

THEMATIC PROBE. Primary Education: an International Perspective

Country Description: Hungary

This country description was compiled from the *INCA* Archive (www.inca.org.uk).

1. Organisation of school phases=

How are the early years and primary phases organised? (3-5yrs? 5-11yrs?)

Pre-compulsory nursery education (*óvoda*) is provided for children aged three to six years. Although education does not become compulsory until children reach the age of six, all five-year-olds must attend kindergarten for a maximum of four hours' formal teaching daily in order to prepare for school.

The principal type of primary education institution is the eight-year *general school* (*általános iskola*) catering for students aged six to 14 years. However, some children may move on from primary level education to secondary school at age 10 or 12.

What are the points of transfer between phases?

Pre-compulsory kindergarten, age range	Compulsory primary, age range	Compulsory secondary, age range
3-6 years	6-10, or	10-18/19, or
	6-12, or	12-18/19, or
	6-14 (most common)	14-18/19 (most common)

Parents are discouraged from transferring children from kindergarten to school until they are mature enough, but children generally start compulsory schooling in the academic year in which they become six, unless they were born after 31 May. (The school year runs from September to June.) Such summer born children may enrol at the age of seven but, as with all others, will have had to attend kindergarten since they were five. Children require a kindergarten certificate for admission to *general school*.

2. Locus of control

What degree of control over curriculum content and other aspects of primary schools exists at the national, regional, local and/or school level?

General

Overall responsibility for education/education policy at the national level is that of the Ministry of Education. At school level, structural decisions are made by the local (municipal or county) authority which maintains schools. There are more than 3,000

local authorities which are responsible for providing basic educational services for the local population, either by maintaining a school or by creating access to institutions maintained by other authorities, and more than 95 per cent of primary and secondary schools are owned and run by local government/local authorities. Local authorities are responsible for:

- deciding on the establishment, organisation, reorganisation or closure of schools and defining their profile;
- defining school budgets;
- supervising schools financially and legally;
- appointing the director of the school;
- approving the teaching programme and the operational and organisational rules of schools; and
- evaluating the implementation of the (teaching) programme and the efficiency of teaching in schools.

There are no central regulations governing the organisation of teaching/classes. Individual schools make such decisions. As a result there is great variety at individual school level. Classes may be organised by ability and/or subject specialisation for subjects such as music, physical education, languages etc or in small ability or interest groups for subjects such as mathematics or languages.

Curriculum

There is a national curriculum framework. The National Core Curriculum (NCC) establishes a central definition of minimum requirements for each subject area/area of knowledge (or 'cultural domain' as it is often known), from which schools and local teaching staff are expected to define and adopt local curricula and courses for each class and each subject area. Local curricula can also be 'borrowed' from other schools thanks to a national curriculum 'bank', from which schools not wishing to develop their own curriculum can select.

In September 2000, framework curricula were introduced to all schools. These frameworks provide an interim regulatory level between the NCC and the local curricula drawn up and used by educational institutions. The frameworks are designed to ensure that the education provided in publicly-funded schools meets national regulations, whilst giving schools as much autonomy as possible. All schools had to introduce local curricula amended to match the framework curricula for Years 1, 5 and 9 (ages six to seven, 10-11 and 14-15 years respectively) from September 2001. The gradual introduction of such amended curricula will mean that, by 2004, all year groups will be taught via local curricula based on the curriculum frameworks. The framework curricula are available (in English) online at <http://www.om.hu/j4a2.html>

Are there any shifts in the distribution of control between these different levels? (Is it possible to assign percentages to each level, to reflect circumstances in each country?)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

At what intervals is the curriculum reviewed? (eg are there established review cycles?)

Under the previous Communist regime (until 1989), curricular changes occurred extensively on a national scale, essentially once every decade. Since 1990, work has been taking place on a new curricular framework - the National Core Curriculum (NCC). The NCC began to be implemented in 1998, at which time a new government came into power in Hungary. This triggered a review of the NCC and further changes may result from this.

3. Curriculum content

What does the statutory curriculum consist of?

The National Core Curriculum comprises 10 'subject areas' - usually known as 'cultural domains'. These are:

- Mother tongue and literature: either Hungarian language and literature or minority language (Hungary has 13) and literature. (The education of minorities has been governed by law since September 1993, when the Public Education Act became valid. Since then, the 13 minorities in Hungary have had the right to education in their mother tongue. The language of instruction for language and literature, history, geography and culture must be the mother tongue but, at the same time, minority students must have the opportunity to become acquainted with the Hungarian language and culture. Similarly, students who do not belong to the given minority should have the opportunity of acquainting themselves with the culture of the local minority.)
- Modern foreign languages.
- Mathematics.
- Man and society: social studies; civics; economics; human studies; history.
- Man and nature: natural studies; physics; chemistry; biology and health studies.
- Our earth and environment.
- Arts: singing and music; dance and drama; visual arts; motion picture and media studies.
- 'Informatics': computing studies; library use.
- Life management and practical studies: technology; home economics; career orientation.
- Physical education and sports.

