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*Stocktaking on quality assurance
in education and EDC*

*Country report : Bulgaria
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1. Introduction

This country study has been prepared following the framework agreed at the Ljubljana meeting (March –April 2003) and the research plan for Bulgaria. The study was carried out at a most unfavourable time, when a profound change in the structure of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) was taking place, and when there was also a change of Minister. In the short term these developments are not affecting the environment for schools, but in the midterm this will definitely result in a change in the way schools are administered, and certainly affects the way in which papers like this are and will be accepted. This report does not present the official views and ideas of MES. It is the result of consultations with teachers, school directors, ministry officials and researchers in the education sector.

2. Current interest in “Quality in Education” in Country.

Quality in education is a topic that can be understood by any Bulgarian, even those who are not specialized or professionals in the field. This understanding is very often based on the achievements of previous generations. It concentrates mainly on individual results at schools, which still help Bulgarians to be quite well ranked in different educational surveys, tests and international competitions¹. This approach to quality, which still forms public opinion, has little interest in the process of quality provision, only in individual education results. The institutions responsible for the education process (the Ministry of Education and Science-MES, Universities and schools) are expected to produce excellent results in spite of effects of the transition period and the changes in society. They are still expected to “control” the processes and to report good results. Since 1999, MES has been trying to formulate a way to provide quality in education within the national context. It has produced a number of policy and strategy documents, but most of these are aimed at serving immediate political or EU integration/accession goals and were not put out for broad public consultation and discussion with all stakeholders. It is only now, with the most recent changes in the government and the Ministry that an opportunity has arisen for this to happen.

First, the Ministry has established five new Directorates (where there was previously only one) to administer and guide school education in the country:

- Policy in General Education
- Education and Cultural Integration
- Coordination and Control
- Teacher Training
- Policy in Vocational Education and Lifelong Learning

¹ Bulgarian team is ranked first on the World Olympics in mathematics, ahead of China and USA.

Second, a number of consultative bodies (the Education Branch Council, the Council on the Curricula, the Advisory Council on Roma, etc.) are actively working with the education administration at different levels, and a Strategy for Secondary Education is expected to be produced this autumn. One of the important contributions of this strategy will be the definition of quality in education, as seen in the Bulgarian context.

3. Current interest in QA systems in education in the Country.

The above is merely to confirm that the issue of quality in Bulgarian education is one on which the Ministry is beginning to concentrate. It is not an externally imposed target, but is more a result of the unsatisfactory provision that has been observed over the last decade. The last attempt of MES to institutionalize the idea of ensuring quality in education was dated as recently as 2001, when the National Assessment Unit was established, using a World Bank loan. It was expected that this would fund efforts to organise the first Matura exams, and would also ensure the process of quality assurance, by working out indicators and measures for the education process. These expectations have so far failed to be realised, as only a probationary Matura, with special attention paid to the Bulgarian language exam, was organised.

Additionally, some university establishments (for example, the Department of Information and Further Teacher Training at Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski”) and a number of NGOs had already organized some forums to initiate discussion on quality issues. It is not to be expected that there is agreement between the understanding of the researchers (mainly at universities) and that of the practical innovators (NGOs and some private schools) in defining quality processes in schools. Both sides are more involved in stressing or adding components that are missing in the reform processes. There is still no single common understanding of quality assurance.

Education for Democratic Citizenship² (EDC) has, since 2000, been a part of the whole process of introducing educational standards to provide quality of education. At that time MES published the State Educational Requirements (SER) for EDC curricula content in the “State gazette” iss.48 of 18th May. In a way, this act simply revived the tradition of civic education in Bulgaria which started in 1894 with the publication of the first textbook on civic education. This was not enough to enable implementation at school level, and it was decided that the Matura exam on EDC should be postponed until all support services (textbooks, teacher training, etc) are in place.

