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National Specificities of the Education System

In the Federal Republic of Germany responsibility for the education system is divided between the Federation and the Länder. The scope of the Federal Government's responsibilities in the field of education is defined in the [Basic Law](#) ^[1] (*Grundgesetz*). Unless the Basic Law awards legislative powers to the Federation, the Länder have the right to legislate. Within the education system, this applies to the school sector, the higher education sector, adult education and continuing education. Administration of the education system in these areas is almost exclusively a matter for the Länder.

In addition to the division of responsibilities described above, the Basic Law also provides for particular forms of cooperation between the Federation and the Länder within the scope of the so-called joint tasks (*Gemeinschaftsaufgaben*).

Early childhood education and care is not part of the state-organised school system in Germany but almost exclusively assigned to the child and youth welfare sector. On the federal level, within the framework of public welfare responsibility lies with the [Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth](#) ^[2] (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend – BMFSFJ), on the level of the Länder, the Ministries of Youth and Social Affairs and, in part, also the Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs, are the competent authorities.

Following the primary school stage, after grade 4 (in Berlin and Brandenburg after grade 6), an early division into the educational pathways of *Hauptschule*, *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* takes place.

Vocational education and training takes place in the *duales System*. Training is carried out in two places of learning: at the workplace and in a *Berufsschule* (vocational school).

Stages of the Education System

Early Childhood Education and Care

Early childhood education is provided by institutions catering for children until the age of six at which they usually start school. Children of school age who have not yet attained a sufficient level of development to attend a school have a further option in some Länder, namely *Schulkindergärten* and *Vorklassen*. These institutions are either assigned to the early childhood or the primary sector according to the particular Land.

Compulsory Education

As a rule, general compulsory schooling begins for all children in the Federal Republic of Germany in the year in which they reach the age of six and involves nine years of full-time schooling. Those young

people who do not attend a full-time general education school or vocational school at upper secondary level once they have completed their period of compulsory general schooling must still attend part-time schooling (compulsory *Berufsschule* attendance - *Berufsschulpflicht*). This usually lasts three years.

Primary Education

As a rule, in the year in which children reach the age of six, they are obliged to attend primary school. All pupils in Germany enter the *Grundschule* which in almost all Länder covers grades 1 to 4 (in Berlin and Brandenburg grades 1 to 6).

Secondary Education

Following the primary school stage, secondary education in the Länder is characterised by division into the various educational paths with their respective leaving certificates and qualifications for which different school types are responsible. Once pupils have completed compulsory schooling they move into upper secondary education. The range of courses on offer includes full-time general education and vocational schools, as well as vocational training within the *duales System* (dual system).

At school types offering one course of education all teaching is channelled to a specific qualification. These have traditionally been the *Hauptschule*, *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*. *Schularten mit mehreren Bildungsgängen* (schools offering more than one type of course of education) bring two or three courses of education under one umbrella. In most of the Länder they have meanwhile led to the abolition of the *Hauptschule* and *Realschule*.

For pupils with *sonderpädagogischer Förderbedarf* (special educational needs), additionally various types of *sonderpädagogische Bildungseinrichtungen* (special schools),) have been set up within the organisational framework of general and vocational education.

Once pupils have completed compulsory schooling - generally when they reach the age of 15 - they move into upper secondary education. The type of school entered depends on the qualifications and entitlements obtained at the end of lower secondary education. The range of courses on offer includes full-time general education and vocational schools, as well as vocational education and training within the *duales System* (dual system).

Tertiary Education

The tertiary sector encompasses institutions of higher education (universities, *Fachhochschulen*, colleges of art and music) and other establishments that offer study courses qualifying for entry into a profession to students who have completed the upper secondary level and obtained a higher education entrance qualification.

Additionally there are a number of special higher education institutions which only admit certain groups, e.g. higher education institutions of the Federal Armed Forces and *Verwaltungsfachhochschulen*, and are not considered below.

Those with a higher education entrance qualification may also choose to enter a *Berufsakademie* offered by some Länder as an alternative to higher education. At state or state-recognised *Studienakademien* (study institutions) and in companies students receive academic but, at the same time, practical career training.

The *Fachschulen* and the *Fachakademien* in Bayern are institutions of continuing vocational education that, as a rule, call for the completion of relevant vocational education and training in a *anerkannter Ausbildungsberuf* (recognised occupation requiring formal training) and relevant employment. The qualification level achieved here is comparable to the first level of the tertiary sector in accordance with the International Standard Classification of Education ISCED.

Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

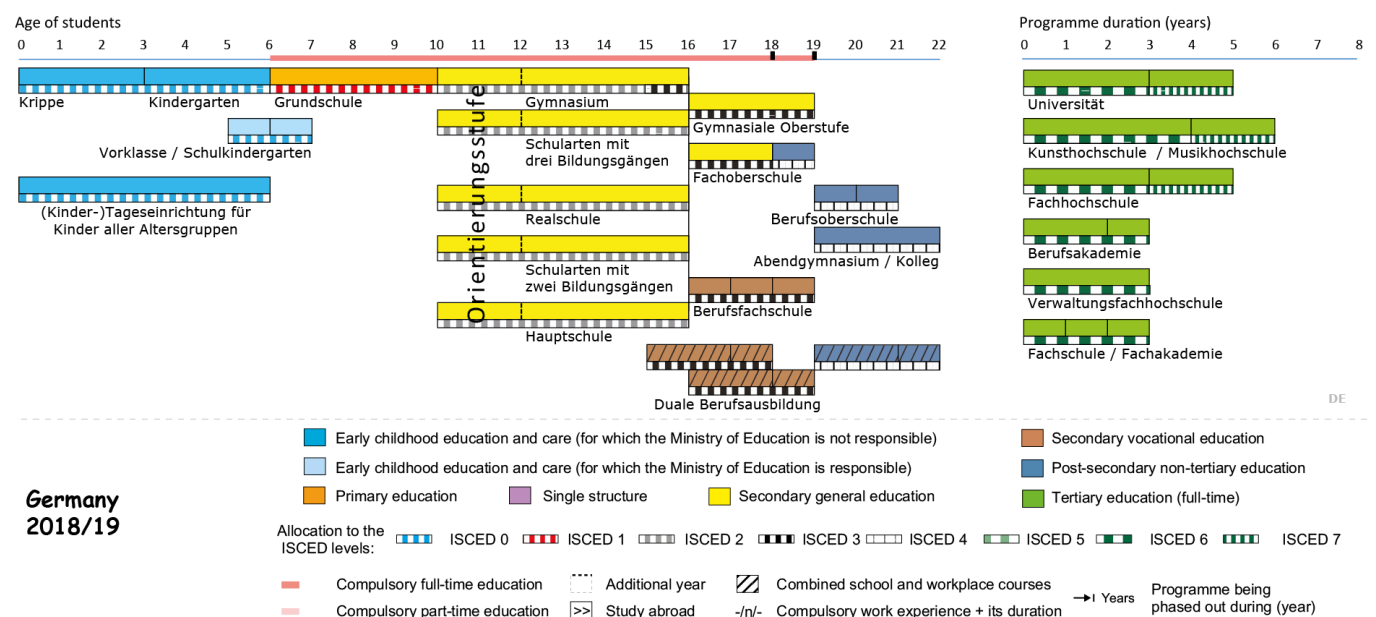
The activities of the state in the field of continuing education are, for the most part, restricted to laying down principles and to issuing regulations relating to organisation and financing. Such principles and regulations are enshrined in the legislation of the Federal Government and the Länder. State regulations are aimed at establishing general conditions for the optimum development of the contribution of continuing education to lifelong learning.

As part of lifelong learning, continuing education is assuming greater importance and is increasingly becoming a field of education in its own right. In response to the vast range of demands made on continuing education, a differentiated structure has been developed. Continuing education is offered by municipal institutions, in particular *Volkshochschulen*, as well as by private institutions, church institutions, the trade unions, the various chambers of industry and commerce, political parties and associations, companies and public authorities, family education centres, academies, *Fachschulen*, institutions of higher education and distance learning institutions. Radio and television companies also provide continuing education programmes.

It is usually possible to acquire school-leaving qualifications later in life at evening classes (*Abendhauptschulen, Abendrealschulen, Abendgymnasien*) and in what is called *Kollegs*.

Structure of the National Education System

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Useful links

While the Eurydice Description of National Education Systems provides comprehensive and comparable information, further information may also be found on the websites of the Secretariat of the [Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany](#) [3] (*Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* – KMK) and the [Federal Ministry of Education and Research](#) [4] (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung* – BMBF).

Common European Reference Tools Provided by the Eurydice Network

- [National Student Fee and Support Systems](#) [5]
- [Organisation of the Academic Year in Higher Education](#) [6]
- [Organisation of School Time in Europe](#) [7] (Primary and general secondary education)
- [Recommended Annual Instruction Time in Full-Time Compulsory Education in Europe](#) [8] (Presented by grades/stages for full time compulsory education as well as by subject and country.)
- [Teachers and School Heads Salaries and Allowances in Europe](#) [9] (Salaries and allowances of teachers and school heads at pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education levels.)

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Links

[1] http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/legislation-25_en#ConstitutionLawFederalLaw

[2] <http://www.bmfsfj.de>

[3] <http://www.kmk.org/>

[4] <http://www.bmbf.de/>

[5] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-student-fee-and-support-systems-european-higher-education-%E2%80%93-201718_en

[6] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-academic-year-europe-%E2%80%93-201819_en

[7]

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-school-time-europe-primary-and-general-secondary-education-%E2%80%93-201819_en

[8]

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/recommended-annual-instruction-time-full-time-compulsory-education-europe-%E2%80%93-201718_en

[9]

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/teachers-and-school-heads-salaries-and-allowances-europe-201617_en