



# Overview of the Higher Education System

## Belarus



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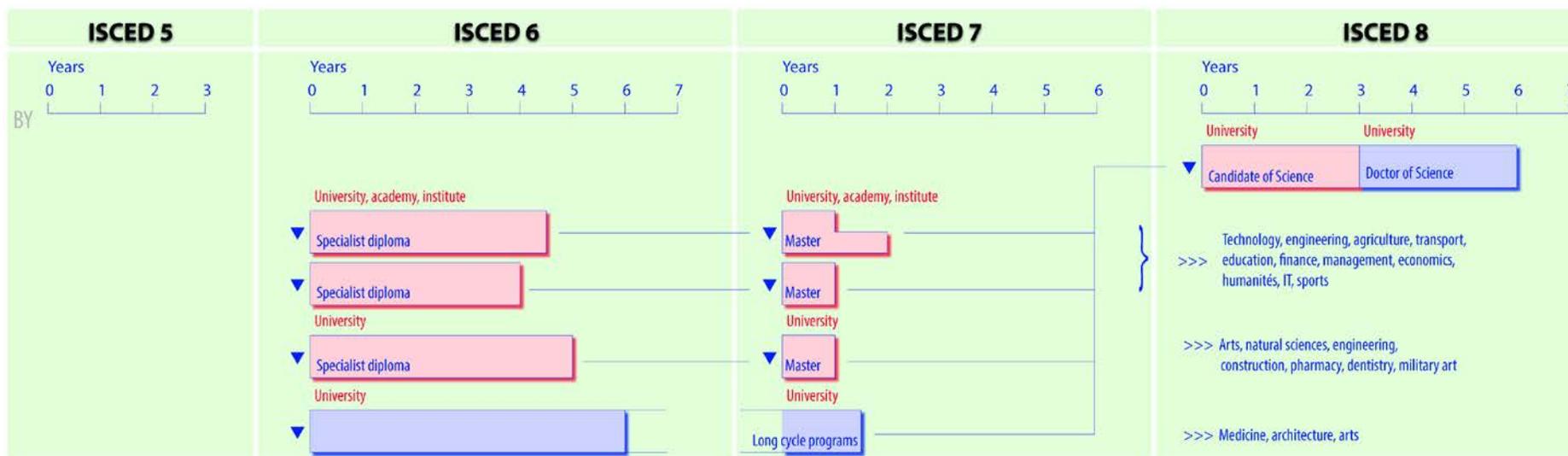
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## The higher education system in Belarus



- Most common length of a Bologna cycle
- Other length of a Bologna cycle
- Professional programme

- Programme outside the typical Bologna model
- Professional programme non Bologna

**ECTS:**  
Credits according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

		regulated at national level	decided at institutional level
All	programmes have admission requirements	▼	▲
SOME		▽	△



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**Note:**

Due to the monetary reform in Belarus, the Belarusian ruble (BYR) was replaced with the new Belarusian ruble (BYN) in July 2016, wiping four zeros off.

1 BYN = 10,000 BYR

Please note that the amounts mentioned in this document refer to the old currency (BYR) since they relate to data collected before the redenomination took place.



## 1 Overview

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The Republic of Belarus is a Central European country; its area totals 207,600 km<sup>2</sup>. It borders on Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, and Ukraine.

The 2015 official census data puts the country's total population at 9,480,900 people, 77% thereof being urban, with the remaining 23% residing in rural areas. 17% of total population are under the employment age (i.e. under 16), 59% are within (16-59 for men, 16-54 for women), and 24% are over the age of employment.

Belarus features two official languages: Russian and Belarusian.

Its ethnic composition is as follows: 84% are Belarusians, 8% – Russians, 3% – Ukrainians, 5% – the representatives of 23 ethnic minorities.

Belarus' 2014 GDP amounted to BYR 7,784,560,000 (an equivalent of EUR 57bn proceeding from the 2014 average exchange rate<sup>1</sup>). GDP per capita (2014) is BYR 82,163m (or EUR 6,053). In 2010-2014, there was a tendency of GDP growth deceleration: (7.7% in 2010, 5.5% in 2011, 1.7% in 2012, 1% in 2013 and 1.6% in 2014)<sup>2</sup>. Education spending amounted to 5.0% of GDP (2014).

### 1.1 Fundamental Principles and National Policies

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The core piece of legislation governing the education system is the Education Code adopted in 2011. Under Article 2 thereof, state educational policy is based on the following principles: education is a priority; universal human values and rights are a priority; humanistic nature of education; each person is guaranteed a constitutional right to education; ensuring equal access to education; general basic education is mandatory; integration into the international educational area while preserving and developing national traditions in education; environmental focus in education; support and development of education in line with the goals of the country's socio-economic development; government-societal nature of education management; secular nature of education.

Key vectors in the state educational policy include:

- Implementation of the rights, freedoms, and lawful interests of people in the sphere of education, including the right to receive education both at the expense of state and/or local budget(s) and on a paid (commercial) basis.
- Provision of special conditions to enable access to education for persons with special needs resulting from their physical or mental health status; correctional pedagogic assistance for such persons.
- Ensuring the required conditions meet the demands of individuals to education, as well as those of the society and the country to mould personalities and train skilled experts.
- Transition to mandatory general secondary (high-school) education.
- Ensuring the succession and continuity for education levels and cycles therein.
- Equal status for Belarusian and Russian languages.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nbrb.by/statistics/Rates/AvgRate/?yr=2014>

<sup>2</sup> [http://belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/otrasli-statistiki/natsionalnye-scheta/godovye-dannye\\_11/proizvodstvo-valovogo-vnutrennego-produkta/](http://belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/otrasli-statistiki/natsionalnye-scheta/godovye-dannye_11/proizvodstvo-valovogo-vnutrennego-produkta/)

## 1.2 Lifelong Learning Strategy

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A system of institutions for supplementary education for adults has been created and is working in Belarus to implement the “Lifelong learning” principle. This system features more than 400 institutions for retraining and qualification upgrading, as well as [sub]departments within the existing educational establishments. At these institutions, the state provides qualification upgrade at the public budget’s expense. The 2014 data lists some 382,000 experts (or ~8% of the country’s total labour pool) as engaged in professional training, qualification upgrade, internships, and retraining activities. Qualification upgrade for managerial staff and experts is provided within all educational profiles and study programmes. Retraining of staff with higher and vocational secondary education is carried out for 392 programmes.

A significant focus is placed upon education for the unemployed arranged at the premises of educational institutions and specialised training centres. Annually, more than 26,000 unemployed persons undergo such training with subsequent employment.

The key objectives of supplementary adult education include: the integration of formal and informal adult education based on social partnership between state-owned and private institutions; introduction of training for teachers specialised in adult education; methodology enhancement for qualification upgrade and retraining programmes, including distance learning technologies; internationalisation.