***What other aspects of the curriculum/teaching in schools are statutory?
Are time allocations for subjects statutory?***

Other statutory subject areas

In addition to the 10 compulsory subject areas (cultural domains) detailed above, there are also compulsory cross-curricular objectives, as follows:

- Homeland. Every student is expected to become acquainted with the characteristics of their national heritage and the historic values of the nation's culture, and to appreciate the values and achievements of other nations and ethnic groups both within and outside Hungary.
- Integration into Europe and the world.
- Environmental education.
- Communication culture.
- Physical and mental health.
- Learning.
- Career orientation.

Time allocation

The National Core Curriculum (NCC) determines guideline proportions for the cultural domains that indicate their weight within the curriculum, in accordance with the specific years of the compulsory *general school*. These are expressed in terms of approximate percentages, as it is recognised that individual schools will transform cultural domains into specific teaching subjects in different ways. It is for schools themselves to determine the exact amounts of time to be allocated to the various cultural domains. In other words, the NCC does not contain strict timetables. It provides only an approximate distribution of teaching time among the various cultural domains as follows:

The subject areas/cultural domains of the NCC and the approximate distribution of teaching time, %

Subject area	Years 1-4 ages 6-10	Years 5-6 ages 10-12	Years 7-8 ages 12-14
Mother tongue and literature	32-40	16-20	11-13
Modern foreign language		11-15	9-12
Mathematics	19-23	16-20	10-14
Man and society	4-7	5-9	10-14
Man and nature	5-9	8-12	16-22
Earth and environment			4-7
Arts	12-16	12-16	9-12
Informatics (IT)		2-4	4-7
Lifestyle and practical skills	4-7	5-9	6-10
Physical education and sport	10-14	9-13	6-10

Are there statutory timings for the length of the school day/week?

Education in the *general school* takes place in the morning. By law, the academic year, in all Years/Grades, is 185 days of teaching, from 1 September to 30 June of the following year. Children in Years 1-3 (ages six to nine) study for a maximum of four hours each day; in Years 4 to 6 (ages nine to 12) they study for four to five hours (the weekly average must not exceed four-and-a-half hours each day); and in Years 7-8 (ages 12-14) the maximum daily study time is five hours.

Children up to the age of seven, usually have 20 45-minute lessons each five-day week, Monday to Friday, whilst those up to the age of 10 have 25.

Schools may also organise special (extracurricular) activities which are not compulsory. The time allocation for these subjects must not exceed 10 per cent of the total educational time allocation in Years 1-3; 25 per cent in Years 4-6; and 30 per cent in Years 7-8.

In accordance with the 1993 Public Education Act, teachers in the *general school* are obliged to teach for 20 hours a week. The remainder of their time is used for planning and lesson preparation.

What changes have there been to the statutory/non-statutory elements of the curriculum?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What government/other initiatives have been introduced? What has been their impact?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What other trends are emerging in curriculum development? (eg new subjects/areas of learning being introduced)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What other levers may be having an impact on curriculum content? (eg international studies: PIRLS, IEA, PISA, TIMSS)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

4. Organisation of the curriculum

What are the common features of curriculum organisation in the primary phase? (single subjects? planning subjects as 'topics'?)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

How are subjects labelled?

Within the National Core Curriculum (NCC) in Hungary, subjects are known as 'subject areas', 'areas of knowledge' or 'cultural domains'.

What examples are there of 'areas' rather than subjects?

What examples are there of clusters of subjects (eg Humanities, made up of geography and history) being brought together?

Within the National Core Curriculum (NCC), there are the following specific clusters of subjects or subject areas:

- Man and society. This includes social studies; civics; economics; human studies; and history.
- Man and nature: natural studies; physics; chemistry; biology and health studies.
- Our earth and environment.
- Arts, which includes singing and music; dance and drama; visual arts; and motion picture and media studies.
- 'Informatics' comprising computing studies; and library use.
- Life management and practical studies. This includes technology; home economics; and career orientation.

As students progress through the years of the *general school*, the curriculum is based more on the individual subjects of the clusters rather than on the general clusters named above.

What are the common features of timetabling? (eg weekly lessons in each subject, English and mathematics taught daily)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

5. Assessment

What is the purpose, nature and scale of assessment? (eg end of phase assessment, statutory, published test results, optional, national, local, timed tests, teacher-assessment)

The performance of all students is regularly evaluated throughout the school year and mid-term and final marks are provided in each subject. Students are assessed on the basis of written and/or oral performance, sometimes under test conditions.

Traditionally, continuous student assessment in Hungary has been the responsibility of the individual teacher who has enjoyed considerable autonomy in this field. The National Core Curriculum (NCC) has introduced attainment targets for students at the end of Years 4, 6 and 8 (ages 10, 12 and 14 respectively). These have been introduced gradually since September 1998.