The upgraded SER for EDC are targeting well defined levels of knowledge and skills as well as the attitudes that are expected to be adopted by students throughout their schooling. They are part of obligatory general education and selective general education and are specified for every school level and stage at school from 1st to 12th grade. It is expected that some forms of out of class activities will also contribute to EDC.

² In Bulgaria the terminology used is “civic education” but for the purpose of this paper we will use the EDC as equal to the Bulgarian one.

4. Empowerment and devolved responsibility.

The parameters of education reform in Bulgaria are not defined on paper. They can be traced as a chain of changes taken on board and mainly introduced in the administration of the system during the last 13 years, with different degrees of success in operational terms. The same is the case for QA in the key sectors of education. Some Ministry teams adopted the legislation necessary for the process, and then others had to implement it, using a framework that was not always suitable. So, at times (e.g. the period 2000-2001), the accent was more on quality control (QC), as it was assumed that the system needed stronger administrative supervision. It is very difficult to pass judgement on the QA and QC approaches in the education system because of the problems of the transition period. At least two of the main outcomes of this period are the under funding of education and the attempts at decentralization.

As a result of under funding, the education policy makers and administrators do not have sufficient resources and instruments to support the QA process. They leave it to the ambition and commitment of policy teams or just expect it to “happen “ in schools. There are some ‘show’ or ‘elite’ schools where this is the case.

Decentralization is not always as motivating and inspiring as expected, as it is not properly resourced. In Bulgaria it brings together the local actors - school- municipality- parents but the inequality between them is still so strong that it usually leads to the implementation of control measures.

Often the understanding of the dichotomy of QA/QC and its operationalization in countries in transition is fixed in the legislation. This still tends to prescribe most of the activities carried out at school rather than to provide an overall framework.

It was expected that the last amendments in the education sector legislation (mainly the Law on amendment and supplement of the Public Education Act, the Law on schooling levels, general secondary minimum and the curriculum) would target the delivery of quality education, especially at secondary level. Several things have “prevented” the development of efficient governance and competent administration of quality education in the country:

- The absence of clear vision on secondary education as a process, its structure and content, and the way it is funded. It has always been explained that all changes are aimed at implementing European and world standards, but this without sharing with the public what exactly this means;
- The fractured relationship between education and upbringing (in fact EDC plays a major role here);
- Lack of clarity concerning the main goals of, and the need for, education reform, its objectives and implementation phases, the balance between the traditional advantages of Bulgarian education (for example languages and math) and the background and the directions of the new trends and innovative practices;
- Underestimating the role of the state in guaranteeing the right to education for everyone by the Constitution. Now equal access to education in the rural areas is not the problem of the minorities alone;

- The absence of an operational strategy for continuing improvement of the quality and competitiveness of Bulgarian general education;

The greatest obstacle and challenge for all the efforts made by schools and teachers, in the absence of clear reform vision, is the shortage or total lack of material resources of all kinds- heating, building repairing, support materials, consumables, IT equipment, sports facilities, etc. All this make schools unattractive to both students and teachers, and very often is the major factor in parents' choices.

A few instruments or resources have been piloted or introduced nationwide. These are empowering schools to take responsibilities for the provision of quality:

- The delegated budgets scheme gives schools opportunities to plan and manage part of the school budget themselves. Bearing in mind that usually more than 85% of the budget is spend on salaries, it is not possible to progress without the support of the local authorities.
- Schools have some right to select 30% of the curricula. This is done with difficulty, as not all the necessary support services are available and teachers are not motivated to invest additional efforts. The flexibility in the curriculum is still an under-utilized opportunity within the education system.
- Schools have flexibility in cooperation with the Boards of Trustees. Very often this is the only opportunity for them to be involved in projects and to receive additional support or funding for their initiatives.
- What to expect in the provision and choices for textbooks is, until now, uncertain. The quality criteria for them have been changed frequently.