## 1.3 Organisation of Private Education

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Educational institutions of any level of education can be state-owned or private; they enjoy equal status. Regardless of the form of ownership, educational institutions report to the Ministry of Education.

The appointment and dismissal of a rector at a private higher education institution is handled by the Minister of Education upon the founder’s recommendation.

Both public and private educational institutions are subject to state licensing and accreditation exercised by the corresponding departments under the Ministry of Education. Accredited institutions provide their graduates with documental certificates (diplomas) of the uniform state standard.

## 1.4 National Qualifications Framework

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As of 2009, the National Qualifications Framework is being developed in Belarus with the participation of the European foundation.

A current pilot project features the developed sectorial qualification frameworks in IT and management/administration; the frameworks’ levels and descriptors have been defined. Practical testing of the new National Qualifications Framework’s elements is carried out by the High-Tech Park and at the Academy for Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Belarus, respectively.

System-wide implementation of the National Qualifications Framework mandates the correlation between such Framework and other national and international standards, particularly, with the Unified Employees Reference Book, national “Profiles and Qualifications” Classifier, State “Economic Activity Types” Classifier, and International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).

The relevant activities are arranged and monitored by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection jointly with the Ministry of Education.

## 1.5 Statistics on Organisation and Governance

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Number of 1 <sup>st</sup> Cycle students (2014/2015 academic year)	
362,907	
Public	Private
328,296	34,611

Number of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Cycle students (2014/2015 academic year)	
8,855	
Public	Private
8,087	768

The aggregate number of students within both cycles is 371,762. Currently postgraduate studies are not part of the higher education system; therefore, the doctorates are not reflected in these statistics. [*Please refer to section 3.6.1.*]

Number of Higher Educational Institutions (2014/2015 academic year)		
52		
University	Institute	Academy
30 (public)	4 (public)	9 (Public)
3 (private)	6 (private)	

## 1.6 Distribution of responsibilities

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The governance for the Belarusian higher education system is of public-private nature, which is stipulated in the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus (Chapter 11).

The Ministry of Education plays a fundamental role in running the education system, providing overall management thereof and education quality monitoring; it implements public staffing policy in education, and organises the development of higher education curricular content.

Public management in higher education is exercised by the National Council of Rectors of Higher Education Institutions; regional Councils of Rectors of higher education institutions; institutions responsible for the higher education system's operation; academic (educational) and methodological associations in higher education; Public National Students' Council under the Minister of Education.

The National Council of Rectors unites all the heads of Belarusian higher education institutions (public and private) to come up with recommendations related to the higher education matters. Normally, the

National Council of Rectors considers the most critical strategies of higher education development and forwards the relevant recommendations to the Ministry of Education. It is also part of the selection process for the heads of all higher education institutions in the country. Regional Councils of Rectors unite the heads of higher education institutions located in specific regions of Belarus to facilitate the recommendations on common approaches and policies for efficient higher education management and scientific activity customised to the current development status of each specific region.

The institutions in charge of the higher education system's operation are the National Institute for Knowledge Assessment (it provides organisational and legal support to the centralised testing) and the National Institute for Higher Education, which provides scientific, methodological, and analytical support to higher education's development.

The most significant higher education institutions are running special academic (educational) and methodological associations to improve education quality. Such associations feature pedagogic and scientific staff and employers' representatives. Their area of responsibility includes development and enhancement of the educational standards' content, as well as the conduct of feasibility studies to look into the expedience of launching new programmes.

The Public National Students' Council under the Minister of Education was founded in early 2015. Its objectives include: the development of proposals for the key public youth policy fields considering the challenges young students are facing – educational process enhancement, facilitation of joint efforts on the part of student self-governance bodies to implement and protect the youth's rights; participation in various programmes and projects; analysis and representation of the youth's interests; coordination of interaction between the Ministry of Education, heads of higher education institutions, and student self-governance bodies.

The Institutional Council is the primary governing body at the higher education institution in question. Student self-governance bodies are also engaged in the development of legislation for education, are represented (up to 25%) at Institutional Councils, and render social support.

## **2 Higher Education Funding**

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### **2.1 Public Education**

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State-owned (public) educational institutions are financed from the public (central or local) budget proceeding from the cost estimate approved by the governing body. Such cost estimate is the main financial planning document reflecting the amount, targeted allocation and quarterly distribution of funds for the coming year.

The government provides taxation benefits both to state-owned and private educational institutions, exempting them from VAT and profit tax.

#### **2.1.1 Financial Autonomy and Control**

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State-owned educational institutions are not entitled to use the budget funds for purposes other than those stipulated in the cost estimate, or to overspend for any expenditure items without the superior governing body's approval (Ministry).

The funding amount is calculated on the basis of state minimal social standards in education, the number of students, number and structure of the academic staff. The budget estimate can only include the costs indispensable to the nature of activity of each specific institution. Budget allocations envisaged by the

estimate should be substantiated by calculations per each article, sub-article, and particular item of expenditure.

### **2.1.2 Public Higher Education Fees**

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In the 2014/2015 academic year, the total number of the 1st cycle students was ca. 362,900. Of these, 38% (138,700) received education financed by the state; 62% (224,200) paid for their studies. 52% of state-owned educational institutions' students pay for their education.

Tuition fees at public educational institutions are based on the economically substantiated costs required to train an expert in a given field at a specific educational institution with the maximum profitability level of 30%.

The money received by state educational institutions as fees from students is strictly used to pay salaries with accruals, to upgrade technical facilities, and for scientific/methodological support of education and economic needs.

In early 2015, the annual tuition fee for full-time students of the 1st higher education cycle for Belarusian citizens ranged between BYR 10 and 23m (= EUR 600 and 1,370), and between BYR 4 and 8m (€ 240 and 480) for part-time students. Fees charged for 1st cycle full-time foreign students ranged between € 800 and 4,500, and from 600 to 1,800 € for part-time students. Annual tuition fee, 2nd cycle, Belarus citizens: full-time students, BYR 7 to 24m (420 to 1,450 €); part-time students, BYR 3 to 17.5m (180 to 1,100 €). Tuition fee, 2nd cycle, foreigners: full-time students: 1,800 to 3,600 €; for part-time students: 900 to 1,800 €. Tuition fees for programmes in English are usually higher. Part-time studies are not an option for many fields/profiles. Payments are made directly to the higher education institutions.

## **2.2 Private Education**

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Private educational institutions receive no direct state funding and enjoy full financial autonomy. Tuition fees are the primary income source for private educational institutions. There are 9 such institutions in Belarus (out of the total number of 52 higher education institutions).