Prior to the introduction of the NCC, student assessment used particularly to take place from Year 5 to Year 8 (age 10+ to 14 years). Most teachers chose to use centrally-produced test papers with instructions and marking schemes. The administration and marking were carried out by individual teachers in schools. All subjects, except for the arts, foreign languages and PE, were covered by these test

papers. Tests took different forms depending on the nature of the subjects. For example, mathematics tests contained almost exclusively free-response items and, in science, open-ended questions were most common. Multiple choice questions were generally not used in the testing system during compulsory schooling, but were introduced in the entrance examinations to tertiary level institutions. With the gradual introduction of the NCC, the importance of the above tests has begun to decrease, deferring student assessment to the end of Year 10, age 16. There are, however, proposals to introduce central (standardised) tests for students in Years 4, 6 and 8 (aged 10, 12 and 14 respectively) to support teachers' assessment. Such tests will be written in accordance with, and cover the topics and attainment goals of, the NCC.

The purpose of student assessment can be summarised as:

- To make students aware of their own achievements.
- To gain a general overview of the fulfilment of curriculum requirements.
- To advise and inform curriculum developers and textbook authors.
- To provide help for teachers' self-assessment.

All students who achieve a minimum level of attainment (a mark of '2' on a five-point scale where '1' represents 'failed' and '5' 'excellent') tend to progress automatically to the next year. Those whose performance is judged inadequate when they receive their end of year marks - based on continuous assessment of written and oral class work and tests undertaken throughout the year - may be requested to sit a special examination or test before being permitted to progress; may be placed in special remedial classes until they are judged ready to move on (see below); or may be requested to repeat the year. Generally, students who fail their assessment in one or two subjects sit a special examination before they are permitted to progress to the next class, cycle or phase. Those who fail in more subjects may be requested to repeat the year. Children in Year 1, however, aged six to seven years, may automatically proceed to Year 2. The individual subject teacher has the right to evaluate students, but staff level consultation is typical.

Students who, on the basis of continuous assessment throughout the school year, are judged to be failing to keep up with their peers/expected standards are placed in special, small classes which are taught in much the same way and do basically the same work as the 'standard' class. After a period of two years and, again, on the basis of continuous assessment, many of these students are successfully reintegrated into ordinary classes. The remainder are sent to special schools.

Student performance and achievement in the *general school* generally determines the type of secondary school a student will go on to attend. The highest attaining academic students tend to progress to the secondary grammar school (*gimnázium*); others proceed to some form of secondary vocational school, again dependent on attainment. Students whose achievements are not judged adequate to attend either the secondary grammar school or a 'standard' secondary vocational school are usually placed in vocational training schools, offering one- to three-year courses in a special field or profession. Such schools do not issue certificates, but prepare students for entry to the labour market.

How far is the curriculum driven by assessments? (eg evidence of teacher preparation for testing, 'booster' or 'catch-up' classes in schools)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

6. Teaching profession/training

What changes can be identified in initial teacher training programmes?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What kinds of continuing professional development/on-going training are provided?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

To what degree are teachers'/schools' planning subject to scrutiny?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

To what degree are teachers using electronic formats to plan?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

7. Pedagogy

Which teaching approaches are dominant or developing a higher profile, and which are receding? (eg collaborative work, whole-class instruction)

Although, in principle, teaching methods are a matter for the individual teacher, it appears that whole class 'face-the-front' teaching and blackboard work is common, with children following a programme of planned exercises simultaneously.

What is the impact of ICT in teaching practice? (eg use of electronic whiteboards, intranets, managed learning environments/local grids)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

To what degree are teaching approaches focusing on developing thinking skills, creativity and building on children's learning styles?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

8. Resourcing

How far are resources to support teaching made available via government/central/local agencies?

How far, and in which subjects, are resources statutory/ recommended/ subsidised? (eg textbooks, courses, lesson plans for teachers, web-based materials)

Teachers generally select the textbooks they wish to use from the list of officially approved textbooks produced annually by the Government. This list provides teachers with appropriate information on what textbooks are available on the market. Individual teachers have the right to choose the textbooks to be used in each class, although generally it is the decision of the staff as a whole. The textbooks selected must comply with the school's 'pedagogical/teaching programme'.

The National Council for Public Education assists the national Ministry of Education in compiling the official textbook list by recommending textbooks for registration.

Schools receive a grant from the state budget for textbook purchase on the basis of the number of students enrolled in the school. The principles of the division of this grant, which only partially covers their cost to the school, are decided by the teaching staff. In principle, the grant covers some 20 to 30 per cent of the cost of the textbooks; the remaining 70 to 80 per cent is paid by the parents. However, some schools use the whole of this state grant to support children in need; ensuring textbooks are entirely free for such students. Other students then pay for all textbooks. Additionally, the authorities responsible for maintaining schools often contribute to the costs of textbooks, especially in the case of families in need, while some of them traditionally buy the textbooks for all children in Year 1 (aged six to seven).

Textbooks are usually produced by commercial, free market publishers, but there is a state subsidy. This does not take the form of a direct state subvention. Instead, the State provides a guarantee for banks providing production loans to publishing companies.

Textbooks and teaching material necessary for minority education must be provided by the State. Textbooks may be translations of the Hungarian textbooks; textbooks in the minority language written in Hungary; or textbooks from abroad.

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