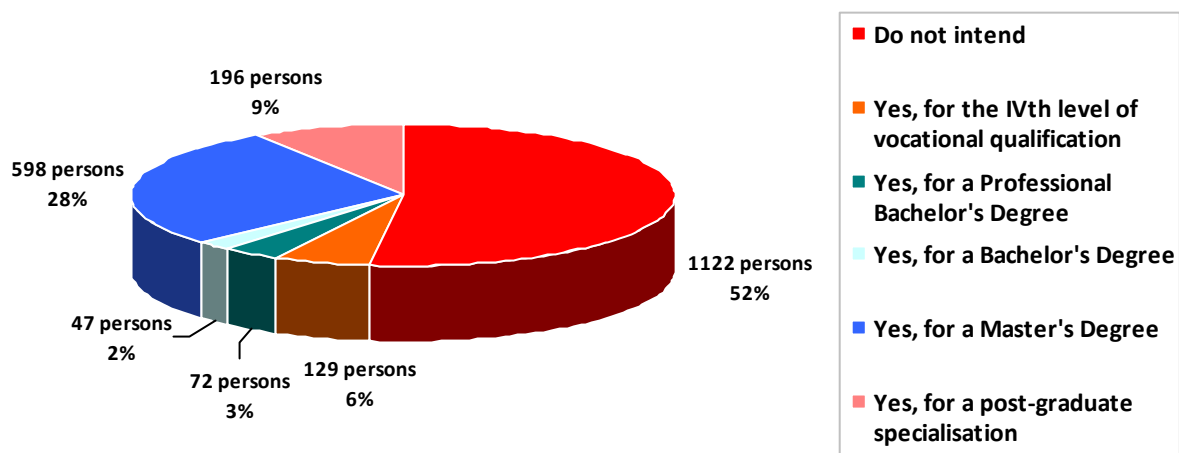
**Table 5. Intention to continue education for a higher degree**

Respondents	No intention	Yes, for IVth voc. qualification	Yes, for a Prof. Bachelor	Yes, for a Bachelor degree	Yes, for a Master's degree	Yes, post-graduate qualification	Total
Students Colleges Higher education	390			21	598	143	1152
Students enrolled in specialization courses	124						124
Students 2 y. Colleges other than Higher education			72	26			98
Students at Centers for professional orientation	513	129					642
Graduated students Higher education College	95					53	148
<b>Total</b>	<b>1122</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>2164</b>

**Figure 6.**

Data from the survey show the following trends:

- Students who have chosen a shorter period of higher education aiming a faster professional realization and currently do not intend continuing their education for a higher degree comprise 34% of all inquired students studying higher education and 52% of all inquired.
- 129 people studying at centers for professional orientation or about 20% of students at centers for professional orientation or about 6% of all inquired wish to obtain a higher degree of professional qualification from a college with two years course of education rather than from a center for professional orientation.
- From graduates of a higher education college and working in the industry 53 people or 36% wish to continue their education for obtaining a supplementary specialty according to the demands of the labour market.



**Figure 7.**

The summarized information shows that 52% of all inquired currently do not intend to continue their education.

This indicator could serve as a starting point by analyzing of the possibilities for launching of a short-cycle higher education as it shows explicitly that eventual users of such education could be currently sought not among higher education circles but among professional education circles. 34% of students studying for a Professional Bachelor degree do not intend to continue their study and 66% state that they chose the shorter way for continuing their education for a Master's degree.

#### Popularity of short-cycle training courses:

**Table 6. Familiarity with short-cycle higher education in the U.S. and EU**

Respondents	Number	Answer YES	Answer NO	Answer TO A CERTAIN EXTEND
Students at colleges in the system of higher education	1152	129	704	319
Students in specialization courses	124		113	11
2-year college students outside the system of higher education	98	7	76	15
Students in PEC's	642	5	628	9
Graduates of college in the system of higher education	148	9	107	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>2164</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>1628</b>	<b>386</b>

The responses indicate the following trends: only 6.9% of the respondents are aware of the existence of a short cycle in higher education and 17.8% are somewhat familiar. The remaining over 75% of respondents are unaware of the existence of short-cycle higher education.

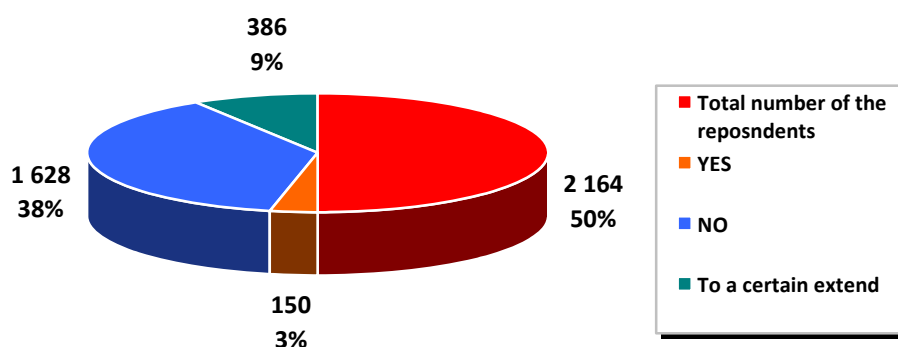


Figure 8

**Table 7. Answers to the Question: If you had the chance, would you chose to do higher education in the U.S. or an EU member state, and why?**

Respondents	Number	YES	NO	Cannot answer
Students Colleges in the system of higher education	1152	863	217	72
Students in specialization courses	124	59	52	13
2-year college students outside the system of higher education	98	71	21	6
Students in the PEC's	642	412	193	36
Graduates of college in the system of higher education	148	96	51	2
Total	2164	1501	534	129