According to art.138 of the Education Code, state-owned educational institutions may also engage in profit-generating activities in line with the legislation in force, and this is not the reason to reduce their state funding. Additionally, the provision of paid services in education cannot replace or be part of the activities financed from the central and/or local budget. The money generated through the educational institutions' commercial activities is solely theirs to manage and is disbursed in line with the legislation and their articles of association.

### **2.2.1 Financial Autonomy and Control**

---

Private educational institutions receive no direct state funding and enjoy full financial autonomy.

The direct funding of private educational institutions is ensured with the financial resources of their founders, money resulting from commercial activities, sponsorship from legal entities and individual entrepreneurs, as well as other lawful sources.

Most of private educational institutions' revenue comes from tuition fees. All students at private institutions make payments directly to the respective institutions. A tax deduction is also granted to students receiving higher education at private institutions.

The exemption from VAT and profit tax constitutes the state's indirect financial contribution towards the operation of private educational institutions.

### 2.2.2 Private Higher Education Fees

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As for the private sector of higher education, in 2015, the annual tuition fee for full-time students of the 1st higher education cycle for Belarusian citizens ranged between BYR 10 and 20m (between 600 and 1200 €), for part-time students – between BYR 5 and 10m (between 300 and 650 €). Fees charged for 1st cycle foreign students ranged between € 720 and 2,200 for full-time tuition, and from 1000 to 1,300 € for part-time students. Annual tuition fee, 2nd cycle, Belarus citizens: full-time students, BYR between 5,8 and 20m (between 350 € and 1,200 €); part-time students, between BYR 3,3 and 12.6m (between 200 and 750 €). Tuition fee, 2nd cycle, foreigners: full-time students, from 650 to 2,500 €, for part-time students between 500 € and 1,500 €. Private higher education institutions offer, as a rule, programmes in social sciences, economics and management, law. Most private educational institutions' revenue comes from tuition fees, and the payments are made directly to the higher education institutions.

### 2.3 Financial Support for Learners' Families

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In Belarus, an income tax (13%) deduction is envisaged for persons receiving their first higher education on commercial (paid) basis. Such a benefit can be granted to students themselves or to one of their parents/legal representatives. This deduction is provided for the tuition fee amount paid within one calendar year, i.e. the tuition fee is deducted from the income subject to taxation.

Students receiving their first higher education at state-owned higher education institutions on a commercial basis, or one of their parents/legal representatives, enjoy the right to an *ad-hoc* loan at "Belarusbank". The maximum loan amount is 70% of the entire tuition fee. Such a loan is provided to a citizen if the average monthly income per family member is under the 350% of official minimal per capita subsistence budget. Currently, this minimal subsistence budget amounts to BYR 1,567,810 (€ 82).

The borrower pays the loan interest of 50% from the National Bank's refinancing rate; the remaining half comes to the bank through a state budget subsidy. Loan interest repayment must occur within 5 years following the completion of the studies. The current National Bank's refinancing rate is 25%.

### 2.4 Financial Support for Learners

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There are several scholarship<sup>3</sup> types paid to full-time students who receive education at the state's expense

**Academic** scholarships are in order for students completing their studies plan, curriculum, and with positive (4 pts and higher on a 10-point scale) grades. Academic scholarships for 1<sup>st</sup> cycle students start at BYR 600k (30 €), for 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle students – at BYR 900k (45 €). A multiplier (between 1.1 and 1.6) is applied for 1<sup>st</sup> cycle students depending on their academic performance.

**Presidential** scholarships are granted to students with top performance in science, technology, and innovative activities. Such a scholarship is granted for one calendar year, its monthly amount being BYR 875k (€ 45).

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<sup>3</sup>As opposed to the Western concept of *scholarship* (*bursary, study grant*, i.e. money granted to students to help them pay for their studies), *scholarships* in some CIS countries including Belarus are in fact *allowances* paid to students whose studies are funded (= subsidized) by the state. Students who pay for their studies themselves (fee-paying education) do not receive such public allowances ("scholarships").

Bright students and master's students with outstanding academic results are candidates for being awarded **personal** scholarships. This scholarship's monthly amount is BYR 960k (€50).

**Personalised** (or "named") scholarships are envisaged for students who scored at least 75% of "9" and "10" grades (with no other grades below "7") during the current academic period, as well as for those making significant progress in R&D and extracurricular activities. This scholarship's monthly amount is BYR 1.27m (€65).

Students at top educational establishments (Belarusian State University, Belarusian National Technical University, Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Belarus, Belarusian State Economical University, Belarusian State Pedagogical University) enjoy a scholarship with a multiplier between 1.1 and 1.3.

Students who receive no academic scholarship and belong to the below-mentioned categories are entitled to a **social** scholarship:

- Orphans or children deprived of parental support;
- Children whose parents served in the army, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Emergencies and died in time of peace or suffered a disabling injury during their service;
- Military personnel with disabilities;
- Disabled students; tuberculosis patients; victims of the Chernobyl NPP disaster;
- Pregnant women and persons with children under 18.

This scholarship's monthly amount is BYR 435,000 (€23).

Rectors have the right to grant such social scholarships to financially struggling students not entitled to an academic scholarship.

**Special** scholarships are granted for the entire duration of studies to the following categories of citizens:

- Persons who suffered a disabling injury during the Great Patriotic War (WWII) and hostilities in foreign countries;
- Family members of the military personnel who died from wounds, shell-shocks, disabilities, diseases suffered from/inflicted in the course of hostilities.

The scholarship amount is BYR875k (€45).

Other forms of student welfare support:

- Subsidised meals for full-time students who are struggling financially;
- Financial aid to students in need as well as to orphans, disabled students, students from single parents and large (more than 3 children) families, married students;
- Subsidised public transportation during the academic year for non-local full-time students from financially struggling families;
- Free-of-charge hostel accommodation for orphans and children with disabilities;
- Full state support for orphans and children deprived of parental support;
- Subsidised rehabilitation for medical reasons.

The data for the 2014/2015 academic year suggests that 93,900 students (or 52.7% of all full-time students<sup>4</sup>) at state higher education institutions receive scholarships.

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<sup>4</sup>2<sup>nd</sup> cycle students excluded.

### 3 The structure of the Higher Education system

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Under Article 49 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, everyone is guaranteed the right to free higher education at state educational establishments on a competitive basis.

The current higher education structure comprises two cycles:

- The 1<sup>st</sup> higher education cycle ensures the training of experts with fundamental and specialised knowledge, skills, and abilities, and results in assigning a professional qualification and awarding a higher education diploma that entitles to employment (according to the qualification obtained) and access to the second cycle (master's course).
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> higher education cycle (master's course) provides comprehensive training, development of academic and research skills, with ultimate awarding of a Master's degree and issuance of a Master's diploma entitling to enter postgraduate studies and to employment according to the field of study and qualification. Currently, the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle training encompasses more than 300 programmes.

