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SSIS VENETO -
INTER-UNIVERSITY SCHOOL
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SPECIALIZATION
FOR THE TRAINING
OF SECONDARY
TEACHERS

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1.1 Education population

The total number of students is **10.181.020**, of which

- 1.632.324 in Prep School,
- 2.772.988 in Primary School,
- 1.802.956 in 1st grade Secondary School,
- 2.687.943 in 2nd grade Secondary School,
- 1.285.809 at University.

(Source: CENSIS, 38th report of Italy's social situation in 2004).

1.2 Language of instruction

Italian is the official language and is used for the teaching of all subjects. However, in some areas where the autochthonous population speaks a different mother tongue the use of local languages is officially recognised both in the Administration's official acts and in education. The regions with Special Statute are the Aosta Valley where besides Italian, French is taught as mother tongue; Trentino Alto Adige/Südtirol where schools teach Italian, German and Ladin; Friuli-Venezia Giulia where pursuant Law no. 38 of Feb. 23, 2001 the Slovenian minority group is ensured special rights also in education. Rules for the implementation of the Special Statute have been emanated by Law Decree no. 223 of Sept. 12, 2002 as to the transfer of the responsibilities regarding the protection of language and culture of the Friuli, Slovenian and German speaking populations.

In the past other language groups did not enjoy adequate protection, but the Law no. 482 of Dec. 15, 1999 and its implementation rules approved in May 2, 2001 have extended such protection to the Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek and Croat populations as well as to those speaking French-Provençal, Friulian, Old Provençal and Sardinian.

It is the task of the Provincial Councils to determine the areas within which the above rules will be implemented. These regulations allow Prep schools, Primary schools and 1st grade Secondary schools to use "protected" languages for teaching upon parents request, to speak local languages during official Local government meetings, to use the local language in Justice of the Peace courts, to employ bi-lingual personnel in public offices although Italian remains the official language.

1.3 Planning functions and extent of public-sector funded education

The Italian laws of education are based on some of the articles of the country's Constitution namely art 30, 33, 34 and 38 establishing the principles on which the law making activity must be oriented. The following are the main principles:

- Freedom of education;
- Right of private organisations to open schools and other educational institutions without any cost for the State;
- Duty by the State to ensure an education network of all types and grades open to all people without discrimination;
- Right of Universities, Academies and cultural institutions to have autonomous rules;
- Right-duty of parents to educate their children also if born out of wedlock;
- Right of deserving students, even if lacking economic means, to reach the highest degree of education through adequate support;
- Right to education and professional training for physically challenged people

The implementation of the fundamental principles of the Italian Constitution has inspired all the subsequent legislation specially as regards compulsory education, teacher training, students evaluation, physically challenged people schooling and professional training.

The public education sector is divided into two levels:

- Regional Level (Regional Education Offices);

- National level (Ministry of Education, University and Research) organised over three departments:

- Department of Ministerial programming, budget management and resources;
- Department of Education;
- Department of University, high artistic, musical and dance education, scientific and technical research..

There is also at central level the National Council for Public Education, an advisory body assisting the Ministry in programming and controlling the education policies, to be replaced in the coming years by the Higher Council for Public Education.

1.4 The education system in Italy

The system at the present comprises the following types of school:

- Prep School, non compulsory school for children between 3 and 6 years of age;
- Primary School, compulsory for children of 6 to 11;
- 1st grade Secondary School, compulsory for students of 11 to 14;
- 2nd grade Secondary School (or Higher School), comprising several types of schools for students of 15 to 19.

The Italian schooling system guarantees the right to education and training for everybody for at least twelve years or to the obtainment of a qualification of at least three years within the 18th year of age -1st and 2nd educational cycle- (Law Decree no. 76 of April 15, 2005, "Definition of the general rules on the right/duty to education and training" pursuant art 2 comma 1 letter C of Law 53 dated March 28, 2003)

Schools are recognised own autonomy in order to guarantee freedom of teaching and cultural pluralism (Presidential Decree no. 275 of March 8, 1999 "Rules and regulations regarding school autonomy as per art. 21 of Law Decree no.59 dated March 15, 1999)

In particular, the said law gives organisational and teaching autonomy to schools within the objectives of the national education system and standards.

The organisational autonomy aims at flexibility, diversification, efficiency and effectiveness of the education system as well as at the integration and the better use of resources and structures, to the introduction of innovative technologies and co-ordination with the territorial context.

The autonomy finds its expression in the free and programmed choice of teaching methods, instruments, organisation and of education timetable adopted in the respect of the possible difference in methodology and in any initiative expressing project freedom including the offer of optional subjects falling within the students' training needs.

In order to improve and harmonise the quality of the education system as defined by Law 53 of March 28, 2003, the Decree no. 286 of Nov. 19, 2004 has set up the National service for evaluation of educational teaching and training system, to assess its efficiency and effectiveness in an international context.

The said Institute is under the control of the Ministry of Education, University and Research and carries out the following duties:

Control of knowledge and ability of students and of the overall training supplied by schools and training institutions in the context of permanent learning. The controls on professional training concern only basic level performance and are carried out taking into account other institutional subjects operating at national level in the field of evaluation of national policies for the development of human resources;

Organisation and responsibility of State exams at national level, at the end of the training cycles, to be chosen by the Ministry. The exams are carried out on the basis of scientific objectives in relation to the subject taught in the last year of every cycle as per art. 3, comma 1, letter C of Law Decree no. 53 march 28, 2003;

Study of the lack of success and non attendance in the social context and as regards the type of teaching offered;

Initiatives to ensure Italian participation to European and international projects on evaluation; support activities and technical assistance to school administration, regional and territorial institutions as well as to single schools and training organisations for autonomous initiatives on monitoring, evaluation and self-evaluation;

Training of teachers and school managers for the evaluation and self-evaluation of teaching institutions (Law Decree no. 286 of Nov. 19, 2004 National Service for the Evaluation of the Educational and Training System, re-organisation of the said institute as per art 1 and 3 of Law no. 53 dated march 28, 2003).