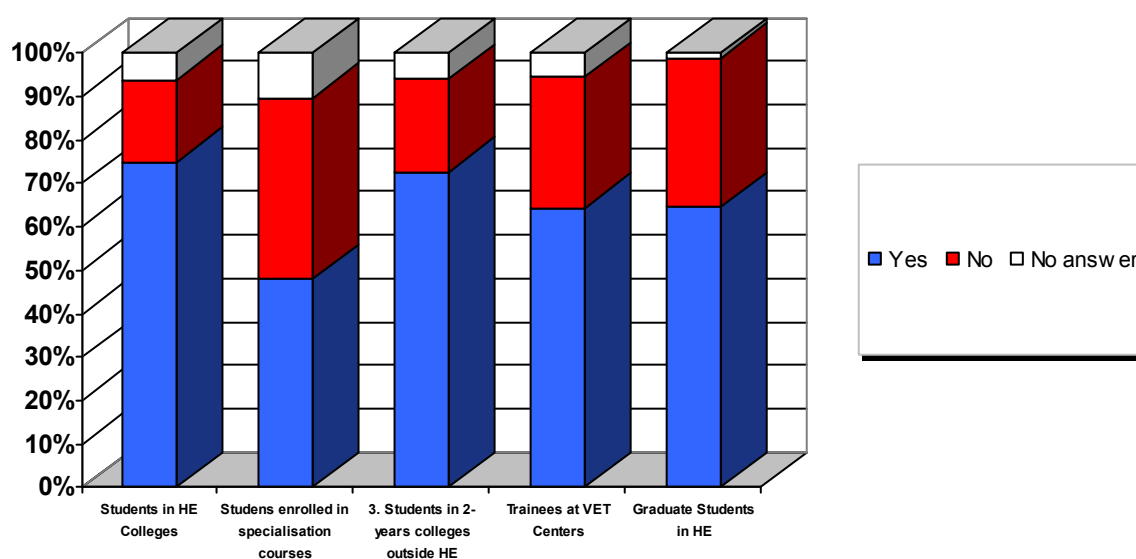
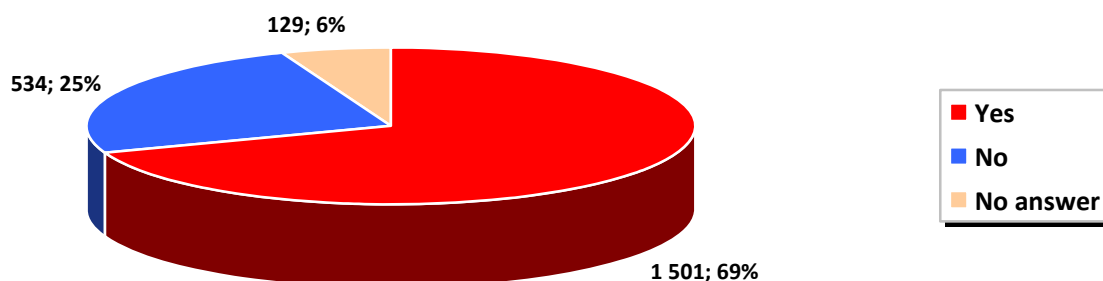


Figure 9.



### Would you choose to graduate higher education in the USA or a EU member state?

**Figure 10.**

Results: 69.3% of respondents would prefer to complete their higher education in the U.S. or an EU member state, while 24.6% would definitely not want to graduate abroad. About 6% are respondents who can not give an explicit answer.

**Table 8. Reasons for choosing to study abroad rather than in Bulgaria.**

Respondents	Students Colleges HE	Students in specialization courses	2-year college students	Students in the PEC's	College graduates	Total
Higher quality of education	172	16	12	91	11	302
More flexible learning - a large choice of courses, credit transfer, mobility opportunities	398	28	24	87	63	600
Greater opportunity for internships and practical training	115	8	10	53	16	202
In Bulgaria, higher education received by foreign universities is valued more than the Bulgarian one	140	3	22	166		331
Other	38	4	3	15	6	66
<b>Total</b>	<b>863</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>1501</b>



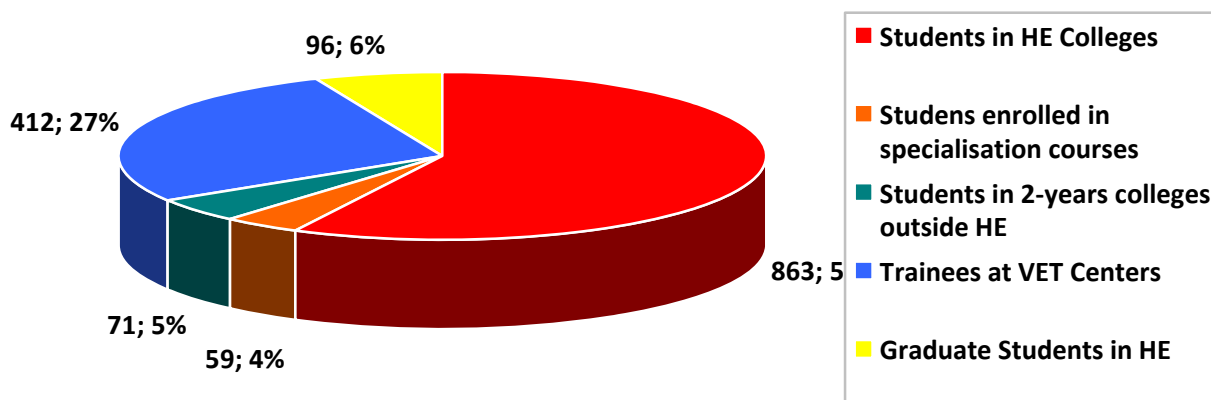
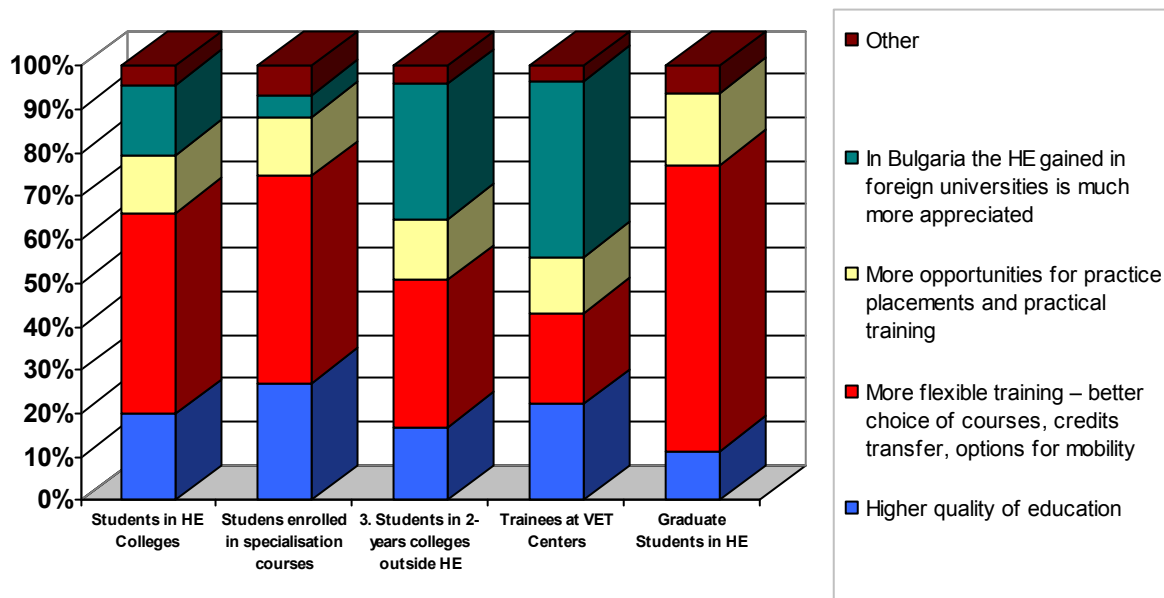