What is decisive for most schools in their efforts to maintain a quality level of education is the involvement of local authorities and partners. Municipalities have a major role here, as they not only fund the schools but are also represented in all school support establishments (different boards) and main procedures of administration (though they do not have the decisive vote in selecting and appointing directors, for example). It is usually the positive attitude and environment they create for education that encourages schools to concentrate on the quality of what they are doing.

5. “Self improving schools”.

It is very difficult to trace and speak about a conscious or intentional adoption of a “self improving/self evaluation school” approach, or of governmental interest in this issue. In spite of all the above difficulties schools are doing their best to provide quality in the education process:

- In one way or another they are trying to structure most of the elements of QA, as understood for the purpose of this study, and to adopt them within the existing school environment and capacities;
- Very often schools establish internal agreement on quality for the different fields and classes (additional to the entry levels fixed in the regulations):

- teachers' assessment of the quantity of the material taught and the quality of students' expected performance
- assessment of developments for every subject area
- recommendations for further upgrading of teaching
- all this is usually signed by all teachers for the different subject areas
- They try to control the end results of their work by sharing responsibilities between themselves, but also by trusting some traditional external methods of assessment- the Olympiads (national competitions in several rounds) for different subjects, success in entrance exams after seventh grade, university entrance exams, feedback from some inspectors, and any other structured and written documentation, etc.
- They introduce some internal forms of assessment to control and develop the education process:
 - consultations with students to provide sufficient feedback
 - creation of their own assessment forms to motivate and promote the best teaching practices, etc.
 - pedagogical control exercised by the school authorities to influence individual teachers' performance;
 - internal-methodological groups, school boards, etc.
- They cooperate with donors and municipal authorities to make the school accountable to the community, trying to base their communication on targets set annually:
 - to give awards to the best teachers and students at the end of the school year;
 - to give feedback to parents at semester meetings or individually
 - to use local radio stations and television to inform the public or to promote school initiatives;
 - to organize school open days, for the community to visit the premises;
- They try to organize all school activities to be teacher centred- to upgrade teachers' skills and qualities (internally in seminars or using external training, mainly from NGOs) and support them in achieving the targets set.

6. Training and consultancy support for schools.

It is very difficult, given the way schools are managed, administrated and funded, to imagine that they can develop corporate working practices and culture. Centralization is still overwhelming schools' and teachers' behavior, leaving very little space for creating participative styles. Formal execution of responsibilities and minimum performance efforts can often be observed.

Teachers can justify their performance, blaming the existing contracts and also the existing imperfections in both initial teacher training and in-service teacher training:

There are no State Educational Requirements concerning the competencies needed for those that want to become teachers. Now most University graduates with Bachelor's degrees can become teachers even if they showed poor achievements as students. This problem is of social importance because society can not expect a poorly performing student to become a good teacher. How can such a person, with inadequate training, not only teach but prepare students for matriculation and perhaps sit on the exam board?

In Bulgaria there is no clear vision or concept of teacher training. This situation leads to serious problems, the most notable being teachers' lack of motivation for professional self-improvement. Their confidence and their desire to work qualitatively are suppressed, due to the lack of any prospects for career development. There is only differentiation between a primary school teacher and a secondary school teacher. No attention is paid to secondary education levels (between a teacher in a secondary, and teacher in an upper secondary education school), type of school (general secondary and vocational schools), etc.

The acquisition of the occupational degree of a teacher takes place only in higher education institutions/universities, thus eliminating from the education services market all other potential education actors, and strongly reducing competition. The University decides whether it is obligatory for Bachelors in a given discipline to acquire the occupational degree of a teacher. Some of them make it a condition for the acquisition of the educational Bachelor's degree. This means that all Bachelors become teachers.

