

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF HUNGARY

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Until recently, education in Hungary was compulsory from the age of 6 to 16. Since September 1998, however, the duration of compulsory education is 12 years.

Attending *kindergarten* is compulsory only from the age of 5: during the last year at kindergarten, children are prepared for school.

Basic education in Hungary is provided by the *general (primary) school*, during two cycles of 4 years. Children attend general (primary) school up to the age of 14, after which they have to choose another school.

Following economic and social changes and with regard to the decreasing number of pupils, in the 1990s the education system in Hungary was restructured. As a result of the changes, some of the general (primary) schools and general secondary schools provided longer or shorter schooling than formerly. Pupils received a wider range of opportunities, such as *general secondary schools (gymnasiums)* starting education for periods of 6 or 8 years besides the traditional 4-year-courses. These new school types made it possible to choose a school even at the age of 10 or 12. These two school types were initially favoured. However, at the end of the 1990s, their spreading was restricted by new regulations. As a consequence, these schools nowadays furnish only a small part of the secondary education.

Children can choose among secondary schools as follows:

- Technical schools
- Special technical schools
- Secondary vocational schools
- General secondary schools (gymnasiums)

Students who are not planning to obtain a secondary school leaving certificate and wish to begin work immediately after the compulsory period of education, have the opportunity to attend a *technical school*. The latest regulations state that, during the first and second years of the secondary school (the 9th and 10th grades), students have to be taught only general subjects. They can learn professional subjects from the 3rd grade on. The professional orientation and preparation for the technical training starts in the 9th and 10th grades. However, the real technical training begins in the 11th grade, partly in the school, and partly in factories or school-workshops. The conditions for entry to vocational training are defined by the *List of National Training Possibilities*. If the practical training is provided by an organisation operating with the agreement of the chambers of trade, a *contract of apprenticeship* has to be made. The duration of training in technical schools is from 2.5 to 4 years. At the end of the school year, students take technical examinations and can obtain *qualifications as skilled workers*.

Mentally handicapped children can attend *special trade schools*. They first obtain the certification of the 9th and 10th grades, and subsequently start acquiring competence in a trade. These schools prepare students for simple jobs.

The *general secondary schools (gymnasiums)* aim at preparation for universities and colleges, high level foreign language teaching and a thorough general education. After the last year of

the gymnasium, the students take *final examinations*, on the basis of which they are entitled to apply for places at universities or colleges, to learn a trade, or to apply for a position demanding secondary school leaving certificate. The gymnasiums generally offer 4-year-long education, starting in the 9th grade and finishing in the 12th grade. 6- or 8-year-periods of education and gymnasiums in which subjects are taught in *two languages* are exceptions. The latter schools offer 5-year-courses of education. In the 9th grade, learning a foreign language is emphasized and from the 10th year on certain subjects are taught in a foreign language.

Besides general education, *secondary vocational schools* offer the opportunity to learn a profession.

In the 9–12th grades of the secondary school, students are taught general subjects. This is a preparation phase for the secondary school leaving certificate and further studies. The vocational orientation starts in the 9th grade. From the 11th grade on, theoretical and practical basic knowledge is taught in workgroups. The real vocational training begins only after the secondary school leaving certificate. The conditions for entry to vocational training are defined by the *List of National Training Possibilities*. The vocational training ends with a *vocational qualification*.

Up to the 1990s, these schools offered a 4-year-period of training, which ended with a vocational qualification in addition to the school leaving certificate.

The number of general secondary schools and secondary vocational schools increased in the 1990s. The reason was that more students decided to obtain the secondary school leaving certificate and to study further at universities or colleges. It was also a consequence of the economic changes in Hungary, as the demand for highly qualified people increased significantly.

Today, a majority of secondary schools offer various training forms. Students can choose from among different specialisations in the same school and also have the chance to change their specialisation within the school. Previously, students could not move from one course to another without changing school. The recent education system facilitates mobility among the various training forms.

In the 1990s, a new training form, short-cycled post-secondary *Accredited Higher Vocational Training* (AHVT) courses were introduced. These programmes are offered mainly by colleges (sometimes universities), and in many cases in cooperation with secondary vocational schools, for students with a secondary school leaving certificate. During the training participants earn credit points, which can be utilized when they apply for places at universities and colleges.