Postgraduate programmes are formally not a part of higher education; they belong to a separate educational level. However, the forthcoming reform envisages the transition of postgraduate studies to the 3<sup>rd</sup> higher education cycle.

Training of experts at all levels and cycles of education covers 15 profiles: pedagogy; pedagogy and vocational training; art and design; humanities; communication, law, economics, and management; natural sciences; environmental sciences; technology and equipment; architecture and construction; agriculture and forestry; healthcare; social protection; physical education, tourism; foodservice industry and consumer services; security services. These educational profiles are listed in the "Profiles and Qualifications" State Classification.

Requirements for graduates' competencies are defined in state education standards for each profile of the corresponding educational level.

The Belarusian higher education system features predominantly public establishments (of 52 higher education institutions, 43 are state-owned) and a high proportion of universities (33 of 52 higher education institutions have the university status). Typically, higher education institutions report to the Ministry of Education, but certain ones are also accountable to other bodies: Ministries of Healthcare, Culture, Agriculture, etc.

The educational process at higher education institutions is organised by academic years; an academic year is divided into two semesters (the mean duration of each is 17 weeks) that end with examination sessions.

In 2015, Belarus joined the European Higher Education Area. Full-fledged participation requires meeting the conditions of the Reform Roadmap.

#### 3.1 Types of Higher Education Institutions

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Higher education in Belarus is represented by 3 types of educational institutions, depending on the programmes offered: classical universities, institutes, academies.

A **classical university** is a higher education institution implementing higher education curricula of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cycles in various educational fields; postgraduate education, retraining programmes; fundamental and applied research.

A **field-oriented (profile) university** (Academy, conservatory) is an higher education institution executing 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle curricula largely centred around one educational field, as well as postgraduate education, retraining programmes; fundamental and applied research.

An **institute** is a higher education institution implementing 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> higher education cycles' programmes in one or several related areas of one or more educational fields, as well as postgraduate education, retraining programmes; fundamental and applied research in one or several fields of knowledge.

## 3.2 First Cycle Programmes

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1<sup>st</sup> cycle training of experts is performed by all types of institutions. Nominal duration (for full-time studies) is 4 - 4.5 years.

### 3.2.1 Branches of Study

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Training is carried out in all educational profiles listed in Section 3 (overview), depending on the specific HEI's accreditation for the programme(s) in question. Currently, education is provided in the framework of approximately 380 1<sup>st</sup> cycle programmes.

### 3.2.2 Admission Requirements

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The admission requirement to a 1<sup>st</sup> cycle or integrated curricula is the general secondary education (or equivalent) that enables access to higher education, as well as passing the centralised tests. Besides Belarusians, citizens of the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are also entitled to receive education at the expense of the state budget (provided they take and pass centralised tests). Currently, citizens of Ukraine's Donetsk and Lugansk regions can be enrolled to receive higher education at the state expense, should open vacancies be available. The 1<sup>st</sup> higher education cycle is also open to graduates with vocational training certificates (with general secondary education) and with specialised secondary education diplomas.

The maximum number of students an institution can enrol depends on its licence requirements as well as its technical facilities and academic teaching staff number and composition. Every year, the number of students to receive state budget-funded education at state-owned higher education institutions is determined by the Ministry of Education and other ministries for each educational institution in line with this institution's request.

Admission is based on the results of centralised testing held throughout June of the admission year. Test results are processed by the National Institute for Knowledge Assessment. During the admission, the centralised test results in three subjects (these are determined by the educational programme in question) and the average scores recorded in the general secondary education certificate are taken into account. Certain profiles (arts, literature, sports) require additional entrance exams arranged by the relevant educational institutions. Admission is conducted in July.

### 3.2.3 Curriculum

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Each programme's educational standards prescribe the requirements to the content of graduates'

professional activity, their competencies, study form and duration, final assessment. The development of such standards is handled by academic (educational) and methodological associations jointly with the labour market representatives. The Ministry of Education approves these standards in consultation with stakeholders. Currently, 65% of the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle curricula content is determined by the state, 35% is decided on by the educational institution itself. It is planned to extend the autonomy of higher education institutions, i.e. the proportion of the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle curricula content that educational institutions can decide on for themselves will rise to 40-50%.

#### **3.2.4 Teaching Methods**

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The ratio of students' in-class work vs. self-directed activities is prescribed in educational standards and averages 50/50. The higher education institution is free to determine the content of its component. Model study programmes developed by academic (educational) and methodological associations define training objectives in the state component disciplines, as well as minimal curricula content, competencies, and assessment forms. Academic staff organise the educational process within the curriculum in question and are not limited in teaching methods.

The number of students in a group is defined at 20-30 people. Groups can be combined into larger "streams". For certain branches (art, sports, medicine), the minimum group size is set at 4.

#### **3.2.5 Progression of Students**

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Students are eligible to take "result-rating" exams and "pass-fail" tests in an academic discipline in case of successful completion and defence of all the current semester's projects.

The 1<sup>st</sup> educational cycle permits a maximum of 2 re-examinations for failed result-rating/pass-fail exams. Additionally, the second attempt is made before a commission of at least three persons. The resitting of failed result-rating/pass-fail tests, term papers/projects is organised within 30 days of the following semester.

The students who fully met the curricular requirements, successfully defended term projects (papers), passed all the tests exams in academic disciplines, are promoted to the next semester or academic year.

#### **3.2.6 Employability**

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In Belarus, professions and primary positions are determined for each study programme, which allows students and employers to be fully aware of their employment opportunities and perspectives. This correlation of study programmes, qualifications and positions is elaborated on in the "Profiles and Qualifications" State Classifier.

The Education Code (Article 83) states that all full-time students whose studies at state-owned higher education institutions were paid for from the state budget are obliged to accept the first job placement related to the acquired professional qualification, and higher education institutions are delegated with the responsibility to find such job placements. The legislation also stipulates cases and categories of graduates entitled to search for employment by themselves. At the same time, graduates from higher education institutions have the right to reject such mandatory job placement, in which case they must reimburse the budget funds invested into their training.

A higher education institution provides job placement at a certain (either state-owned or private) entity. Requests for job placements from employers and organisations that cooperate with a higher education institution in question are a priority. Job placement conditions at private companies are the same as those at public ones. Typically, the ratio between graduates provided with employment in the public and private

sector is 3:1.

Mutual employment obligations between a graduate and his/her employer last 1-2 years.

Higher education institutions' graduates who paid their tuition fees search for a job themselves; alternatively, they can file an application with their institution for a job placement.

In 2014, first job placements were provided to 96.5% of full-time graduates from public higher education institutions whose tuition was funded from the state budget; 3.5% found employment themselves.