Figure 11.

**Results:** Of all the respondents, who answered that they would like to study in the U.S. or an EU member state, the largest number listed as first reason the flexible training, a wide variety of courses to choose, credit transfer and mobility opportunities - these are 39.95% of the total respondents. As a main motive was selected the prestige of the foreign higher education in Bulgaria by 22.05% of the respondents, and a higher quality of education acquired abroad has been identified as a motive by 20.12% of the respondents.

From this data it can be concluded that, according to the respondents, the main features in which the Bulgarian system of higher education gives way to educational systems in the United States and EU member states are: (a) lack of flexibility, (b) lack of eligibility for training courses, (c) no opportunity for transfer of credits between universities in Bulgaria and other countries, (d) no conditions for student mobility.

**Table 9. Answers to the Question: If Bulgaria introduced short-time training within higher education - for example, 2 years, would you prefer it to the current three or four programmes to receive higher education and why**

Respondents	Number	YES	NO	Cannot answer
Students Colleges Higher Education	1152	462	638	52
Students in specialization courses	124	113		11
2-year colleges students outside Higher Education	98	46	19	33
Students in the PEC's	642	555	28	59
College graduates	148	67	72	9
Total	2164	1243	757	164

**Results:** The largest number of respondents responded positively to the choice of training within two years of higher education - 57.43%, as compared to 34.98% negative responses and 7.59% who can not answer with certainty.

**Table 10. Reasons for choosing the short-cycle form of education**

Respondents	Students Colleges of Higher Education	Students in specialization courses	2-year college students	Students in the PEC's	College graduates	Total
Can start work earlier	98		8	175	9	290
Will save money for education	62		6	72	7	147
May pursue higher levels over time	49		9	133	28	219
Can be transferred to another university without losing the first two years if I did not properly choose the school or higher degree	64		5	96		165
Can complete a second degree in a short time in another specialty, or any practice that is sought in the labour market		84			5	89
I prefer practical aims of higher education with the acquisition of specific skills	43	10	3	18		74
The key factor is the prestige of the institution which offers it and the quality of the program, not its duration	141	19	13	30	16	219
Other	5		2	31	2	40

Total	462	113	46	555	67	1243
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## Diagrams