Grading scale

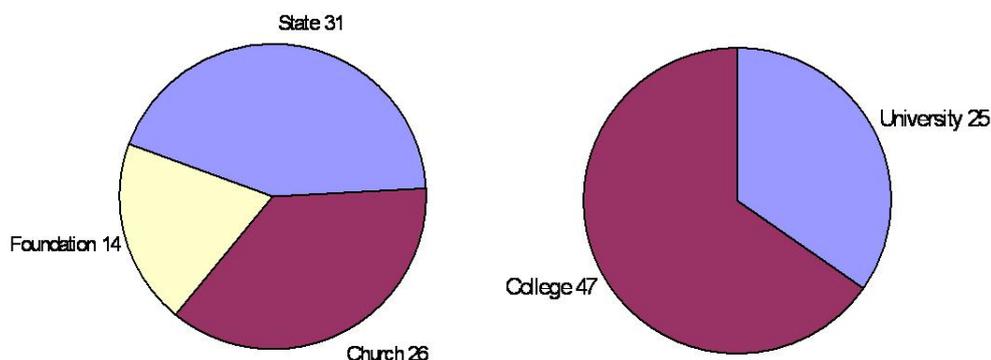
<i>Hungarian grade</i>		<i>Approximate U.S. equivalent</i>
5 or jeles	excellent	A
4 or jó	good	B+/B
3 or közepes	average	B-/C+
2 or elégséges	pass	C
1 or elégtelen	fail	F

Primary and secondary educational paths

Age	U.S. Grade	Hungarian Class (<i>osztály</i>)	Primary and Secondary Educational Paths		
6/7	1	1	Lower Elementary School (<i>általános iskola alsó tagozat: 4 years</i>)		
7	2	2			
8	3	3			
9	4	4			
10	5	5	Upper Elementary School (<i>általános iskola felső tagozat: 2 or 4 years</i>)		
11	6	6			
12	7	7			
13	8	8			
14	9	1	Vocational School (<i>szakmunkás-képző: 2-3 yrs; vocational training</i>) Skilled Worker Certificate (<i>szakmunkás bizonyítvány</i>)	Secondary Vocational School (<i>szakközépskola: 4 years; general & vocational training</i>)	Secondary Grammar School (<i>gimnázium: 4 or 6 or 8 years; general theoretical training</i>)
15	10	2		Matura or Secondary School Leaving Certificate (<i>érettségi</i>)	2005: introduction of the two-level maturity exam (higher level exam coinciding with entrance exams to universities, colleges)
16	11	3			
17/18	12	4	Labor market		
18/19		5		1 additional year (optional) Technician (<i>technikus</i>)	1 additional year in the case of Bilingual Secondary Grammar Schools (<i>kéttannyelvű gimnázium</i>) Matura (<i>érettségi</i>), in some cases I.B.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The term higher education includes training at *universities and colleges*. These are mostly state universities and colleges; a smaller number are controlled by various churches and there are private colleges. Some foreign education institutions too exist in Hungary. There are altogether 72 universities and colleges with 176 faculties in the country.



In the 1990s, several higher education institutions were merged. The number of universities and colleges decreased, but the training possibilities increased significantly. In the past decade, the numbers of students at universities and colleges have risen greatly.

The academic year consists of two semesters: the autumn semester generally lasts from the middle of September to the middle of December, and the spring semester from the middle of February to the middle of May.

State-funded students can obtain their first degree free of charge at state universities and colleges. However, foreign citizens have to pay a tuition fee even at state institutions (with the exception of foreign citizens with permanent residence permission). Students who obtain a state scholarship can be exempted from paying the tuition fee. The tuition fee varies at the different institutions and faculties. Information can be found on site or on the homepage of the university.

Applications for basic training can be submitted by students who have obtained the secondary school leaving certificate or have a degree. There is generally no age limit for applications. Both Hungarian and foreign students can apply.

The main condition of application is possession of a secondary school leaving certificate, but this does not mean automatic acceptance. Most universities and colleges also have entrance examinations. Information can be obtained from the university.