1.5 Prep School education

Prep-Schools contribute to the education and to effective, psychomotor, notional, moral, religious and social development of children, promoting their power of interaction, autonomy, creativity and learning ensuring at the same time a real equality in education opportunities Respectful of the parents' primary responsibility on education, the prep school contributes to the forming of the child's character and in its autonomy as well as in its didactic and pedagogic unitary form creates the educational profile and the continuity with the child's services and with the school system. (Law Decree no. 59 of Feb. 19, 2004, section I Definition of the general rules regarding primary schooling and 1st educational cycle, art 1 of Law no. 53 of March 28, 2003)

Prep School:

- Has a three year duration;
- Is not compulsory;
- Creates an education environment full of concrete experiences in which learning is strictly connected with several sensorial activities of the child as doing, feeling, expressing and enjoying beauty. At this stage the educators create a playful environment in the learning activities;
- It can be public or private (the latter is officially recognised provided it adopts an education project in harmony with the Constitution and with the current laws and regulations. It must also accept anybody who wants to enrol including physically challenged or disadvantaged children. It makes its Balance Sheet public, has suitable premises and structures and a board formed on the basis of democratic participation. The teachers must be holders of a teaching certificate and be hired on individual contracts on the basis of the category's National Labour Contract. It must also offer complete courses and be subject to evaluation according to the National Evaluation System based on the standards set up for State Schools. It must issue school certificates having the same legal value as those issued by the equivalent State Schools).

Prep Schools operating in Italy are **24.758**, of which:

- **13.546** (54,7%) with 960.984 students (59,6%) are State Schools
- **11.212** (43,3%) with 651.990 students (40,4%) are non-State Schools
- For a total of **1.612.974** students
- **96%** of children between 3 and 6

(Source: Miur, DG Studi e Formazione, 2002/2003)

1.6 Compulsory full-time education

1.6.1 Phases

The Italian compulsory school is organised in two phases:

- Primary School;
- 1st grade Secondary School

Although these two phases form the first unitary cycle of the education-training system they have separate and specific features. In fact, while the Primary School is aimed at the obtainment of a basic course of learning instruments by the students, the 1st grade Secondary school allows all students to use study methods and techniques at a more complex level (Law Decree no. 59 of Feb. 19, 2004, section I Definition of the general rules regarding primary schooling and 1st educational cycle, art 1 of Law no. 53 of March 28, 2003)

1.6.2 Admission criteria

- Children whose 6th birthday falls within August 31st are enrolled in that same year;
 - Also children who will be 6 within April 30th may be enrolled in that same year.
- (Law Decree no. 59 of Feb. 19, 2004, , Capo II, art. 6)

Taking as reference the school year 2003/2004, children who will be 6 within August 31, 2003 will be automatically enrolled and also those who will be 6 within April 30, 2004 may be enrolled but the choice is optional and will depend on parents' decision and on school availability.

Families are free to choose whichever school they want, however there may be limitations as regards school or teachers' availability. In the case of requests exceeding availability, the admission criteria are set by the single schools. The smaller towns can join together in consortia or in inter-municipal associations to better manage their services and avoid resource wasting.

1.6.3 Length of the school day/week/year

Primary School

- Has a duration of 5 years and is divided into:
 - 1 link year with the prep school,
 - 2 two year phases (2^o/3^o - 4^o/5^o year).

The passage from primary school to 1st grade Secondary School follows a simple final positive evaluation.

1st grade Secondary school,

- Has a duration of 3 years and is divided into:
 - 1 two year learning period,
 - A 3rd year completing the first learning cycle connecting with the following phase.

The year's timetable of Primary and 1st grade Secondary School, including the quota reserved to Regions, autonomous school institutions and the teaching of Catholic religion as per Concordat is of 891 hours i.e. 33 hours over 27 weeks (minimum compulsory teaching time). Furthermore, in order to personalise their syllabus, the schools set up, within the framework of suggested training activities, other courses linked to the school's educational profile for further 99 hours in Primary Schools and 198 hours in 1st grade Secondary Schools. These activities are optional and free of charge and it is up to the families to decide whether their children ought to take part or not. It is also possible to enrich these offers with the use of experts in specific fields. (Law no. 59 of Feb. 19, 2004, Capo III art. 7; Capo IV art. 10)

The organisation of the timetable and of teaching activities is left to the single schools. The law also provides for the setting up of a tutorship service to co-ordinate the activities decided upon by the Teacher's Board and to keep the contacts with the families as well as implementing the syllabus.

1.6.4 Class size / student grouping (average)

The number of staff in all schools (number of classes and sections, number of teachers including support teachers) is established by the Regional School Office on proposal by single schools and within the personnel quota assigned by the Ministry. It is the task of the Ministry of Education, together with the Ministry of Economy after having considered the opinion expressed by the relevant Parliamentary Commissions, to determine the total number of teaching personnel and its allocation on a regional basis. The Director of each Regional Office in turn sub-divides the quota by province.

The sections are set up on the basis of the number of students enrolled which is not rigidly established but varies in connection with several factors such as the presence of physically challenged students, the geo-morphologic characteristics of the territory, the economic and social conditions, the teachers' regional quota. In general terms, as regards Primary Schools, the classes are formed by a minimum of 15 students and a maximum of 25.