In-service teacher training is done only in three university establishments and they have the right to grant the occupational degree also. This kind of monopoly raises a number of issues:

- There is no continuity in providing teacher training services. In one institution the different providers of pre- and in-service teacher training do not speak to each other.
- There is no competition in the provision of teacher training, and this makes it less attractive and motivating for teachers, especially the young ones;
- in the syllabuses and training courses offered by the previously mentioned units, the prevailing dominant trend emphasises staff pedagogical competence and not specialized new skills and scientific training in the appropriate fields. Project work is just emerging and participation in international programs is not used for teachers' development.
- In- service teacher training is not mandatory. It is left to teachers to decide whether they want it, or to the recommendation of their superiors. This eliminates nearly all opportunities for the evaluation of teachers' performance, not to mention participative inputs and publications or individual projects.
- In-service teacher training is done in five stages/levels with obligatory time intervals between them. This demotivates most teachers from even starting to climb the ladder. This is an attempt to compensate for the absence of career development opportunities for teachers. The way it is organized is based on producing papers and passing exams and not on building, proving and validating, recognizing professional skills and competences for different profiles. Young teachers represent a very small percentage of those beginning on the long "path" to reach the top of the qualification hill.

Last but not least, qualification levels do not result in a substantial or motivating increase in teachers' wages. The only motivational element is that the higher the qualification possessed, the lower the chance of that teacher being made redundant. To this we must add the absence of adequate mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teachers' work and its effectiveness:

- Regional Inspectorates of Education, in accordance with the statute on their organization and procedures as regional sub-divisions of MES, do not have effective instruments and responsibilities to effectively monitor teachers' work. They do not have any specific responsibilities for EDC teachers
- There is no national assessment of students' achievements (the matriculation in 2003 can not be accepted as a successful one) which can be used as a background for formulating an active mechanism for training quality improvement.
- School directors are the only people who make final judgments on teachers' performance. All other school and local establishments can only advise or consult him/her on this.
- Labour legislation still actively defends the rights of the workers, not public interest. This is especially true for education.

The in-service teacher training institutions are trying to reach their clients and keep the interest in training by organizing it in the field (in the municipalities, following requests from both schools and Regional Inspectorates of education). They are also diversifying the support services offered - targeted courses, special tailor made courses, etc. They are trying to meet expectations and interests, especially since Bulgarian teachers are still ready to invest in their training, despite the low wages and the absence of career opportunities. But still there is no reliable motivation, nor mechanisms to provide incentives for teachers to develop and upgrade their competences and skills and to build real careers in education.

And the competition is there...a number of NGOs (like "Paidea", "Open education", "Civic education" etc.) provide good examples of how EDC training can be organized to support curriculum implementation, and of how quickly the informal sector can respond in producing training materials for this. The NGOs in the last couple of years are in fact leading in this sphere. MES can utilize and build on these good practices for the future.

It is true that the foundations are using a lot of donors' money to implement training and to publish support materials for EDC, but for some of the activities teachers contribute themselves, which is very encouraging. There are also a number of textbooks and methodological materials that are officially approved by MES for use in classrooms, and by teachers and students in EDC.

Consultation for teachers and schools in understanding this kind of support is not, so far, provided at institutional level or by informal establishments. The international projects are exceptions, but the sustainability of the results and experience gained is still a challenge.

7. School development planning

The planning processes at schools are predominantly concentrated on how to introduce the new requirements for different subjects, how to select new textbooks and ensure good teachers' performance and how to attract and keep children at school. The municipalities have a decisive role in this process (they fund the schools) and there is already an association of municipality civil servants responsible for education. This association is trying to support and mobilize efforts to raise the quality of education at local level, working with the local communities and educational institutions. Other specialized support for building capacity (mainly of headmasters and inspectorates) for planning exists within the framework of some international projects, but the mechanisms for institutionalizing and sustaining these processes are limited.