### **3.2.7 Student Assessment**

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Throughout the semester, students' knowledge and competencies are subject to continuous (on-going) evaluation. Principal forms thereof include written tests or tests in specific sections of disciplines, colloquia, and other evaluation methods employed during practical classes. Students receive grades for such principal forms of monitoring that compose the weighted average score for a discipline to be taken into account at the time of the exam/test. These are the forms of periodic evaluation for 1<sup>st</sup> cycle students: term project (paper); "pass-fail" test; result-rating examination in the discipline. Such evaluation is held at the end of the semester/year.

Evaluation results are graded on a 10-point scale or with "pass"/"fail" marks. The lowest passing grade is 4, highest possible being 10; a "pass" mark is also a positive one.

### **3.2.8 Certification**

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Final evaluation is carried out to determine whether the graduates' studying results conform to the requirements of educational standards. 1<sup>st</sup> cycle students' final assessment forms are the State Exam and defence of the diploma project. Evaluating bodies are the State Examination Boards established every year at all higher education institutions that have passed state accreditation for each branch of study, regardless of the institutions' subordination and ownership. Potential members of State Examination Boards (SEBs) may include heads of higher education institutions, their deputies, deans of relevant faculties or their deputies, heads of departments, professors and associate professors, top experts from the relevant economic sectors, employer representatives. SEB Chairpersons are appointed by order of the Ministry of Education or a different state body to which the higher education institution in question reports. SEB Chairpersons at private higher education institutions are also appointed by the Ministry of Education. Employees of a different higher education institution can act as SEB Chairpersons. This position can also be filled by general managers and experts from state administration bodies and companies, by scientists, academic staff from higher education institutions, whose background and/or academic degrees correspond to the profile subject to the final evaluation. The results obtained at the State Exam determine whether the appropriate professional qualification certificate will be awarded to the graduate. Successful graduates receive state diplomas indicating their profile, profession and a diploma supplement outlining the mastered disciplines, grades and workload, diploma project's (paper's) topic.

## **3.3 Short-Cycle Higher Education**

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In Belarus, short-cycle higher education programmes belong to specialised secondary education levels. They are highly practice-oriented. As of 2014/2015 academic year, 219 state-owned and 12 private specialised secondary education institutions operate in the country. The total number of students enrolled by them is 129,000. 77,700 of these are trained at the national budget's expense, whereas 51,300 pay their fees. General secondary education is the precondition for admission to most programmes. A small

portion of programmes admits students with general basic (9 years of school) education, in which case the study period is increased to enable the completion of general secondary education. The National Institute for Professional Education is the coordinating body in the field of specialised secondary education.

### **3.4 Second Cycle Programmes**

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Second cycle expert training is available at all higher education institution types, with an average duration of 1-2 years for full-time studies.

#### **3.4.1 Branches of Study**

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The 2<sup>nd</sup> higher education cycle is available for all educational profiles listed in Section 3 (overview), depending on the accreditation status for a specific programme at a given higher education institution. Currently, there are approximately 330 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle programmes.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> higher education cycle involves comprehensive training of experts leading to the award of a Master's degree (e.g. "Master of Engineering", "Master of Radiobiology"). Master's programmes are categorised into (a) programmes with scientific and research components ("academic-oriented master's programme"); and (b) programmes with comprehensive training for innovative activities ("practice-oriented master's programme"). Around 60% of programmes are academic-oriented ones, mainly aimed at preparing students for future PhD studies.

#### **3.4.2 Admission Requirements**

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The 2<sup>nd</sup> higher education cycle admission competition is open to successful 1<sup>st</sup> cycle graduates with relevant documentary proof (diploma). The 1<sup>st</sup> higher education cycle's profile also matters. For example, a student who has completed 1<sup>st</sup> cycle education in humanities may not enter a Master's programme in engineering.

Training fees come either from the national budget or from students' pocket. State funding is available to citizens of the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, provided this is their first-ever enrolment for the cycle. Normally, foreign students pay their tuition fees unless otherwise stipulated in an international agreement.

Every year, the number of 2<sup>nd</sup> higher education cycle students to receive state budget-funded education at state-owned higher education institutions is determined by the Ministry of Education and other ministries for each educational institution in line with that institution's request. This amounts up to 14% of 1<sup>st</sup> cycle graduates in a given year. The maximum number of students a public or a private HEI can enrol depends on its educational licence provisions regarding the maximum threshold.

Admission is determined by the results of entrance exams organised by educational institutions. The highest-scoring candidates are enrolled.

#### **3.4.3 Curriculum**

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State educational standards also exist for 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle programmes, establishing general requirements for the content of experts' professional activity, graduates' competencies, study form and duration. The development of such standards is handled by academic (educational) and methodological associations jointly with the labour market representatives; the Ministry of Education approves these standards in consultation with stakeholders. Second cycle educational standards ensure much wider autonomy to

educational institutions, as only 30-35% of the curricular content is determined by the state, with the remaining 65-70% to be decided on by the institution itself. The language of teaching is mostly Russian, less often Belarusian. An ever-increasing number of programmes in English is emerging.

#### **3.4.4 Teaching Methods**

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Second cycle study curricula are focused on independent work, so the weekly average contact classes<sup>5</sup> duration for the entire study period is under 18 hours. An academic supervisor is appointed for each master's programme student by rector's order. The individual study plan includes a list of theoretical and practical studies, internships at scientific or industrial centres, preparation of publications and reports, participation in conferences, workshops, master's thesis preparation programme.

#### **3.4.5 Progression of Students**

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Master's students must honour the specified deadlines for the individual study plan completion, passing exams and tests, preparation and defence of their master's thesis. Persons failing to meet the above deadlines without legitimate reason(s) are expelled from the programme with no right to reinstatement.

#### **3.4.6 Employability**

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Section 3.2.6 is also relevant for the 2<sup>nd</sup> higher education cycle.

#### **3.4.7 Student Assessment**

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On-going monitoring of master's students' academic performance involves colloquia (interviews) and evaluation tests; testing as interim evaluation, and exams as the final evaluation. For 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle programmes lasting over one year, an annual evaluation is held, and successful master's students are promoted to the next academic year by rector's order. Evaluation results are graded on a 10-point scale or with "pass"/"fail" marks. The lowest passing grade is 4 (four); a "pass" mark is also a positive one.

#### **3.4.8 Certification**

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At each semester end, a department session is held to evaluate master's students against the completion of the approved study and customised working plan. Successful students are listed in the rector's order enabling them to take state exam for the chosen profile and to defend their master's thesis. These two procedures are run by the members of the State Examination Board approved by the Ministry of Education.

Master's theses are defended publicly before the State Examination Board. During the defence, the academic supervisor and at least one independent academic or scientific staff member present their reviews on the thesis. The latter is a qualification work elaborating on the outcomes and scientific results that the author puts forward for public defence to demonstrate his/her personal contribution and ability to conduct independent research.