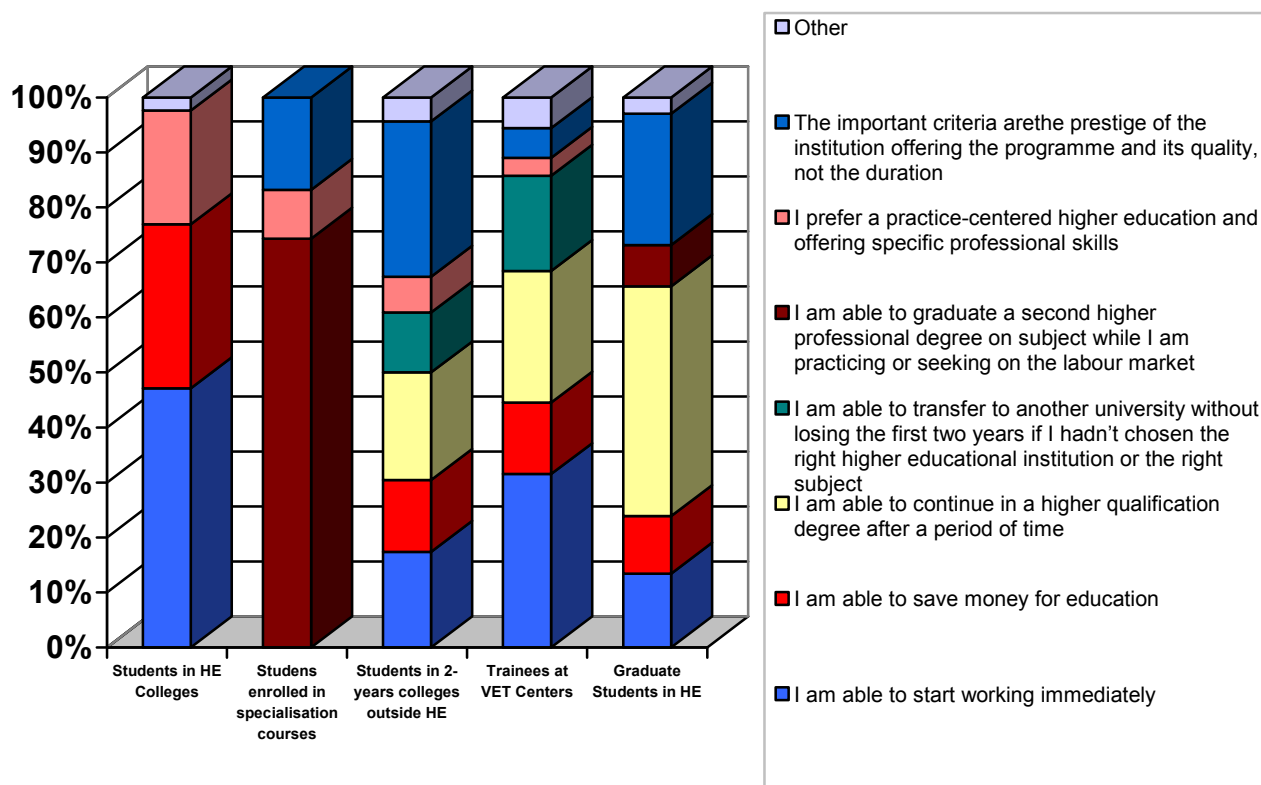
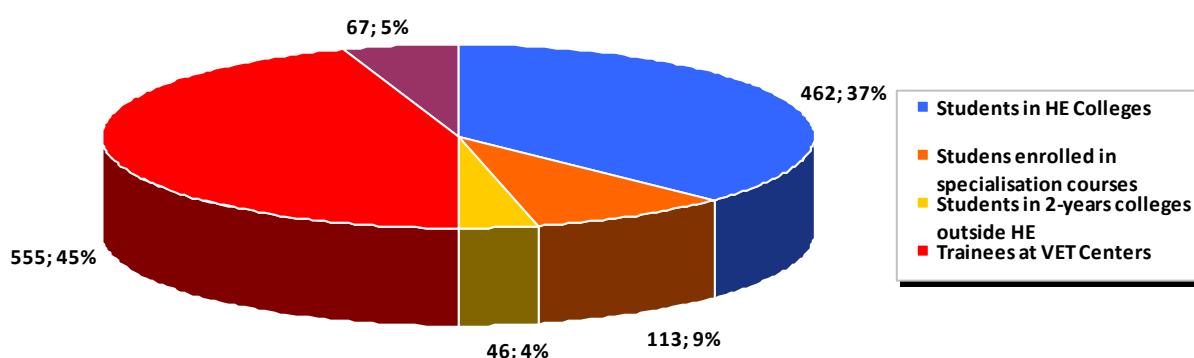


Figure 12.

Table 11: Reasons to reject the short-cycle form of education

Inquired	Students at colleges in higher education	Students two-years colleges	Student at VTCs	Graduated students	Total
I prefer the more prestigious higher education in Bulgaria offered by 3- and 4-year universities. Two-year higher education is two degrees lower than the 4-year one – Bachelor's degree, and is not popular in society and business.	188	7	2	18	215
The two-year diploma will not be appraised by the employers and will not give me the same opportunity to advance like the 4-year one – Bachelor's degree.	225	8	1	17	251

Will not be recognized by the international universities in order to continue my education in higher educational degree.	82	2	11	11	106
Will not be recognized by the Bulgarian universities in order to continue my education in higher educational degree.	92		9	13	114
Other	51	2	5	13	71
<b>Total</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>757</b>



**Results:** the largest number of the respondents – 23.33 % state as a key reason to select the short-cycle higher education **the opportunity to start work as soon as possible**, and the same number of the respondents – 17.61 % state as a key reason **the opportunity to continue the education** aiming at a higher degree, as well as the reason that the motive for the selection of the educational institution is not the duration of the education , but the esteem of the institution and the quality of the training programmes – stated by other 17.61% of the respondents. Lowest is the number of the respondents who stated the professional direction of the higher education as a key reason for the selection of a school – 5.95 % of the respondents.

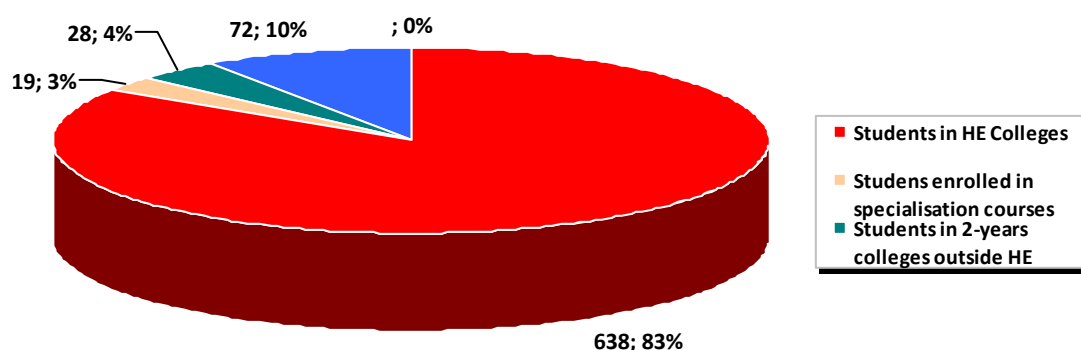


Figure 12.

**Results:** the largest number of the respondents states as the reason to reject short-cycle education the apprehension that, when pursuing a career the graduates of two-year education programmes have a smaller chance to develop themselves than those with four-year education. That is 33.15% of the inquired.

The second place is taken by the insufficient reputation of two-year education in society and business – 28.40%,

The smallest percentage of respondents stated as a reason the impossibility to continue their education in higher educational degree abroad. The lack of recognition of the two-year higher education was selected by 14% of the inquired.