8. National/international benchmarks and assessment processes

One of the most visible shortcomings in ensuring quality in the education system in Bulgaria is the absence of a nationwide system for assessment or national testing. The system still does not have all the resources to start to implement tests at all levels. The format of national tests, untrained teachers, unadapted curricula, lack of guides and materials, copying machines, paper, etc, all hamper progress. It is still very difficult to decide why, since 1995, several MES attempts at this have been unsuccessful, after their public declaration of commitment to a national test system. Though a lot of schools are trying to introduce tests, the establishment of national guidelines, not to mention about standards, is necessary. Even the national Olympiads for the different subjects are no longer a national benchmark, since different schools are following different textbooks, and the material covered is different.

Recently, MES has produced a special regulation to start internal and external assessment of students' achievements and to use this as a basis for developing the quality of teaching and learning. The section relating to external assessment provides opportunities not only to use matriculation, but for directors to be able to assess students' achievements (the so called self assessment of schools). Still the criteria and the goals of this assessment are not clear- who is going to receive and comment on the results, is it for public release or only for the schools system, etc? For the first time the regulation states that an evaluation of achievements, based on the State Educational Requirements, can be made. This evaluation is to be conducted by MES units, and is not obligatory. No consequent actions for schools are planned. For now it is not clear what form the evaluations will take - essays, tests, or whatever. No mechanisms are yet envisaged to implement this evaluation, whether after every educational stage (after 4th, 8th and 12th grades) or annually for selected subjects. The consultation and the discussions are only now starting, but this is the only way to empower the system, providing comparable data and opportunities for analysis, corrections and development.

Only two events during school life enable students, parents and the general public to guess what is happening in the system. These are the national entrance exams after the 7th grade (these are regionally evaluated) and the entrance exams for the Universities. In the last couple of years it is only matriculation that has created negative emotions. In fact these exams do not give an accurate picture of what is happening in schools. Most

students attend private lessons or visit “private companies for preparation for entrance exams”. This is the biggest proof that the quality of education does not correspond to the targets set, and that in fact there is a double standard - one for the classroom and another for the well paid who can afford additional classes. There is no consistency in the efforts to provide continuity in the introduction of standards in education. A lot of teachers’ and schools’ energy is invested in the introduction of the new framework, but still nobody knows exactly what the results will be.

Bulgaria has borrowed money to establish a national test unit but until now expectations have not been met, and obviously the lobby of the grey market/industry for educational services is successfully defending its interests as far as entrance exams are concerned. The belief that “our schools still manage to prepare our children to enter Universities abroad and to achieve good results in international competitions” does not take cognizance of the fact that the quality of education provision is more and more dependent on family budgets and the area where families live. An elite segment of students is formed from a very young age (13-14-15 year olds). Only the ability to pay for access to further tuition can “prepare” you for entering a prestigious school. This is distorting the curriculum reform efforts of MES, but much more so the efforts and investments of teachers, students and parents.

9. National Inspectorate.

The bottlenecks in the governance and administration of education in providing quality are to a great extent predetermined by certain discrepancies and shortcomings in the current legal regulations:

- Duplication of the governance and control functions of entities which are unequal in status. The recent changes in the Public Education Act decreed the Ministry of Education and Science to be a specialized body for both administration and control. At the same time, the act assigned similar functions to the Regional Inspectorates of Education. On the other hand, as specified in this very Act, Regional Inspectorates of Education are regional administrations of the minister, meant to support him in state education policy enforcement. This second specification subordinates the Regional Inspectorates to the Minister. The control function requires the imposition of some corrective actions or sanctions, in the event of identified violations of the education legislation. But it is not within the discretion of the Regional Inspectorates of Education to impose such sanctions, especially in certain situations concerning schools, and especially school directors. By law the minister is the one who concludes and terminates contracts with the directors of the state-owned pre-school institutions, schools and education support units. The local authorities provide for, and are responsible for, school education up to the age of 16 by constitution, by providing all educational costs, including teachers’ wages and inspection of the education system.

So the Regional Inspectorates of Education have difficulties with local authorities in providing quality and control in municipal funded and municipal schools³.