Successful defenders of their thesis papers are awarded the master's degree by the State Examination Board's decision, and receive state master's diploma and a diploma supplement outlining the exams and tests passed, grades obtained, and the topic of their master's thesis.

Students holding a master's degree are qualified for professional and R&D activities defined in their specific curriculum, for tutoring at higher education institutions, as well as for further postgraduate studies.

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<sup>5</sup> 'Contact classes' or 'contact hours' is the term used to define the students' workload spent in contact with the tutor. The total student workload includes both contact and 'independent' hours.

### 3.5 Programmes outside the Bachelor and Master Structure

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Unlike other programmes within the 2-cycle structure, those in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, arts, architecture, and engineering are integrated into unique 5- or 6-year cycles. From the educational level's perspective, graduates from these programmes have direct access to postgraduate (PhD) studies.

### 3.6 Third Cycle (PhD) Programmes

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#### 3.6.1 Organisation of Doctoral Studies

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At present, doctorate studies in Belarus belong to a separate level of postgraduate education and include two cycles: 1<sup>st</sup> cycle (*aspirantura*), culminating with the award of a PhD degree (literally "Candidate of Science") in case of successful thesis (dissertation) defence; and 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle (higher doctorate), the successful completion (doctorate paper/thesis defence) of which grants the Doctor of Science (DSc) degree.

The *Aspirantura* programme comprises lectures, seminars and independent research work as the core component. The Postgraduate studies' duration is three years (full-time). Ultimately, a scientific thesis (dissertation) is to be defended to receive a *Candidate of Science* (PhD) degree. Candidates are required to write an extensive summary of their thesis called "*autoreferat*" (author's synopsis). Publication of papers in scientific journals and participation in conferences are a must to proceed to the defence.

Doctor of Science is the highest achievable academic degree. Admission is extremely selective and highly restricted. An institution's Academic Council determines whether or not to award the degree, based on the level of scientific advancement shown in the doctoral thesis that must resolve a fundamental scientific problem. The programme is purely research-oriented and its duration is up to 3 years.

Doctorate studies can be covered by the state budget, candidate's own or his organisation's resources. The number of state-funded places is determined annually for each institution.

In 2014, 119 institutions and organisations were authorised to run 1<sup>st</sup> cycle postgraduate programmes, and the number of students that year totalled 4,900. 55 institutions and organisations were cleared to train 282 second cycle higher doctorate researchers.

#### 3.6.2 Admission Requirements

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The prerequisite for a *Candidate of Science* programme admission is a Master's diploma or equivalent. Prior to the enrolment, the candidates are required to pass the so-called 'candidate exams': philosophy, a foreign language, IT. The applicants must also be inclined to do scientific research demonstrated by their publications, participation in research and innovative projects, conferences, or by other documentary proof.

Higher doctorate training requires a *Candidate of Science* (PhD) degree; candidates must have authored scientific papers and other materials outlining scientific research results (monographs, intellectual property-related materials, conference presentations/talks, reports of implementation of state scientific research programmes, etc.) that lay the foundation of a doctoral project and enable its completion within 3 years. The candidate must present a scientific report on the research topic before the institution's Academic Council to be granted admission.

The number of higher doctorate researchers trained at the national budget's expense is based on preliminary requests from organisations.

#### 3.6.3 Status of Doctoral Students/Candidates

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Full-time postgraduates and higher doctorate researchers are regarded as learners, but not students.

They receive a monthly government scholarship during the study period. The full-time and part-time study periods are included into professional experience record that matters for career advancement in the academic area. First cycle postgraduates are entitled to academic activity at higher education institutions as teaching assistants.

#### **3.6.4 Supervision Arrangements**

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An academic supervisor is appointed to facilitate a 1<sup>st</sup> cycle postgrad's training and PhD thesis preparation. A scientific advisor is assigned to 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle doctoral researchers ("higher doctorate"). In exceptional cases, learners of both cycles have the right to study and prepare the thesis on their own, i.e. without a supervisor/advisor. An academic supervisor must normally have a DSc degree, whereas this degree is the minimal requirement for a scientific advisor. In cases when the research topic is supposed to be worked on at multiple institutions, as well as if the research relates to two branches of one scientific field, the appointment of two academic supervisors for a postgrad is allowed. The latter principle also applies to the foreign postgraduates' training.

A maximum of 5 postgraduate students can be managed by a single academic supervisor at the same time.

#### **3.6.5 Employability**

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Often, postgraduate training is conducted at the request of an organisation in need of high-skilled academic experts. For state-owned (public) institutions, such training is normally funded from the national budget. *Candidate of Science* (PhD) or Doctor of Science degree is a significant advantage and expands employment opportunities to academic posts and positions in educational management. PhD or DSc degree holders employed by public education institutions receive legally envisaged salary bonuses as determined by the institution's administration. Some positions are only available to *Candidates of Science* or Doctors of Science. Currently, there are more than 12,000 Candidates of Science and ca. 2,500 Doctors of Science in Belarus.

#### **3.6.6 Assessment**

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Each postgraduate student has an individual work plan for writing the dissertation research, scientific and educational activities. Postgraduate students make reports on the implementation of the individual plan once every half year and at the end of study. Regular reports are evaluated at department sessions, taking into account the opinion of the academic supervisor. The phases for thesis evaluation are as follows: a preliminary examination at the department; thesis evaluation and thesis defence at the institutions' Academic Council; examination at the Higher Attestation Commission. The Candidate of Science (PhD) degree is awarded by the Academic Council of educational institution with regard to public thesis defence, and the decision to award the degree is approved by the Higher Attestation Commission.

Higher doctorate researchers also have an approved research plan and are required to conduct research as planned, to publish articles in scientific journals, make reports at conferences, and summarise the study materials in the form of a dissertation manuscript. The Doctor of Science degree is awarded by the Academic Council of educational institution after a successful public thesis defence. The decision to award the degree is approved by the Higher Attestation Commission.

#### **3.6.7 Certification**

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The decision of the Academic Council of education institution to award the Candidate of Science (PhD) degree and Doctor of Science degree is approved by the Higher Attestation Commission. All the

documents provided by the degree-seekers as well as the dissertation work are examined by the appointed expert, and the decision is made whether to approve or disapprove the degree award.

## **4 Teachers and Education Staff**

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### **4.1 Initial Education for Academic Staff in Higher Education**

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The teaching staff at educational institutions is composed of:

- Academics with “pedagogue” (“instructor”) qualification received upon completion of studies at higher education institutions. They are the educators at higher education institutions.
- Experts in economic and social fields, with no pedagogical background, providing education in areas of their professional expertise.
- Academic staff with Candidate of Science (PhD), Doctor of Science degrees.