It is obvious that there is not a clear distribution of the larger part of the respondents; they selected all of the mentioned reasons. 9.37% of the inquired have other reasons and that indicates that the short-cycle education is not well-known and because of that, it will be more difficult for the student to accept it, regardless of the fact that they are in different age groups and study at various educational institutions and in various educational modes.

## CONCLUSIONS

The short cycle within higher education, leading towards a national higher education diploma, is very popular in the US and in some EU countries. The reasons why students in these countries choose the short cycle are different and often reflect the specificities of the particular national higher education system. The existing opportunities to select among different study courses, different forms of education and different universities, as well as the recognition of prior learning even if obtained in individual courses, let students rest assured that their study efforts would not be wasted and that they would be able to continue their education at a later stage in their career or life. In contrast, student mobility in Bulgaria is extremely limited even in the case of identical programmes in two different colleges offering identical education and qualification degrees, although legally, it should be possible. Mobility is even more limited between private and public colleges and between universities and colleges. The main reason for this is the great variety of academic curricula of similar programmes, resulting from the academic autonomy of the universities, which allows them to create their own curricula. Another cause is the unwillingness of teachers from some higher education institutions to acknowledge the work of their colleagues in competing higher education institutions.

The results of the conducted sociological survey clearly indicate that at this point, the short-cycle education is not sufficiently popular in Bulgaria. On the other hand, impediments for its introduction are the flaws in the regulatory framework of higher education, as well as the unwillingness and incapability of state universities to develop a more flexible education system.

The lack of reforms in the system of higher education and its continuing conservatism and elitism, tend to install in the mind of the general public a misplaced notion that the longer a higher education program lasts, the more valuable and prestigious it is for society and business. Students are not aware of short-cycle higher education and there is no demand for such education. The majority of students in higher education programmes are between 25 and 28 years old and study fulltime. Extramural study is less popular mainly due to the enduring prejudice - common in Bulgarian society - that the quality of education offered in extramural form is lower. Distance learning is has not been widely introduced in Bulgarian universities yet.

The analysis of the survey indicates that Bulgarian society and the potential customers of short-cycle higher education programmes in particular, are not able to cast away their traditional views on education and are not well-disposed towards fast introduction of short-cycle programmes within higher education in Bulgaria.

## IV. CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSIS 2

Results of the Focus Group Discussion with Representatives of NGOs on Issues of Higher Education and the Possibility of Introducing Short-cycle Education in the frame of the Bachelor Degree.

*January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Dobrich, Bulgaria*

#### STAGE 2 – Focus Group 1

**Topic :** Higher education and training and the place of SCHE as a response to the social and economic needs in Bulgaria

**Date:** 30th January 2009, 11.00 o'clock

**Venue:** International University College – Dobrich, 3 Bulgaria Str.

**Participants:** 14 people

**Target Group of the Research:** in total 14 representatives of 8 non-governmental organizations, 1 higher school and 2 scientific institutes, as follows: NGO “Center for civil education, consultancy and training” Varna, representative Mrs. Vessela Panova, Foundation “Modern Education and Science” – Dimitrina Kamenova PhD, NGO “International Management Institute” - branch Sofia – Romyana Konstantinova PhD, National Association for Legal Initiative and Local Governance, represented by Eva Radeva, NGO Dobrudzha Agrarian and Business School, represented by Kamelia Vunova PhD, State Agricultural Institute – Assoc. Prof. Emil Penchev, Association of Bulgarian Black Sea Municipalities – Varna, represented by Stilyana Savova, Association Auriga – Tourism Academy – Sofia – Tanya Topalova, Scientific Research Institute of International University College – Assoc. Prof. Dimitar Dimitrakiev PhD, College for Economical Management – Varna – Assoc. Prof. Dimitar Rusev PhD and representatives of International University College – Assoc. Prof. Todor Radev PhD – rector, Klara Dimitrova – Deputy Rector, Stanislav Ivanov PhD – Academical Rector and Pavlina Alexieva – Chair of Students Placements and Practice Department in IUC.

**Total technological time:** 180 min.

**Duration:** 60 min.

**Discussion Moderator:** Assoc. Prof. Todor Radev PhD – economist, Rector of International University College – Albena

**Analysis of the Discussion:** Vesselin Blagoev PhD and Stanislav Ivanov PhD

**Research Methodology:** Questions to the participants, free discussion, discussion on the different positions on the role of the higher education and the short cycle in the system of the higher education in Bulgaria

**Goals and Methodology of the Research:**

**The objective of the research is to discuss the short cycle higher education in Bulgaria emphasizing on two main issues:**

- ❖ To what extent SCHE is known and applied in the system of the higher education in Bulgaria.
- ❖ The choice and motivation of the Bulgarian students to study in the traditional state universities.

**Research thesis.** The general thesis is that in Bulgaria the SCHE is NOT implemented, NOT well-known and NOT popular. This is the reason the short cycle of education in the framework of the Bulgarian higher educational system ending with awarding a national diploma for higher education, should be offered by the existing well-known accredited institutions for higher education. The higher educational institutions may offer also 2-year programmes for higher education without awarding educational-qualification degrees but allowing the trainees to gain diploma and to have quicker realization on the labour market.

### **The additional theses to the general one are the following:**

In Bulgaria the higher education is still with so called “elite character” and the students prefer the traditional universities and higher educational institutions, as well as the traditional forms of training and educational degrees – well-known and prestigious at this stage among the Bulgarian society and business.

The specialized professional training is offered by institutions outside the system of the higher education. It finishes with gaining qualification degree /from first to fourth qualification degree/, it is acknowledged by the business as well as in the states in the EU /excluding the training in basic professions/ and has its prestige in the community and the employers. Regardless at this stage normatively there are no educational channels to connect the different forms and degrees of vocational training gained after the secondary education with the higher education in Bulgaria.

The mobility of students in the Bulgarian universities is impeded. There are no settled conditions for selection of training courses, transfer of credits both between the different educational institutions in Bulgaria and between the different educational degrees offered by one and the same institution. This is one of the main factors supporting introduction of the short cycle forms in the framework of the higher educational system.