- The contradictory status of the Regional Inspectorates of Education, which are both separate legal entities and regional administrations assigned to the minister. This duality of their background predetermines the limited responsibilities and range of operations of the Regional Inspectorates of Education as legal entities. The restrictions of their legal independence are stated by the Minister in the respective by-laws/Regulation on the organization and procedures of the Regional Inspectorates of Education. The latest one exhaustively prescribes their structure, functions and the way they should organize their work. They cannot be expected to go beyond administration and control with the resources and the tasks assigned.
- Defining Regional Inspectorates of education as legal entities contradicts the norm of their heads being civil servants, appointed and dismissed by the Minister. The same is valid for the experts, who are state civil servants in the Regional Inspectorates of Education. As a result, we have a vertically inadequate hierarchy (dominating subordination to the minister) and the interweaving of similar functions between two hierarchically unequal entities. All this pre-determines the formal and inadequate enforcement of the functions assigned to the Regional Inspectorates of Education. To a great extent they have predominantly to register and report facts concerning local educational life, being unable to support the local enforcement of educational policy or provide sufficient methodological and consultative support to local schools. It is necessary to change and upgrade the status of the Regional Inspectorates of Education to enable them to act as coordination, support and methodological units of the local education process. This would involve turning the administration pyramid upside down, i.e. for MES to reduce the number of its employees and to increase the number of employees in the Regional Inspectorates of Education. The inspectorates should be further supported in capacity building, in order to become real professionals, managing local educational developments and supporting schools in providing quality teaching. Local authorities will be able to act locally with the inspectorates only after such changes are in place, otherwise good cooperation will continue to be the exception rather than the rule.
- The school, being the main unit in the education process, is often badly affected by indifferent or unrealistic governance and administrative resolutions, which it is compelled to enact. Very often it serves three masters: the civil servants of the Ministry of Education and Science; Regional Inspectorates of Education experts and the “Education” Departments in the local authorities. All three of them are important enough to demand attention and time, and all of them limit the operational freedom of the school director. If we add to the equation the limited functions of the school directors and the School Pedagogical Councils, and the limited financial resources, it is unrealistic to expect that schools can be subjects of self-governance or “self

³ In Bulgaria most of VET schools are funded by MES and the rest (except private ones that collect fees) are usually funded by the state budget through the municipalities.

improving schools”, looking for opportunities for providing quality in the education process.

- Due to the lack of the necessary by-laws, the established School Boards of Trustees are not always operational in practice, or are used to overcome some of the financial rigidities imposed by other laws. Thus the relationship between the school and civic society is not functional, but is used in a selective way. Public interest in education is difficult to express even through such traditional Bulgarian educational establishments.
- There is no flexible or consistent state policy on school network optimization. The Ministry of Education and Science’s approach, till now, has been to relate quality of education to the closing down of schools. This is not well thought out, and in most cases is wrong. It is wrong to take economic principles of relevance to an extreme, as is carelessness about the facilities of the closed down schools. This results from the long term governance vacuum on these issues in the Ministry of Education and Science, which for a long time failed to attempt to issue validation to the schools or to conduct a dialogue with local authorities and Trade Unions to decide where, how and when to implement the school network reconfiguration.

Representatives of the ministry and regional inspectorate institutions attend some of the SICI events, but there is no official Bulgarian membership.

10. Curriculum and definitions of “Quality”.

Education quality, especially at secondary education level, is clearly decreasing. The main reason is the imposed reform process in the curriculum and syllabuses:

- At the introduction of the mandatory Grade 12, there was no clarity on the content to be covered and the support materials to be used by teachers and students. This created the biggest misbalance in education:
 - It broke the continuity of building upon knowledge;
 - It made it impossible for teachers and students to follow a systematic approach;
 - It violated the consistency of knowledge and skills delivered;
 - It violated the internal rationale of the knowledge for each school subject - the vertical accumulation of knowledge;
 - It violated the inter-disciplinary links;
 - In some cases the proportion of mandatory to obligatory elective subjects does not meet the basic principles of didactics.
- The introduction of the new curricula and syllabi in the 9th grade was not followed by well thought through, clear development regulations and capacity building measures (textbook preparation, curricula support, etc). The system was not backed up by adequate training in terms of organization and content for the implementation of a quality process.