1.6.5 Curricular control and contents

The Primary school accepts and valorises individual diversity, including disability, furthers the development of personality and has the aim to give and develop basic knowledge and ability (including the use of computers) up to the initial logic/critic expressions. It teaches the child how to express himself, how to use Italian; provides the first notions of English, sets up the basis for the use of scientific methods in studying Nature with its phenomena and laws, valorises relational capabilities and orientation in space and time, provides the fundamental teachings for civil life.

The general objectives of the teaching process are: valorise the child's experience and his corporeity as a value, provide a clear view of ideas and values present in experience, move on from empirics to formalism, from ideas to life, recognise and valorise the diversity of peoples and cultures as a treasure, practice personal involvement and solidarity.

The specific learning objectives are on the other hand organised by disciplinary activities, i.e. Catholic Religion, Italian, English, History, Geography, Mathematics, Science, Technology and Computer science, Music, Art, and PE. Each subject and each primary school class (first class; second and third class; fourth class and fifth class) will focus on knowledge and abilities which the school will help to transform into personal competences for each student. (Law no. 59 of Feb. 19, 2004, Capo III art. 50)

The 1st grade Secondary School is finalised to the growth of autonomous study capabilities and to the strengthening of attitudes towards social interaction. During this phase attention is turned to the improvement of the child's personal ability and the widening of his knowledge also in relation to the historic tradition, social cultural and scientific evolution of nowadays life.

The target of this type of school is obtained through the teaching organised by subjects i.e. Italian, History, Geography, Mathematics, Science and Technology, English, a Second EU language, Art, Music, PE, Religion.

This level is characterised by teaching and methodology diversification according to the student's personality. It takes care of the systematic dimension of the subjects. Progressively develops the competences, ability to choose the vocation of the students. Supplies adequate instruments to continue the teaching and training activities. Introduces the study of a second EU language. Helps orientation to subsequent choice of the type of education and training. (Law no. 59 of Feb. 19, 2004, Capo VI, art. 9/10)

The following table is the list of subjects included in the 1st grade Secondary School syllabus:

| Subjects | Hours per student | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|--------|---------|
| | Minimum | Medium | Maximum |
| Italian | 307 | 313 | 319 |
| History | | | |
| Geography | | | |
| Mathematics | 239 | 245 | 251 |
| Science and Technology | | | |
| English | 114 | 120 | 126 |
| Second EU Language | | | |
| Art | 54 | 60 | 66 |
| Music | 54 | 60 | 66 |
| PE | 54 | 60 | 66 |
| Religion | 33 | 33 | 33 |

1.6.6 Assessment, progression and qualifications

The periodic and annual evaluation of learning and student's behaviour as well as certification of the results obtained are taken care of by the teachers who are responsible for the various teaching and educational activities included in the personalised study plans; teachers must also evaluate the results over the teaching phases in order to determine the passage of students to the following phase.

Taking into account the organisation of primary schools, the student's evaluation is carried out in accordance with the analysis of the teaching periods to determine the passage to the following two-year period.

This final evaluation is additional to the one carried out periodically and annually on students' performance.

Only as an extraordinary procedure the teachers may, with a motivated unanimous decision, refuse admission to a student to the next class up within the two-year period.

Students coming from private or family schools are allowed to take the exams for the passage to 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th class.

It is compulsory to formally release a certification of the results to each student in order to establish the stages of the annual learning itinerary. However, schools may autonomously prepare a final certification form reproduced on the student's evaluation sheet.

The Ministry, on the basis of the survey carried out on significant experiences in the implementation of the reform during the course of the current school year, will also issue certification forms in which knowledge, competences and skills acquired as well as recognisable training credits will be indicated. (Law no. 59 of Feb. 19, 2004, Chapter III, art. 8)

It has been established that for 1st grade Secondary School a minimum attendance period be necessary to consider the school year valid. This limit has been set in at least three quarters of the annual time for educational and learning activities, both compulsory and optional. Therefore, every student must attend school for at least three quarters of the total 891 hours, i.e. not less than 669 hours per year.

Furthermore, it is important that a periodic and annual evaluation of the student's learning and behaviour be carried out as well as the certification of the acquired competences. This evaluation will be carried out by the teachers in charge of education and teaching activities included in the personalised study plans.

On the basis of the results of the periodic evaluations the schools will enact all necessary interventions to help those students who are lagging behind.

Teachers will carry out the biennial evaluation for the passage to the 3rd class having care to ascertain the obtainment of all objectives including the student's behaviour.

The third year, which completes the first cycle of study, ends with a State exam which, if passed, allows the student to move on to a higher education level.

In order to improve learning through didactic continuity, the teacher will remain in the same school for at least a didactic period. (Law no. 59 of Feb. 19, 2004, Chapter VI, art. 11)

1.7 Upper secondary and post-secondary education

1.7.1 Types of education

Upper Secondary education

The second cycle of the educational system is composed of high schools and education and professional training schools.

This is the 2nd grade implementing the right/duty to education and training of which the State guarantees the essential level of performance.

During such a cycle it is pursued the intellectual, spiritual and moral upbringing inspired also to the principles of the Constitution as well as the development of the historic conscience and the sense of belonging to the local community and to the National and European community.