During recent years, the number of courses in foreign languages has risen markedly (English, German and French). Competence in Hungarian language is not a criterion, with the exception of courses provided completely or partly in Hungarian. There are foreign language programmes, particularly at the medical, economic and technical universities and colleges, where competence in Hungarian is not needed. The high-level institutions afford a good opportunity for student mobility, through numerous international cooperation and participation in different European programmes (e.g. ERASMUS and CEEPUS).

The larger universities often offer Hungarian courses for students, for instance in the frame of summer university studies.

Foreign students have the opportunity to take part in a preparation year in Hungarian if they wish to learn the language.

The degrees available at universities and colleges are as follows:

- Bachelor degree, particularly at colleges: 3-4 years
- Master degree: 4-5 years; medical universities: 6 years
- Doctoral degree, Ph.D, Doct. Of Liberal Arts (DLA):3 years

Universities generally provide students with a master degree, and colleges with a bachelor degree.

Higher educational paths

Age	Hungarian Grade (<i>évfolyam</i>)	Higher Educational Paths		
18/19	1	Accredited Higher Vocational Training Courses (<i>felsőfokú szakképzés: 2 yrs</i>) Certificate (<i>felsőfokú szakképzést igazoló bizonyítvány</i>)	College (<i>főiskola: 3-4 years</i>)	University (<i>egyetem: 5-6 years</i>)
19	2	Labor market	Bachelor's (<i>főiskolai oklevél</i>)	Master's (<i>egyetemi oklevél</i>) or "Doktor" (<i>in law, medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine</i>)
20	3			
21	4			
22	5			
23-24	6			
23-24 - 26/27+				Specialized Degree (<i>szakosított oklevél: 1-3 years</i>)
				PhD (<i>3+ years</i>)

Higher Education Reforms in Hungary

- Legal background: 1993 Law on Higher Education; 1996 Amended Law on Higher Education
- Establishment of a new network of integrated higher education institutions from January 1, 2001, which resulted in a reduced number of colleges/universities (the names of institutions changed as well!)
- Expansion of enrollments in higher education: 12% enrollment in 1991 (of the age group 18-22) increased to 28% by 2000
- introduction of a student loan system from September 2001
- introduction of the credit system in all higher education institutions from September 2003
- reform of secondary school final examinations in 2005
- meeting the challenge of the EU-accession in 2004: creating a knowledge-based society, provision of the EU diploma-recognition principles, development of the ECTS-compatible credit system