From there arose the inconsistency between curriculum, syllabuses and State Educational Requirements on content and textbooks. This differs substantially from the period 1992-1998, when schools were self run and the internal and managerial culture was more open to change, influenced by external conditions (a spontaneous bottom up approach), but NOT by top down educational innovations and new administrative procedures.

Most of these documents and materials have been drafted or regulated in-house without taking into consideration, or looking for, inter-relationship and the provision of support for the users. That is why the participants in the education process feel affected by the administrative decisions. The students very often do not accept the textbooks because of their convoluted, difficult, scientific language. Teachers do not accept them either, because of the massive change in the content, but also because of the way they are usually imposed upon them. Teachers and school directors make futile efforts to logically relate the education process to State Educational Requirements with the syllabuses. These efforts and tensions take up most of their time for years, then finally become redundant as new changes are introduced. They fail to produce sufficient results, since they can not compensate for the intensity of the introduction of regulations and the burden of the administrative interventions and control at different levels.

After de-politicisation these changes in the curricula, the syllabi and the administration of education created the biggest challenges for schools. “A lot of changes happen...but reform...we are not sure” stated most of the school directors. The introduction of new subjects (ICT, foreign languages, etc), new content, new normative documentation and procedures, the State Educational Requirements, etc, all can be mastered from the organizational perspective. But all directors are convinced that it is very difficult to ask for quality if the appropriate training for staff is not available. The need for a clear framework that provides some resources, and opportunities to act at school level, is something that is lacking for now.

The unstructured nature of the organization of the curriculum at school level⁴ (and the amount of textbooks offered on the market) has created new challenges and difficulties for the mobility of students and the transfer of students’ achievements. In the absence of locally agreed schemes for monitoring and evaluation of curriculum implementation, sometimes the great discrepancies are making the study of the same subject in different places incompatible. The equalization of achievements under different school programs is totally left to individual teachers and is not regulated. This introduces a lot of subjective judgments concerning both the programs and the students.

One other point made by the directors concerned the absence of any common ground in comparing the achievements of different schools within a community, far less competitive evaluation. The need for a standard approach to evaluating and ranking schools is recognised.

⁴ Schools can decide how to organize about 30% of the curricula in some cases.

11. Accountability.

The school education system reports on formal indicators (number of teachers, students, meeting the curriculum and syllabi requirements, etc) of a mandatory and administrative character to the Regional Inspectorates for Education/MES. They are also accountable financially to the municipalities. Despite the fact that the ministry has introduced State Educational Requirements (standards), with stated quality indicators for most educational fields, it still can not publicly report (nor can schools) on the level of targets and goals reached, and how this is contributing to the quality of education. There is no national body other than MES (which both administers the implementation and judges it) which records standards; there is no national mechanism (except the matriculation exams which are to be introduced) to give feedback and amend the implementation, etc.

The accountability of schools in terms of quality of performance is not formally organized. There are no special national standards for school performance. No official ranking of schools is produced. This has to be searched for in their public images – “good schools, bad schools”. These impressions are mainly locally formed. “Quality” depends most on the teaching team, and to what extent their graduates pass the entrance exams for elite schools or universities. The options for improving the quality of performance are reduced to changing directors or releasing teachers. The absence of a structured accountability system for the processes that take place in schools is making all changes in the system very expensive -mistakes are usually made and corrected rather than targets followed. This is draining the system’s capacities. Other key players are usually held accountable when some mistake comes to public notice (scandals concerning entrance exams, strikes, etc) and affects groups of clients - usually students, teachers and parents.