Tutors from higher education institutions are trained at classical and “profile” (field-oriented) universities for pedagogical profiles that envisage awarding the “pedagogue or instructor” professional qualification (4-year studies). Persons wishing to get an education at higher education institutions must hold at least a master’s degree in pedagogy (study duration of 4+1 or 4+1.5 years).

Persons employed in economic and social sectors with no pedagogical education are required to complete a pedagogical retraining programme (1-2 years) within the supplementary adult education system.

2<sup>nd</sup> higher education cycle graduates and postgrads are only allowed to run practical seminars and laboratory classes, acting as teaching assistants. Students’ evaluation is limited to Candidates of Science and Doctors of Science only.

### **4.2 Conditions of Service for Academic Staff Working in Higher Education**

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23,900 academic staff members serve as educators at Belarusian HEIs. 43% of them, (10,200) hold a “Candidate of Science” or “Doctor of Science” degree. At the same time, “aging” teaching staff is a tendency. The average age of a Doctor of Science holder is ~65, while for a Candidate of Science holder is ~52.

All labour legislation provisions governing professional activities fully apply to the academic staff.

#### **4.2.1 Planning Policy**

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The Belarusian Education Code establishes the ratio between academics and full-time students at 1:10. Proceeding from this provision, the Ministry of Education annually carries out planning and calculation of the number of full-time teaching staff positions financed from the state budget. The institution itself has the right to introduce additional teaching staff positions based on its own financial resources.

The Education Ministry’s academic staffing forecast (running until 2020), based on demographic estimates and the higher education system optimisation policy, envisages a 20% cut in academic staff numbers.

#### **4.2.2 Entry to the Profession**

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Academic staff employment is contract-based (employment contracts with duration of 1-5 years).

Higher education institutions hire their academic staff independently. Also, they have the right to impose extra professional requirements for academic staff positions.

The legislation provides competitive selection procedures for the positions of lecturer, associate professor, professor, and department head. The competition is intended to ensure the selection of top professionals and is held by education institutions in line with the legislative requirements. The competition results are summarised during the higher education institution's Institutional Council session to determine the best candidate for the vacancy.

#### **4.2.3 Professional Status**

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Basic requirements for academic staff are stipulated in each position's job description. Teaching staff are state budget-funded experts; however, they are not considered to be civil servants.

Civil servants and MPs are granted the right to engage into educational activities (as tutors) outside their working hours.

The Education Code lists the categories of persons who are prohibited to work as educators (e.g. those with a criminal record, etc.).

#### **4.2.4 Salaries**

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Academic staff salary in May 2015 averaged at 8,032,000 roubles (EUR 502)<sup>6</sup>.

This salary depends on the educator's hours of academic workload (starting at 800 hours/year) and also takes into account extra pay-outs (for the degree and title, working experience, etc.).

The Ministry of Education has adopted standard hours to serve as the basis for academic staff's overall workload assessment. The Ministry of Economy sets the salary rate, and the total financial resources are transferred to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education allocates specific amounts between educational institutions in accordance with the approved annual cost plans.

#### **4.2.5 Working Time and Holidays**

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Each academic's working time is prescribed in his/her personal contract.

The usual working time is 36 academic hours per 6-day working week. During a 6-hour working day, a tutor is supposed to educate, engage into research, organisational and methodological activities according to his/her position.

In accordance with the labour legislation, academic staff's vacation is 56 calendar days a year. An employer (a higher education institution) typically plans the vacation period for summer. Academic staff has a right to apply for an unpaid social leave lasting up to 30 days.

#### **4.2.6 Promotion, Advancement**

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Career advancement depends on the academic staff members' professionalism and academic degree.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/otrasli-statistiki/naselenie/trud/operativnaya-informatsiya\\_8/o-nachislennoi-srednei-zarabotnoi-plate-rabotnikov/o-nachislennoi-srednei-zarabotnoi-plate-rabotnikov-respubliki-belarus-v-mae-2015-g/](http://belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/otrasli-statistiki/naselenie/trud/operativnaya-informatsiya_8/o-nachislennoi-srednei-zarabotnoi-plate-rabotnikov/o-nachislennoi-srednei-zarabotnoi-plate-rabotnikov-respubliki-belarus-v-mae-2015-g/)

The legislation provided opportunities to qualify for higher positions on a competitive basis (see Section 4.2.2). A system of annual academic staff evaluation based on their activity reports is established; a system of qualification upgrading is organised (see Sections 1.2, 4.3).

#### **4.2.7 Retirement and Pensions**

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Labour legislation stipulates the official retirement age. Men aged 60 with a minimal employment record of 25 years and women aged more than 55 with an employment record of 20 years are entitled to a pension.

No particular requirements concerning the academic staff's retirement age are established.

### **4.3 Continuing Professional Development for Academic Staff Working in Higher Education**

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#### **4.3.1 Organisational Aspects**

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Professional development for academic staff is ensured via the continuing professional education system. University staff with higher education has a legally stipulated right to professional training at the state budget expense every 5 years.

Supplementary adult education programmes for the teaching staff include short trainings (1-2 weeks), retraining programmes (1-2 years, obtaining additional qualification) and internships (up to 9 months). Both full- and part-time training, including distance learning, are available.

#### **4.3.2 Incentives for Participation in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Activities**

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Academic staff training via the supplementary adult education system is supported by the following measures:

- Workers continue to receive the average salary during training, internship, or retraining;
- Employers can send their academics for training and pay for it out of the higher education institution's budget;
- Employers take the employees' continuing professional education outcomes into account when appointing to a position or when holding a competition for an academic post.

## **5 Management and Other Education Staff for Higher Education**

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### **5.1 Requirements for Appointment**

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Institutional Councils of higher education institutions are the main self-governance bodies composed of legal representatives, academic and administrative staff representatives, students.

The **rector** directly manages the educational institution. Public (state-owned) institutions' rectors are appointed and dismissed in line with the procedure determined by the President of the Republic of Belarus. Private institutions' rectors are appointed by the Minister of Education as proposed by the institution's founders. A rector acts on behalf of the educational institution and is responsible for its performance.

A rector can have several **deputies** (vice-rectors) in charge of the educational process arrangements,

management of scientific, R&D and innovative activities, structural units' coordination, quality management operations, HR policies, and other issues.

A **Dean** of Faculty exercises direct management of educational and research activities at the faculty to the extent authorised by the rector. Deans can also have deputies.

Typical minimum requirements to HEI administration staff include higher education, Candidate of Science (PhD) or Doctor of Science degree, approved scientific works or inventions, working experience in academic positions of at least 5 years.

**Department Chairs** (heads) fall into both academic and administrative staff categories and are in charge of general management of their departments, including educational, scientific, and methodical work. Minimum requirements for this position include higher education, Candidate of Science (PhD) or Doctor of Science degree, scientific works or inventions, at least 7 years of experience in academic positions of the educational profile related to that of the department. Department Chairs are elected through a competition at the Institutional Council session and are re-elected/newly elected every 1-5 years depending on their contractual conditions.