### **Stages of the Study**

To study the opinion of the target group described above, three main methods were used: observation, study of documentation and sociological research. For achieving the goals of this research work a combined approach was used matching the options of these 3 methods.

**Stage 1:** In the initial stage of research work, the study team used the first two methods: (a) observation as a direct approach for data gathering for assessment of the role of the SCHE in the Bulgarian system of higher education; (b) study of the current legislative base of the higher education and inner normative acts of the higher educational institutions related to the opportunities for introduction of short cycle of higher education in Bulgaria. The two methods were used for formulating the main research thesis.

In order to be more objectively tested, the team chose the third method for an instrument – sociological research – a popular way for gathering information for assessment of viewpoints, needs and opinions. The choice of research was defined by the advantages of this instrument for gaining quantity information needed in this case to prove the research theses in objective way.

For the purpose of the sociological research the technique of FOCUS GROUP was applied with the task to discuss on the issues of the SCHE in the framework of the higher education system. The members of the Focus group were selected based on their competencies and interests in the field of the topics discussed. The NGOs participating in the focus group with their representatives were selected from the 28 organizations presented on the press conference for promotion of Atlantis Programme and the project held the same day in the building of International University College.

The different Focus Group members supported two different viewpoints about the place of SCHE in the framework of higher education in Bulgaria.

The first thesis was that SCHE has no place in the system of higher education in Bulgaria because system is not yet reformed and because of the continuously inadequate quality of education and lack of competitiveness. In this view, the lack of overall strategy for the development of higher education was seen as a general obstacle for applying SCHE in the system of the higher education in Bulgaria.

The second thesis was that in the Bulgarian education system serious reforms are just starting and that short-cycle higher education is a must in the framework of these reforms. The supporters of this view consider that Bulgaria should follow the global and European trends in the field of the higher education, to account the priorities of Bologna process and Lisbon Strategy.

It's undeniable that in the US and some states from the EU the short cycle in the higher education has supporters and has huge influence on the countries' economies. They also consider the fact that this is a long process and should be implemented step by step.

In the framework of the discussion few distinctive features of the short cycle higher education were underlined:  
Autonomy of the countries in implementation of the credit system in the higher education.

One universal solution applied in the English speaking countries is the credit system, based on the USA experience. This option is most applicable and suitable for the students as the student has the right to combine disciplines from the different range defined for curriculum /mathematics, finance, languages etc./ that in common should provide the number of credits necessary for 1 academic year or the term of the education. In this way the student is free to choose a field in which would like to get deeper knowledge – for instance mathematics instead of ones he less prefers – for instance – accountancy. European states apply significantly more limited credit systems as it is in Bulgaria. The application of the credit system combined with the fundamental right of mobility of students in EU and outside will get to adoption and following the American model giving chance to the talented young people to gain knowledge that the traditional student does not need in order to be successful in business. The system of collection and transfer of credits is legally implemented in Bulgaria and is working successfully in the field of mobility of students in the framework of the Erasmus Programme. It's paradoxical that the European universities give educational credits to Bulgarian students for training in the frame of few months or a semester and the Bulgarian universities do not recognize training performed in another accredited Bulgarian university. This fact could be seen as a typical Bulgarian phenomenon typical for the state higher schools. In opposite the private higher schools are very cooperative and recognize not only the credits between their institutions, but some universities, for instance New Bulgarian University recognize partially training got in the secondary school – for instance the training in journalism.

International University College has also good practice in education in tourism – on the basis of contracts it recognizes 2-years education in the Professional College for Tourism – Shumen in the analogical subjects as well in the different courses from the vocational training – for instance English Language for beginners, practical training in hospitality and food and beverages etc.

#### **Continuity between the high and the higher education:**

The participants in the Focus group consider that at this stage in Bulgaria it is not possible to talk about continuity between the high and the higher education considering that there is not a legislation base for this. The lack of assessment through credit system in the sphere of vocational training following the high education also creates obstacles and lays preconditions for breaking the bond between the high and the higher education.

#### **Outcomes from the discussion:**

##### *View of the representatives of the NGO sector:*

The representatives of the NGO sector were united around the common view that the Bulgarian community is still not well acquainted with the modernization processes in higher education that are underway in the EU and the USA. In Bulgaria the upcoming changes are yet on “cabinet level” and are not an issue of discussion in the public sphere and the community. In order to modernize the system of higher education it is necessary to adopt a Strategy for the Development of Higher Education with broad community involvement taking into account the needs of all the stakeholders. They consider that there is a need for reconstruction of the Higher Education Act, accompanied by supporting legislation.

##### *View of the academic and scientific representatives:*

According to the representatives of the academic and scientific community the obstacles before the introduction of the short cycle in the higher education are several:

In the curricula of the different specialties there is no choice between different subjects. Even in the smaller and more flexible educational institutions the choice is limited to choosing subjects as foreign language, for instance to have three or four options for choosing the second foreign language. The student is free to choose the preferred language as well one specializing subject – such as one kind of alternative tourism among several options. This creates obstacles even to the mobility of students within the university itself and their transfer from one specialty to another. Although this option for choosing different subjects is envisaged in the legislation for higher education in practice it is very rarely used in limited number of cases.

##### *Diversity in the curricula for the same subject*

The curricula for one and the same subject offered by the accredited higher educational institutions in Bulgaria for gaining one and the same educational degree are completely different. This is acceptable according to the legislation but creates huge problems for the mobility of students and the opportunities for recognition of prior education in the framework of the higher education. An example supporting this statement was given by the participants – quotation from the Summarizing Report of the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation for



assessment of the professional discipline Tourism / [www.neaa.government.bg/assets/](http://www.neaa.government.bg/assets/) in 15 higher schools training in subjects from the professional discipline 3.9. Tourism is offered.

Excepting the four colleges where training in these subjects is offered, the rest 11 universities have defined by National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation educational capacity of 1030 students for regular and external education. Just one of the universities offers distance learning in discipline Tourism for bachelor degree and in practice it is not organized at a good level – Shumen University.