All institutions in the educational system have teaching, organisational, research and development autonomy; they allow to change high school streams and to move from high school to professional education and training institution and vice versa. (Scheme of Law Decree on general rules and essential level of performance of the 2nd grade education and training cycle as per Law no. 53 of March 28, 2003, Chapter I)

Within the framework of the 2nd grade Secondary School, the Law Decree no. 77 of April 15, 2005 introduces the possibility to alternate school with work in order to ensure that young students acquire, beyond basic knowledge, competences expendable in the labour market.

These alternative routes are projected, implemented, verified and evaluated under the responsibility of the schools and training institutions on the basis of agreements with employers, their representative associations or with the Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Artisans and Agriculture as well as with public and private bodies including those belonging to the tertiary sector prepared to accept students for "on the job" training stages which do not constitute an individual working employer>employee relationship. Schools and training institutions, within their ordinary budget allocations, appropriate specific resources to the planning of school-work activities (Law Decree no. 77 of April 15, 2005 on "Determination of general rules regarding school-work alternation as per Chapter IV of Law no.53 of March 28, 2003)

Post-secondary education

As far as Higher Education is concerned it is important to point out that Italy is one of the participants to the Bologna Process.

The Bologna Process is the process of creation of the European Higher Area. This process started on 19th June 1999, when 29 European Ministers responsible for higher education signed the Bologna Declaration, in which they decided to create a European Higher Education Area, that should be completed by 2010.

The main objectives of the Bologna Declaration are to increase mobility and employability of European higher education graduates thus ensuring competitiveness of European higher education on a world scale.

Post-secondary education is organised as follows:

- Non university higher education;
- University higher education;
- Third cycle Doctorate of Research.

The non university higher education, is so defined since it is not linked to the university system but is similar to it and is organised in various types of High Schools each one with own specific structure, system and organisation. It comprises 2nd level training courses and High Education and Technical Training courses.

The post-secondary training courses have a duration of 6-12 months, also called 2nd level courses, and are organised for students over 18 therefore no longer subject to compulsory education and end with the acquisition of a specific professional skill.

The IFTS itineraries are instead targeted to training of specialised personnel and are organised for young High School drop outs and working adults.

University education is currently organised in a first three-year cycle degree, a second cycle lasting two further years leading to a specialisation degree and a third cycle corresponding to the PhD. To gain access to this last cycle it is necessary to hold a specialisation degree or a degree obtained in a foreign university officially recognised by the accepting university within the international agreement framework.

Universities may also recognise Master courses subsequent to degree or a specialisation degree released on completing first and second level University master certificates.

In order to obtain a Master certificate it is necessary to achieve at least 60 credits in addition to those needed to obtain a degree or a specialisation degree (National Trends in the Bologna Process)

Furthermore, other specialisation and post-graduate courses for a duration not exceeding one year may be organised through conventions with State institutions, Local Authorities and Public and Private Bodies in answer to a call for the widening of cultural knowledge, professional up-dating and re-qualification or for permanent education.

1.7.2 Admission criteria

Upper Secondary education

Students holding a School certificate obtained at the end of the first cycle may be admitted to High or Professional Schools..

Post-secondary education

Non university education

Professional Training Courses

Students holding a 2nd Grade Secondary School certificate may be admitted to professional training courses prior selection through admittance tests.

Education and higher technical training (IFTS)

The courses may be attended by young people and adult workers holding a 2nd grade Secondary school certificate or the admission to the 5th year of High School.

Access is also allowed to students not holding the above certificate but with proven acquisition of competences in previous education, training and working courses subsequent to compulsory education..

University education

Access to University, subject to previous obtainment of the 2nd grade Secondary School certificate, is obtained through different procedures. In the case of "maximum number" faculties admission is obtained after having passed an admission test..

1.7.3 Curricular control and content

Secondary School – General (or Lyceum)

The schools belonging to the 2nd grade Secondary School group – generally are as follows (Scheme of Law Decree on general rules and essential level of performance of the 2nd grade education and training cycle as per Law no. 53 of March 28, 2003, Chapter II):

a) Classic High School: (5year course divided into: 2 years of junior high school and 3 years of high school); it widens the knowledge of classic civilisations, language, history and philosophy giving a methodological exactness within a high level cultural framework and offering the appropriate instruments for admission to all university branches.

b) Scientific High School: (5 year course) links the classical tradition with science developing maths and experimental science. It gives the students all necessary competences and the ability to learn and follow the development of scientific and technological research and to focus on the interaction between the different forms of knowledge ensuring the command of language forms, techniques, methodologies and relevant competences.

c) Artistic High School: (5 year course) supplies the students with knowledge, competence, ability and capability necessary to get acquainted with the art heritage, its historic and cultural context; teaches how to express one's creativity and planning capability.

- a. figurative art;
- b. architecture, design, environment;
- c. film, multimedia, stage design.

d) Economics High School: (5 year course) supplies the students with the necessary competences and ability to get acquainted with forms and economic, social, institutional and legal rules focusing on interdependence between the various facets singling out the relationship between local and global dimensions.

It ensures command of competences in the field of economics and entrepreneurship. Starting from the second two-year cycle the school is organised as follows:

- a. economic-institutional
- b. economic-industrial.

e) Modern Language High School: (5 year course) co-ordinates several language and culture systems supplying the students with the necessary competences and ability to learn, also from a comparative viewpoint, structure and use of languages; gives the command of three languages besides Italian of which at least two belonging to the EU; teaches how to interact with other cultures on a critic and dialectic basis.

f) Music and Dance: (5 year course) widens high school culture from a music and dance point of view; supplies the students with the necessary knowledge and ability to become acquainted with the music and dance heritage; ensures also, through workshops the command of composition, interpretation, execution and performance..

g) Technological School: (5 year course)) supplies the students with the necessary competences to understand the scientific and historic cultural problems connected with technology and its expressions. Ensures the development of creativity and project creation, as well as the command of techniques and relevant methods of management also through practical workshop activities. Starting from the second to-year course the Technological Schools are organised in streams teaching mechanics, electronics, chemistry and environment.

h) Human Sciences: (5 year course) it focuses on the study of phenomena related with the building of personal identity and human and social relations with particular attention to the elaboration of educational models. It supplies the students with the knowledge necessary to understand the complexity and specificity of formation process.