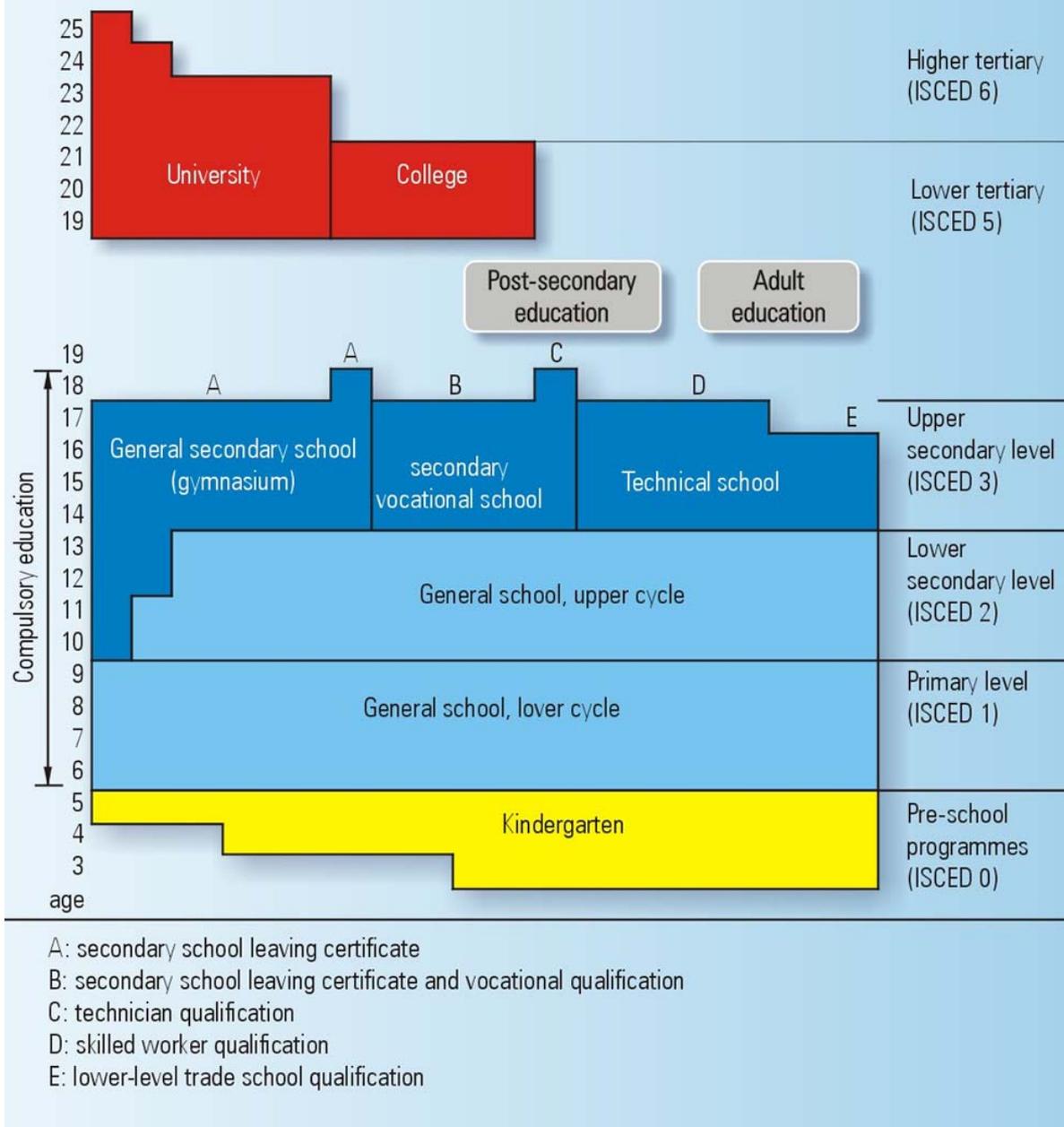
**The number of students of higher educational institutions
by branch, university and college education (1986-2005)**

School year	Full-time regular education	Part-time evening course	Part-time correspondence course	Altogether
1986/87	64 855	6 040	27 610	98 505
1987/88	66 697	5 851	26 477	99 025
1988/89	71 689	5 540	25 812	103 041
1989/90	72 381	5 255	23 232	100 868
1990/91	76 601	4 737	21 049	102 387
1991/92	83 191	4 372	19 516	107 079
1992/93	92 328	4 298	20 834	117 460
1993/94	103 713	4 640	25 603	133 956
1994/95	116 370	5 453	32 837	154 660
1995/96	129 541	5 764	44 260	179 565
1996/97	142 113	5 750	51 169	199 032
1997/98	152 889	6 538	74 230	233 657
1998/99	163 100	6 866	88 349	258 315
1999/00	171 612	7 861	99 524	278 997
2000/01	176 046	8 625	110 369	295 040
2001/02	184 071	9 665	119 502	313 238
2002/03	203 379	13 031	165 150	381 560
2003/04	216 296	12 950	179 829	409 075
2004/05	225 512	11 656	184 352	421 520

**Resources/Information on Hungarian Higher Education
(each website listed is in Hungarian and English)**

- <http://www.om.hu/education>: Ministry of Education: the most comprehensive and authentic homepage on the Hungarian educational system, including an updated list of all universities and colleges
- <http://www.mab.hu/>: Hungarian Accreditation Committee
- <http://www.ftt.hu/>: Higher Education and Scientific Council
- <http://www.hier.iif.hu/>: Hungarian Institute for Educational Research
- <http://www.hok.hu/>: National Association of Students in Hungary
- <http://www.phd.hu/>: Association of Hungarian PhD Students
- <http://www.prof.iif.hu/>: House of Professors (links to many other related websites)
- <http://www.npk.hu/public/kiadvanyaink/2010/education.pdf>: National Resource Centre for Vocational Guidance

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Source: www.npk.hu/public/kiadvanyaink/2002/2002_2.pdf
http://americancorner.hu/htmls/hungarian_education_system.html