12. The way forward, conclusions and next steps.

The Ministry of Education and Science has adopted and is strictly following an agenda for EDC as part of the Cultural and Educational field of “Social sciences, civic education and religion”, an interdisciplinary component of the mandatory education at school. It has clearly defined goals and tasks for EDC in the country, and has described in detail the competencies, skills, knowledge and attitudes that students should have after finishing the appropriate phase (4th grade, 8th grade and 12th grade) of their study. MES is envisaging having an open discussion about the way the State Educational Requirements are met, to produce a more detailed and structured breakdown of the learning content for every grade and every subject involved in EDC. The dialogue about the achievability of the learning content is expected to contribute to QA for EDC in the schools.

The Bulgarian school education system has nearly all the institutional establishments and developed legal framework necessary to start the hard work of providing quality. It is natural that society should request changes in the direction of quality assurance, as already 13 years of transition have passed, with the results of the changes still uncertain. To a great extent this is a result of the following factors:

- The highly politicized environment for educational changes and reforms over the last decade. Over this period a dozen governments have been in power and all of them

sought quick results, even in education. This led to a tendency to stay more with QC than to move to QA. The selection and appointment of senior and middle level managers and administrators is still very politicized and is not based on professional criteria.

- There is no nationally agreed strategy for the development of education. What is more, no government has succeeded in sustaining the professional debate about educational goals and the quality to be embodied in such a strategy.
- The ministry should start to sustain a dialogue and consultation process with the non-formal sector (private providers, NGOs and researchers) on the way in which quality is provided at school level.
- Opportunities for the career development of teachers should be developed and an open market for this service should be established.
- The inspectorate (Coordination and Control Directorate) can contribute a great deal by working to establish local capacities for provision of quality, and gradually to start playing a consultative role for schools. It should share with the National Assessment Unit the responsibility for developing and implementing an effective quality assurance system, as an independent body monitoring school performance.
- Revisions of the curriculum and standards should take place only after enough evidence has been collected to show that their implementation is dependent on further upgrading of the quality framework established.
- There should be a mid term plan to make the cultural shift to schools being the main actors in the system. This plan should also address how they are to be supported in their self development.
- Accountability for the performance of schools and teachers demands the introduction of new procedures and mechanisms to ensure “quality” in a national context.
- Further efforts should be invested in the decentralization of the management and administration of education to give real ownership to the local players.
- Education should become a real state priority and investment in human capital through investment in education should be a leading principle in funding the system. For about 12 years now, the approach has been based on the “residual principle”. No expectations for quality can be real if the material facilities are obsolete and teachers’ wages are not an incentive.

Over the last couple of years, the leadership team for secondary education at MES has introduced new curricula and standards but has also tried to establish the system institutionally. Perhaps now is the time to start to facilitate, and involve in the implementation processes, all these establishments (at MES level The Branch Council, The Council on the Curricula, The Consultative boards, etc; at regional/local level the municipality authorities, the consultative boards of base/best teachers to the Regional Inspectorates of Education, etc; at school level the Board of Trustees, the Pedagogical Council and Parents associations, etc) and to start the school evaluation process. A lot of time has been wasted in dealing with the personal ambitions of high political appointees

concentrating on issues of little significance and thus losing the overall vision and the impetus for reforming the system in terms of quality.

EDC is a new part in the curriculum that could become a field for a trial introduction of the QA system. It is an integrative field of culture and knowledge (not a single issue subject). There is a critical minimum of competitive provision (by the state and NGO) of both teacher in-service training and textbooks. It has not being administratively mastered (like Bulgarian language and math). Accountability of the results is more visible and achievable (there is a forum of professionals for this and the regulations and standards for nation wide testing are there). Planning at school level is a necessity and the process could create a new culture and responsibilities. Last but not least, the communities are interested and could provide support if properly motivated.