Secondary education of professional type

The schools belonging to the professional secondary education (Scheme of Law Decree on general rules and essential level of performance of the 2nd grade education and training cycle as per Law no. 53 of March 28, 2003, Chapter III): are the following:

a) technical schools. After the first two-year cycle are divided in the following three years, into streams and specialisations regarding commerce, agriculture, aeronautics, industry, nautical science, tourism, social sciences and land survey.

These schools are located all over the country covering about 36% of the total education offer; professional schools come second with 23% and high schools specialised in scientific studies come third with 20% (Source: Muir, DG Studi e Formazione).

b) professional schools. Are organised in a three-year course ending with a qualification certificate followed by a two-year course (4th and 5th year) post-certificate which gives access to university. The streams include commerce, tourism, advertising, agriculture, catering, industry, handicraft, cinema and television..

c) Art schools: three-year course divided into sections according to the type of art specialisation: decorative painting, decorative sculpture, graphic arts, wood carving, ceramics, metalwork etc. Teaching of these subjects includes workshop practice..

Non university post-secondary education

This comprises the following:

- Professional training courses

These are organised and run by Regions, Provinces and Local Authorities for young people, holding secondary school education certificates, no longer subject to compulsory education who wish to obtain 2nd level qualifications.

- Education and higher technical training (IFTS)

The professional figures are defined on the basis of ISTAT classifications for technical professions and ATECO classifications for economic activities. These figures relating to the various professional areas outline specific itineraries of professional development.

University education

The Bologna Process has based the academic degree structure on three main cycles. In addition, *laurea* (Degree) holders are offered an alternative degree programme, consisting of at least 60 national credits, which leads to the *1st level University Master Certificate* which however does not give access to doctoral programmes.

The *laurea* provides undergraduates with knowledge of academic principles and specific professional skills. The *Laurea Specialistica* (Specialistic Degree) gives graduates advanced education for highly skilled professions. The Master *Universitario di I livello* (1st level University Master) offers academic or professional specialisation in specific fields.

The *PhD* trains postgraduates for highly specialised research, and the programme may include research periods abroad and training periods in private or public research centres and industrial laboratories. They are not structured in credits as they are based on individual research and collective participation in seminars.

The *Corsi di Specializzazione* (Specialistic Courses) are set up only in compliance with EU directives or national laws. Their purpose is to provide postgraduates with advanced knowledge and skills for specific professions. The Master *Universitario di II livello* (2nd level University Master), a programme of at least 60 national credits, is intended for higher academic or professional specialisation.

All programmes leading to the above mentioned degrees may be designed and organized in cooperation with foreign universities and therefore result in the obtainment of a joint degree.

University education is enacted through a network of 77 institutions as follows:

- 51 State universities: covering the whole country;
- 3 polytechnics: located in Bari, Milan and Turin;
- 12 free universities;
- 6 university institutions, of which 4 State Institutes (Naval institute of Naples, Oriental Languages Institute of Naples, Motor Science Institute of Rome, Institute of Architecture of Venice); 2 Free University Institutes ("Carlo Cattaneo" of Castellana and "Suor Orsola Benincasa" of Naples);
- 2 Universities for Foreign Students, in Perugia and in Siena;
- 3 High Schools (the Normale Superiore in Pisa, the "S. Anna" in Pisa, the SISSA in Trieste).

Universities are organised in the following departments: Agronomy, Economics, Law, Pharmacy, Engineering, Arts, Philosophy, Cultural Assets, Design, Foreign Languages and Literature, Musicology, Medicine and Surgery, Veterinary, Formation Sciences, Communication Sciences, Mathematics Physics and Natural Science, Political Science, Architecture, Statistics, Sociology, Psychology, Science and Technology, Social Science, Motor Science, Oriental Studies, Islamic Studies.

There are also a number of institutes operating in the field of higher musical, dance and artistic education such as academies and conservatoires.

1.7.4 Assessment, progression and qualifications

Higher Secondary general education and higher secondary professional education.

The evaluation of the student's performance is carried out every three months (rarely) or every 4 months (more often) on decision by the Teachers board on the basis of the results obtained in spoken and written tests carried out in class or workshops and is expressed in marks that go from 0 to 5 (negative) and from 6 to 10 (positive). The evaluation is not a merely mathematic exercise but takes into account the team work by the teachers in carrying out the programmes which requires periodic verification. (Scheme of Law Decree on general rules and essential level of performance of the 2nd grade education and training cycle as per Law no. 53 of March 28, 2003, Chapter II art. 13, Chapter III art. 20)

At the end of the fifth year the students who have obtained a positive evaluation are admitted to the State exam which completes the second education cycle and it is organised over tests set up by the examiners as well as on nation-wide ones. In particular, the student's performance is valued over the whole five years and all personal, cultural, artistic and sport experiences acquired also outside school hours are taken into consideration (Law no. 45 of Dec. 10, 1997). The marks are expressed in one hundredths and the minimum pass is 60/100. All students who have attended the last year of the 2nd grade Secondary school are admitted to the State exam

The exam is organised in one spoken and three written tests; the oral test is taken in Italian, the second will concern a subject specific of the discipline and the third is interdisciplinary.

