

## HIGHER EDUCATION IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

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Bulgaria has a long tradition of excellence in science and technology education. Currently, 29 Bulgarian universities offer programs in fields related to ICT. The number of students in this area of study is currently 6,485 (about 3% of the total number of students). An additional 221 students are enrolled in post-graduate education programs.

Different surveys indicate that 90% of the students in Bulgarian universities use ICTs and about 50% are enrolled in some sort of ICT training. Experts believe this considerable number of ICT-trained students constitutes a pool of human resource which could guarantee the adaptability of Bulgarian industry in the future. A number of universities have achieved successful cooperation with the private sector on specialized education or professional training programs but, due to the general economic situation in the country and the existence of certain legislative barriers, the private sector has little interest in cooperating with universities or supporting university research programs in the field of ICT.

There are some schools (particularly IT and/or informatics departments at Sofia University or Technical University – Sofia) where practically all students with ICT skills have access to international programs and research projects.

## ICT PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN BULGARIA

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In addition to the number of traditional college and university programs available, there are many other opportunities for study in fields related to information technology. There is a variety of certification programs offered through professional training institutes, such as Cisco Networking Academy or Microsoft Academy. There are 5 Microsoft and 38 Cisco academies acting in the country at present – most of them affiliated with academic institutions. The scope of their training extends beyond the purely academic community and addresses much broader social segments. Currently several hundred students already take part in courses offered by the academies. Thus, for instance, Cisco's networking academies provide training to a total of 509 people in 2001. Another 1,200 are being trained by Microsoft and about 400 participants are certified annually. At the moment, about 400 database specialists, 70 developers and 70 Microsoft-certified engineers are already employed on the market.

## ICT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN BULGARIA

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By the end of year 2005 obligatory ICT training will be introduced at primary education level as well. In this way computer and Internet literacy will be added to the set of skills acquired by Bulgarian students at school in an attempt to prepare the workforce of the information age.