In parallel the representatives of the International University College – Albena noted that the college has approved by the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation capacity of 990 students in Tourism disciplines 3.9 – almost as much as the capacity of the all other universities together. What are the options for mobility of students trained for instance in qualification degree Professional Bachelor to continue in qualification Professional Bachelor. The comparison of the curricula developed by NAAA is a good example for the obstacles for the mobility and the transfer of educational credits between the different degrees and periods of education even in the frame of the same professional discipline such as Tourism and in the frame of the same qualification degree such as Bachelor. In the NAAA report it's pointed that for instance the University for Food Technologies in Plovdiv has confirmed the following subjects in the discipline Tourism: Applied electronics and technician science – 45 classes; Colloid Chemistry – 60 classes, Food Chemistry – 75 classes; Microbiology – 75 classes. In the curricula of the same discipline for the same qualification degree – Bachelor in Sofia University there are the following subjects: General Physical Geography – 60 classes, General Social-Economical Geography – 60 classes, Physical Geography of Bulgaria – 60 classes, Tourist Cartography – 60 classes, Geography of the Tourism of the World – 60 hours.

At the same time in the curricula of the specialties in discipline Tourism offered by the International University College for gaining Professional Bachelor degree there is none of the counted subjects – obligatory for the above mentioned universities. This shows once again that for the students in Bulgaria it is impossible to continue their education in none professional discipline and even less – to change their professional orientation. In this relation – the mechanical introduction of the short cycle higher education through defining the institutions to offer it instead of modernization of the whole process of education and change of the curricula will only lead to its devaluation.

The members of the Focus Group united around few general directions to work on in order to create proper conditions for introduction of the short cycle education in the system of higher education according to the trends of the Bologna Process, namely:

- ❖ To set up public discussions for the need of modernizing the Bulgarian higher education;
- ❖ To promote best practices from European and American and Bulgarian universities set up proper environment for global mobility of students;
- ❖ Working out a Strategy for development of the higher education to take into account the view of the nongovernmental sector and not only the “central, casual institutions working on the issues of the education but a wider range of stakeholders, keeping in mind that the reform of the higher education is of common interest”.

Short-cycle forms of education has its social-economical importance but should be introduced wisely into an educational system competitive on the global education market.

The Focus Group closed the session with the desire that all the discussed issues will get introduced to the partnering countries on the Project of the International University College and to be taken into account in summarizing the outcomes of the Project.

The NGOs took the responsibility to continue at their level and according to their strength of influence to continue promoting the short cycle forms of education and the need of reforming the Bulgarian higher educational system.

## V. CHAPTER FIVE

### ANALYSIS 3.

**Results of the conducted discussion with a Focus group of representatives of local authorities, business organizations and higher education institutions on the problems of higher education and the possibility for the introduction of short-cycle qualifications in the frames of the first educational degree Bachelor**

*March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Dobrich, Bulgaria*

#### STAGE 3 - Focus Group 2

**Stage Three:** Meeting of Focus Group 2

**TOPIC:** Higher education and the training and the role of short-cycle education as a response to Bulgarian social and economic needs.

**Date of conduction:** March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009

**Location:** Room 205, International University College: Dobrich, 3, Bulgaria Street.

**Duration of the discussion** - 60 min.

**Moderator of the discussion:** Assoc. Prof. Todor Radev, PhD - Rector of International University College

**Discussion analyzer:** Stanislav Ivanov, PhD

**Aims of the research:**

**The aim of the research is to** investigate the opinion of a particular target group and to conduct a discussion on the topic of quality of education and the role of short-cycle higher education in regard to the socio-economic development of the country and the expectation of the business.

**Target group of the research:** Representatives of local authorities, business organizations, higher education institutions.

**Selection of the target group:** The members of the focus group were selected based on their competence and interests in the field of the discussed topic. The business organizations, participating in the research, were selected based on a sent inquiry and an expressed desire to participate in the forum. Before the formation of the focus group, the representatives responded to a question regarding their expectations for specialists, seeking employment at their companies.

**Participants:** 16 people from organizations, grouped as follows:

**Consulting and business services:** Chamber of commerce and industry - Dobrich, represented by Tanya Gicheva, European development consulting OOD - Sofia, represented by Andrey Goranov, National consultant on public procurement OOD - Sofia, represented by Katerina Traikova, Accounting and consulting house Inter OOD - Albena, represented by Valentina Sarneva, *CENTER for BUSINESS AND CULTURE - DOBRICH, REPRESENTED BY SNEZHANA KARACHOROVA.*

**Production and trade:** Agronom AD – Dobrich, represented by Detelina Simeonova, Sanex OOD – Varna, represented by Stoyan Dimitrov, HM Tomi AD – Dobrich, represented by Valentina Radeva, International College OOD – Dobrich, represented by Ginka Grigorova, HRC Culinary Academy OOD - Dobrich, represented by Iliana Miteva.

**Higher education** – Dobrich town Municipality – Kameliya Koicheva – deputy mayor on education, and International University College, represented by Assoc. Prof. Todor Radev, PhD, Klara Dimitrova, Tzvetalina Genova, Stanislav Ivanov, PhD and Denitsa Yordanova.

#### **Research methodology:**

1. Questions towards the participants, open discussion.
2. Sharing the expectations of all representatives of the interested parties, included in the focus group, and the expectations of Bulgarian business.
3. Defense of the shared views on the role of higher education and short-cycle education in the higher education system in Bulgaria.

#### **Research technology**

For the purpose of the sociological research, the **Survey** technique and Discussion in **the focus group** were applied.

#### **Topics, discussed during the discussion:**

Those present had the opportunity to share their opinion on the following topics:

1. Degree of satisfaction with the quality of higher education in Bulgaria.
2. The role of educational qualification as a criterion and opportunity for a successful career on the labor market.
3. Perspectives in the development of the labor market and trends in company behavior.