Non –university post-secondary education

- Training courses

Training courses end with final test proving the degree of ability achieved. The tests, on the examiner's decision, may be written, oral or practical.

- Education and higher technical training (IFTS)

The IFTS evaluation tests are carried out in an individual interview to discuss and analyse the training itinerary and the competences thus acquired based on national standards of adequate technical and methodological significance.

The IFTS courses last about 2 or 3 semesters and are personalised in order to meet the students' specific needs.

University education

University studies are organised in a series of intermediate exams and a final degree examination. The intermediate exams vary in number and in subject according to the different faculties and degree courses; they may consist of a single oral test or in one or more written and oral tests. The marks are expressed in thirtieths; the final examination consists in a thesis discussed in front of a commission. The average of the intermediate marks added to the evaluation of the final thesis form the final marks expressed in one hundred and tenths.

Related to the Bologna Process, there is the introduction of the Diploma Supplement for every student graduating from 2005. The DS is a document attached to a higher education diploma aiming at improving international 'transparency' and at facilitating the academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates etc.). It provides a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification to which this supplement is attached. It should be free from any value-judgements, equivalence statements or suggestions about recognition.

The DS is composed of eight sections (information identifying the holder of the qualification, information identifying the qualification, information on the level of the qualification, information on the contents and results gained, information on the function of the qualification, additional information, certification of the Supplement, information on the national higher education system).

For the student, the DS is:

- A diploma that is more readable and easily comparable abroad;
- A precise description of the academic career and the competencies acquired during the study period;
- Objective description of their achievements and competencies;
- An easier access to opportunities of work or further studies abroad;
- It makes employability easier.

2 Education systems for people with special needs

For over 40 years physically challenged students have been attending normal classes with no separate education system. This system was adopted first in prep schools and primary schools and was progressively extended to all other grades and universities.

There are rules establishing:

- the criteria and forms of classification for physically challenged students (Law no. 104 of Feb. 5, 1992) define a physically challenged person as somebody presenting a physical, psychic or sensorial disability causing difficulty in learning or in relating and integrating in a working environment such as to determine a process of social disadvantage or discrimination.

The composition of classes with physically challenged students: they cannot, as a rule, have more than twenty students and more than one disabled student.

They support action, both in the educational side (specialised teachers) and in specialist medical assistance.

The interventions on the building structures in order to eliminate architectural barriers; the supply of technical equipment and teaching supports.

The teaching of physically challenged is now carried out in normal schools of all types and levels. Some special schools for the blind and the deaf and dumb are still in operation organising professional training courses.

In order to carry out their integration policies, schools must have their premises up graded by eliminating architectonic barriers in accordance with the students' special needs.

The technical and didactic equipment must be adequate to the student's needs in accordance with the functional and sensorial limitations the students suffer from, also through agreements with centres specialised in pedagogic consultancy and in the production and upgrading of specific teaching materials.

The Outline Law on disabilities (Law no. 104/92) provides for the setting up of ordinary classes as sections of State Schools in hospitals and rehabilitation centres to allow the subjects with special educational needs who are temporarily impeded from attending lessons to continue their education and training.

These classes are set up by the School Administration with the Local national Health Centres as well as with public and private centres having agreements with the Health and Labour Ministries.

Minors hospitalised for at least 30 days are admitted to those classes. Whenever possible teachers with specific psychopedagogic experience will be employed in the those centres and hospitals.

Programme agreements are signed by the local public bodies with schools and National Health centres in order to organise, implement and verify the education and rehabilitation projects and supply the necessary services.

The possibility to ensure the education (compulsory and post-compulsory) has been extended from 2001 also to non disabled students suffering form serious pathologies through the supply of alternative school services to avoid interrupting the studies.

These services are the following:

- Hospital schools;
- Home education.

According to some surveys, the number of physically challenged students in Italian schools has greatly increased during the last ten years to 161.160 in the school year 2003/2004 (41% more than ten years before). (Source: Muir, DG Studi e Formazione).

These figures show the strong increase in the integration process of the disabled within the whole national education system.

Specific support measures

Prep school education

The organisation of the educational activity offers the widest opportunity for inclusion in the school community of students in difficulty for psychic-physical, environmental and family reasons or for similarly disabled people. An important contribution in this direction is also given by the social and Health structure of the National Health Service as well as the Local Authorities' social services..

An effective form of prevention of poor performance and lack of success in learning is represented by the timeliness of integrative education interventions. Specially in the first phase of learning the fundamental method to integrate and follow children with particular educational needs is team work activities aiming at the progressive overcoming of expression, movement, behaviour and socialisation difficulty.

Primary School

The physically challenged students pose a more complex question as regards education help and didactic support. While for the majority of subjects the strengthening, improvement and differentiation of the didactic procedures may be sufficient, for a smaller number of students in particularly serious conditions, qualified interventions of differentiated teaching will be made available together with therapeutic and rehabilitation supports.

Within this framework the schools system avails itself of the support of specialists as well as of services and structures existing on the territory.

Learning remains in any case the central element around which education activities rotate which in this specific case are supported by initiatives apt to prompt the process of socialisation and integration of disabled subjects.

Lower Secondary Education

At this level of learning the educational programmes comprise also integration activities often of an interdisciplinary character, organised for groups of students of the same or different classes aiming at implementing personalised actions in accordance with the needs of the single students

Higher Secondary Education

Strict adherence to the timetable, number, difficulties in the interdisciplinary work create serious problems to disabled students at this school level. The support measures are the same as those available for other levels (support teachers, therapeutic, social/health/assistance interventions).

The majority of these students enrol in technical and professional schools where the programmes provide support initiatives for the weakest, cultural re-balancing and re-dressing of disadvantaged situations.

University education

The Law no. 104 of Feb. 5, 1992 guarantees right of education to all physically challenged people not only in normal schools of every type and grade but also in Universities.

The integration of such subjects is carried out also through co-ordinated programmes of social, assistance, health and sport services; through technical equipment and didactic supports; agreements with specialised centres; availability of interpreters for non speaking students.

Furthermore, accommodation must be reserved for disabled students together with equipment in University sporting centres. The right to free travel is also guaranteed and so is the right to escort and reading services, appropriate educational technologies etc.

In general, the individual support for these students is made available under the form of scholarships by the single institutions.

Furthermore, deserving students are awarded scholarships to allow them to reach the highest grade of education. Some categories such as war orphans etc are school fees exempt.

Non university higher education

In general terms the support measures employed in this case are the same as those applied for university higher education.

Some forms of support are made available by the single institutions provided the type of disability is compatible with the institution's ends.

Specific measures in favour of immigrant children/students belonging to ethnic minorities.

For many years immigrants' children have been attending normal schools; the measures to favour integration are different depending on the length of time they have been living in Italy.

For long term residents who have already a reasonable command of the Italian language the support measures, when needed, are not very different from those adopted for local students in the same conditions.

For those who have been living in Italy for very long there are instead courses of Italian and whenever possible they are assigned to classes with a lower number of students. Specialised teachers are not included in the programme but mainly during the first phase there are some forms of intervention activated directly by schools or by the local authorities aimed at favouring integration and also at keeping alive habits and traditions of the community of origin. The range of action is varied and those in serious need can also be given financial help.

The problem can be very complex in those places where immigration is massive in number. For instance, there are some municipalities where the children of Chinese immigrants are almost 1/3 in a class.

It is evident that in these cases the complex situation requires special forms of intervention. In fact, the Teachers' Labour Contract requires that, in areas of high immigration flux, teachers organise emergency interventions such as specific courses of Italian language for students (and adults) of mother tongues different from Italian, courses to widen the theme of intercultural education, production and distribution of didactic material. It is important to point out that integration, at first limited to prep school and compulsory education has now reached high schools.

The Law no. 40 of March 6, 1998 regulates education for foreign nationals. Foreign minors living in Italy are subject to the compulsory education laws with all connected rights and duties, access to educational services and participation to the life of school communities.

The effectiveness of right to education is guaranteed by the State, Regions and Local Authorities also through the activation of courses of Italian language.

The school system accepts the language and cultural differences as a funding value of reciprocal respect, of inter-exchange between cultures and tolerance; to this end, the State promotes and favours all initiatives aiming at the acceptance and protection of foreign languages and cultures as well as the creation of common intercultural activities.

Equality of treatment between Italian and foreign nationals is ensured also as regards access to university and right to education.

3 Methods of teaching

It is the exclusive duty of all autonomous schools and of their teachers to be free to mediate, interpreter, order, distribute and organise specific objectives as regards learning and training in their contents, methods and performance verification taking into account the students' overall capabilities, as well as the most apt pedagogic theories and teaching practices to be transformed into personal competences.

However, in the meantime it is the exclusive duty of all autonomous schools and of their teachers to be responsible for explaining the options taken thus allowing students and families to understand and share them.

A small number of teachers follow particular methods (Frenet, Montessori, etc). the Steinerian schools are only private. A new convention signed on Dec. 11, 2002 between the Ministry of education and the Opera Nazionale Montessori allows schoolmasters to organise primary school classes (but also prep school sections) according to the Montessori method on request by part of the families. This programme will be based on a specific education project as part of the POF.

The teachers must hold a didactic differentiation certificate and the Opera Nazionale Montessori must supply the necessary technical assistance. A great number and variety of teaching material is available in schools with full freedom of choice in its use. Teachers are also free to chose the textbooks. It is also possible to use co-operative learning as a general model. This teaching method allows students to carry out team work acquiring at the same time social skills. It is therefore a method that allows disciplinary learning as well as social behaviours such as collaboration and co-operation.

It is a method of horizontal social mediation (the tasks are so organised as to make students work autonomously among themselves).

Learning is no doubt an individually active process but for this to happen it is important that such a process be socially shared and lived.

It requires a different approach on the teachers' part that is to say a different role within the class.

In general terms all teachers are free to adhere to the programme's objectives following what they consider the most appropriate method with special attention to the school microcosm.

4 The use of IT in the educational system

The introduction of the IT in the national education system goes back to the 50s but only from the 80s computer learning programmes got under way through initiatives of the Ministry of Education aimed at the introduction of new technologies.

During the 1990s these initiatives have increased in number in parallel with IT development and its widespread use.

The use of these technologies throughout the learning process makes it possible, besides active understanding, personalisation of learning according to the student's vocation, ability and learning.

The aim is to stimulate the student towards learning through an approach which makes him the central figure in the system and not a peripheral one as previously happened. Also the role of the teachers has changed since they no longer merely transmit knowledge but are a guide to learning.

In particular, the introduction of study and use of these technologies already at primary schools responds to the precise need to have a more natural approach to these systems and make their use more widespread.

The role of the school is to make students understand in what manner IT are changing culture and society as well as educating the users to look at them with a critical approach.

The use of ICT within the education system is divided into various activities and methods.