During the discussion two competing theses formed in regard to the relationship "**education-labor market**".

Part of the group defended the thesis that education is significantly behind the needs of the labor market and is out of sync with the rapidly developing and modernized economics.

A second group formed among the participants, which believed that in Bulgaria there are good traditions in education, but the low level of technological development in the companies currently operating in the country, the lack of innovative solutions and the high unemployment rate hinder the well-qualified workers and employees to achieve a successful career on the labor market.

According to them, these are the main reasons for the increasing migration of young, highly educated people.

The participants of the focus group gave the following responses to the question posed:

#### **Table 1. Summarized results on the presence of specialists in different sectors**

Question: Is it easy for you to find the specialists needed to work in your company?				
Response	Consulting and business services	Production and trade	Higher education	Total share
Rather easy	21%	58%	43%	40,67
Rather difficult	79%	42%	57%	59,33

**Table 2. Summarized results on the professional training of the personnel**

Question: In your opinion what are the weaknesses of the educational qualification and the training of the personnel, who applied for a position in your company?		
Answers:		
1	Lack of working habits	41,5 %
2	Weak qualifications	46,10%
3	Lack of responsibility and exactingness	33,8 %
4	Unrealistic demands in regard to labor-wage	30,1%
5	Lack of endurance and patience	32,0 %
6	Detachment of the applicants from the actual labor conditions	29,3%
7	Lack of and weak working discipline	27,9%
8	There are not specialists in the field needed by our company	18,3%
9	Outdated knowledge, inapplicable in the contemporary world	26,7
10	Overly abstract theoretical knowledge	52,8
11	Lack of foreign language skills	10,3
12	Insufficient computer skills	10,3

The analysis of the data indicated that the employers identify the main issues in the educational instruction in three directions:

- ❖ **Education/qualification** - according to the data, the main weaknesses in this field is the insufficient instruction in the main specialty, weak qualification, lack of experience.
- ❖ **Personal qualities of the workers and employees** - weak motivation and lack of discipline.
- ❖ **Requirements from the employers** – too great expectations towards work wages, which do not correspond to the performed work.

Those present acknowledged the fact that the companies have increased their requirements for the candidates. Foreign language and computer skills are only one of the prerequisites for a successful career on the labor market. High qualification and the possession of additional skills are not among the most severe problems, pointed out by the employers who seek non-managerial personnel.

This fact results not from insufficient supply, but the slow development and low requirements of the majority of Bulgarian companies. That is why there is a large portion of employed individuals with low level of qualification and education, which receive low wages and therefore produce a low quality of life, even though they are part of the active working population on the labor market.

The conclusion, which can be drawn, is that the role of the education sector in Bulgaria is still not as well-developed as can be seen in societies with a higher degree of economic development. Bulgarian companies are not at an adequate level in order to stimulate the constant increase of the quality of education.

This is also confirmed by the analysis of the question on the requirements of the employers for the individuals employed by them.

**Requirements for non-managerial personnel:** According to the business field, absolute priority is given to the quality "responsibility, thoroughness" – 82%, followed by company loyalty – 67%, team work skills – 63%, conflict resolution – 59% professional experience – 58% and **on the sixth spot – a particular type of education – 57%.**

Acquired skills and knowledge in a certain field were selected by 52% of the companies, ability to work flexible hours – 41%, computer skills - 30% and foreign language skills – 16%.

**As a factor, education is on the sixth place.** Apart from company development, this ranking indicates that a key component of the education system needs to be not only obtaining certain knowledge, but also building skills such as team work, responsibility, exactingness, creativity, initiative, conflict resolution, etc., which are not placed very high in contemporary Bulgarian pedagogical practice.

**Requirements for managerial personnel** – When selecting managerial personnel, a certain education along with personal characteristics such as responsibility and creativity are a mandatory requirement of companies. The third and fourth position are shared by computer skills and language skills, with similar values, followed by company loyalty, professional experience, team work, conflict resolution skills. The possession of a particular specialty is pointed out as an important factor only by 39% of the respondents and only 11% require a Master's degree in the particular degree.

**Personnel recruitment practices** – Currently in Bulgaria, 90% of the enterprises are small and medium sized, i.e. companies in Bulgaria predominantly have a small staff, low commercial turnover and operate mainly in the field of trade and services. Personnel recruitment practices follow three trends:

- ❖ Recruitment of trained individuals with experience;
- ❖ Weak interest in interaction with education institutions in order to prepare the personnel needed by the company;

### Personal recommendations and training on site

51% of the companies in the survey express a definite lack of interest in cooperating with an education institution on a more regular basis. As an exception, companies in the field of consulting and business services, 68%, express an interest in cooperation, but without financial responsibilities such as granting financial aid for education, customized education, etc, which were extremely popular in Bulgaria during the 8's and 90's. When asked how they recruit their personnel, 54.5% of all respondents answered that they do not have low skilled workers, while 72.7% responded that they do not have top management.

Personnel recruitment company	Top management	Middle management	High-skilled employees	Low-skilled employees
Through acquaintances	12,3	16,8	24,2	33,0
Through advertisements in the media	26,5	23,7	25,2	27,3
Through the National employment agency and recruitment agencies	27,7	22,3	25,6	35,2
Through selection	29,7	32,1	4,1	1,9

Directly from education institutions	-	0,9	18,6	1,5
Others	3,8	4,2	2,3	1,1

### Conclusions from the discussion:

The business field does not recognize the separate higher education degrees, and the crucial factor for it is not obtaining a Bachelor's or Master's degree, but professional skills and competences, which the student has acquired during his studies. At the end of the discussion, the participants made the following recommendations:

1. To organize meetings between the business and the universities.
2. To introduce the practice of company internships during the course of the studies.
3. To conduct regular questionnaire surveys on the needs of the labor market for employee qualification.
4. To introduce a short-cycle higher education as a possibility to acquire professional qualifications to respond to the needs of the labor market.
5. Short-cycle education will provide the opportunity to increase the qualifications of already employed people.