The general objective in introducing IT is to guarantee that at the end of the educational process the students have:

- an adequate knowledge of IT,
- theoretical knowledge sufficient to make them, as users, aware of IT's potentiality and limitations.

The main intervention lines for the introducing of IT in the education system provide for innovations and changes involving the whole school system, in particular:

- curricular review
- teacher training
- web services in support of school didactics and organisation
- infrastructures to:
 - o improve teaching
 - o improve school organisation
 - o offer services to students and families
- setting up of territorial centres for technological resources
- conventions with the private sector to:
 - o favour teachers' access to new technologies
 - o experiment new technologic solutions
 - o offer specialist training to teachers

In particular, provision have been made for training courses for the use of IT through:

- setting up of a local web for schools
- teaching how to use the Internet
- E-learning systems

The first point refers to the setting up of a LAN system representing the foundation of work co-operation in every sector.

This is a specific school web accessible by other institutions, an important instrument of communication to exchange experiences and confront with diverse educational issues.

The communication theme in Internet is one of the central points in transmitting knowledge throughout the school system and it is therefore very important to teach students how to access the system. Furthermore, essential points for the study of Internet are the knowledge of communication modalities and style norms regulating the use of the web in order to make the information clear and effective.

E-learning represents a new reference to think, plan and manage distance teaching; it guarantees speed, flexibility and capillarity in diffusion centred on the user. The E-learning

teaching projects have often organisation and technical implications which must be taken into consideration in the projecting phase.

With the use of E-learning systems the education process does not end in a mere distribution of material through the web but allows the use of a range of services for communication, interaction and self-evaluation.

IT is also a very good instrument for the integration of physically challenged subjects, in particular for the deaf and deaf-mute subjects who are able to communicate through the computer system in a completely autonomous way.

There are also a number of devices which make the use of IT accessible to people with particular disabilities not normally compatible with these technologies such as students suffering from epilepsy who could have a crisis in the presence of light flashing at certain frequencies or in the case of blind people who need vocal command helping devices.

As regards the use of these technologies in schools, the following are a series of data relating to the above.

- student/computer ratio 10/1
- Pcs installed nearly 540.000 (over 12.000 laptops)
- Schools using the Internet 85%
- Schools with own web site 51.4%
- Schools using E-learning 58.8%
- schools in the local LAN web 62.6%
- Schools with satellite aerial more than 9.000

5 Ongoing reforms

The political debate regards mainly the reform of the education system as a whole, for prep school to university.

After several years of discussion, debates and proposals never finalised, during the past legislation a reform of the school cycles (Law no. 30 of Feb. 10,2000) was approved along the following lines:

Prep-school: 3 years, non compulsory

Primary school, 7 years

Second cycle education, 5 years, divided into the following areas:

- classic, human sciences, scientific, technical and technological, art and music.

The existing schools would have taken the name of "Licei". However, the said law has been repealed by the new government and replaced by Law no.53 of March 28, 2003 providing for a prep school over 3 years, non compulsory; a first cycle including the Primary School (5 years) and 1st grade secondary school (3 years) and a second cycle organised in the Licei system over 5 years.

This law keeps the present duration to 16 years ending at 19 years of age whereas the previous law fixed the whole period at 15 years ending at 18 years of age. However, it must be pointed out that the new law allows to anticipate both in prep school and primary schools the enrolment at 3 and 6 years of age respectively thus minimising the difference.

A part from the issues concerning the reform of the educational and training system, once the Law no. 53/2003 is approved, this law will focus on the decrees that must be emanated within 24 months (the first regarding prep school and 1st cycle has been approved on Feb. 19, 2004), the object of discussion is the field regarding fund raising for the universities and the employment of teachers (national public examination test instead of local). At the same time there is the intention to reorganise the degree system that has recently been reformed by Law Decree 509/99.

Another important point is the European and international dimension of education and the need to give education a supranational and European dimension also in Italy. Intercultural education has the objective of creating a new sensibility in terms of European citizenship. At the same time it is important to underline that intercultural education is already part of the school programmes since 1979; in 1st grade secondary school programming it is evidenced that school "is not anchored to a one and only interpretation of reality, but open to all that happens in the world". Furthermore, socialisation is improved by stimulating students towards "the contact with different problems and cultures, thus favouring the creation of a citizen of Europe and of the World, educating a mental attitude that goes beyond a unilateral vision of the problems and near to the intuition of values common to all men from all kinds of cultures and political structures".

These programmes anticipate in some way what will be the focal point in the Maastricht Treaty.

In 1985 elementary school programmes the main objectives were "the understanding and co-operation with other cultures" and the prevention of "stereotypes and prejudices against peoples and cultures". But the term "multicultural education" is first seen in 1991 in primary school programmes, with the objective to single out, recognise and valorise the diversities found both in school and in every day social life.

As the reform of the 2nd grade secondary school was not enacted, references to the above issues are missing, but they are present in some disciplines as "intercultural understanding" and "ability to think through different models".

Therefore, the change from a national vision to a supranational one dictated by the art. 126 of the EU Treaty (substitute of art. G no. 36 of the Maastricht Treatise of August 7, 1992, found in Italy both fertile political and cultural ground. In fact, art. 4 of the Single Tesxt April 16, 1994, no. 297 has established Italy's undertaking to foster co-operation among the Member States for the development of quality education and European dimension to the contents of education and its organisation.

The main debates are:

1. political – with the aim of giving European oriented values to the reform of the educational system respecting at the same time national value (for example, increasing the study of foreign languages, organisation of orientation and a wider range of offers in the post-secondary level have already been carried out) ;
2. technical – the organisation of programmes of co-operation, mobility and exchange.