## 5.2 Conditions of Service

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Generally, employment is defined in a contract with a duration of 1 to 5 years. Once the contract expires, new appointment or competition-based election takes place.

## 6 Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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### 6.1 Responsible Bodies

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External quality assurance tools in Belarus are state licensing and state accreditation of higher education institutions handled by the Education Quality Assurance Department under the Ministry of Education.

A state license gives the right to educational activities within a given educational level.

State accreditation implies validation of educational activities' compliance with the relevant legislation, educational standards' requirements, and the right to issue state educational documents. State accreditation is carried out at least once in 5 years for each education institution and programme. Prior to this procedure, a higher education institution performs a self-audit procedure which can serve as preliminary data source.

At the time of state accreditation, the Education Quality Assurance Department monitors the activities of the institution in question. To this end, the Department creates an independent commission composed of representatives from various higher education institutions' academic and administrative staff. The commission produces a report based on the audit results, which is then submitted to the stakeholders. The Education Quality Assurance Department's opinion regarding licensing and accreditation is approved by the Board of the Ministry of Education.

The Education Quality Assurance Department is a member of the Eurasian Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN). The legislation of the Republic of Belarus does not restrict higher education institutions in carrying out additional procedures for external education quality assurance. Belarus aims to join the European ENQA network.

The audit of external quality management systems is certified to comply with the international ISO 9001 standard and is carried out by independent Belarusian and international agencies.

At the National Rectors' Conference session (October 9-10, 2014), the decision about the need for external accreditation of educational programmes by various employer associations and for the creation of a National Quality Assurance Agency was made and submitted to the government. It stipulates the following:

- Transformation of the Education Quality Assurance Department under the Ministry of Education into an agency in charge of education quality assessment, independent from the Ministry of Education.
- This agency shall be delegated functions related to knowledge evaluation of school graduates wishing to enter a higher education institution.
- Student involvement in all processes of external education quality management and assessment.

## **6.2 Approaches and Methods for Quality Assurance**

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Since the beginning of implementing education quality management systems complying with the ISO 9001 standards, the following system of internal quality assurance and management has been shaped:

- Higher education institutions developed and approved education quality assurance policies available on the relevant HEIs' websites.
- Educational and scientific activities of higher education institutions are described as processes and procedures and are stated in the relevant quality standards of each higher education institution. These standards include sections describing quality monitoring, supervision and quality enhancement procedures.
- Organisational structures as well as Quality Management Councils involving students have been established to develop in-house university quality assurance systems. These structures perform annual internal audits and develop quality enhancement mechanisms.

Currently, all higher education institutions of Belarus have been certified as ISO 9001 compliant.

Assessment of educational programmes content at a higher education institution is carried out by the Institutional Council once in a 5-year period. The assessment requirements for the educational programmes' content of higher education institutions are established in the relevant Guidelines developed by the National Institute for Higher Education.

Students' evaluation is performed within the academic period by education institutions. Representatives of potential employers and academic staff from other higher education institutions sit on the state examination board that runs the final evaluation.

Quality assurance for the university academic staff professionalism is ensured by the hiring requirements: academics are elected by the Institutional Council for a term of 1 to 5 years. The higher education institution's commission evaluates the academic staff's performance annually and sets corresponding financial bonuses.

Higher education institutions run regular self-audits, and the data of these audits can be submitted to the external educational quality assurance body. Self-audits includes visual examination, documentation

study, actual conditions analysis, attendance of classes, interviews with the educational process' participants, and testing of students' knowledge (written, verbal, computer-based, practical assignments). An information note containing the analysis, specific conclusions and proposals regarding the training content is a result of the self-audit.

## **7 Educational Support and Guidance**

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### **7.1 Support Measures for Learners in Higher Education**

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#### **7.1.1 Definition of the Target Group(s)**

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At the beginning of 2014/2015 academic year, ~1,500 disabled persons were studying at higher education institutions: 385 students with special physical and mental needs and 937 disabled persons at vocational secondary education institutions.

The government makes efforts to create a barrier-free environment, provide access to information resources and the required means for social rehabilitation, educational, medical, social and other forms of assistance.

#### **7.1.2 Specific Support Measures**

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Children with disabilities are entitled to participate in the entrance competition to receive part-time higher education at the state's expense.

Applicants with impaired hearing, vision, or musculoskeletal functions are eligible to take the entrance exams at vocational and higher education institutions without passing the centralised testing. The entrance exam form is determined by the admission committee of vocational and higher education institutions with regard to the applicants' specific physical and mental features.

Training of the visually impaired is performed using blind aids and special equipment. Blind students are trained using the Braille system. Large-font teaching manuals are used when training visually impaired persons.

The education of people with hearing impairment is facilitated through the use of personal/shared sound-amplifying equipment and technical means to ensure visual-based conveyance of the training material, as well as the use of sign language. Videos are of particular importance.

Barrier-free access to educational institutions for people with musculoskeletal system deficiencies must be ensured. This situation requires further improvement.

Measures of students' social and welfare support are listed in Section 2.5.

### **7.2 Guidance and Counselling in Higher Education**

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#### **7.2.1 Academic Guidance**

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Curatorship plays a crucial role in the educational work at higher education institutions. A teacher-curator is a consultant and assistant for students both in their studies and extracurricular activities. The biggest responsibility rests upon the curators working with freshmen: motivating the students, catching problems early, supporting in challenging situations, encouraging initiative, and highlighting their successes.

#### **7.2.2 Career Guidance**

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Please refer to Section 3.2.6

## 8 Mobility and internationalisation in Higher Education

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### 8.1 Student Mobility

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Currently, under 1% of Belarusian students are academically mobile. Meanwhile, a significant number of Belarusians receive higher education abroad (for instance, over 30,000 Belarusian citizens study in Russia).

Academic mobility is realised within two mainstreams: studies to obtain the final qualification (degree mobility) and studies during a certain timeframe (short-term mobility).

A limited number of students receive state-funded education to obtain high quality education; they are sent abroad under the relevant intergovernmental agreements for educational cooperation. Training is conducted by profiles unavailable in the national higher education system. The overall quota for students and teaching staff exchange under such international agreements in 2014 amounted to 207 people (Poland, 40; Ukraine, 30; Turkmenistan, 30; China, 20; Lithuania, 20; Vietnam, 20; Latvia, 10; Kyrgyzstan, 10; Slovakia, 10; Tajikistan, 8; Kazakhstan, 6; Mongolia, 3).

Short-term mobility is based on inter-institutional agreements, students' private initiative, as well as in the framework of exchange programmes. Presently, there are about 2,000 active inter-university agreements for mutual student exchange. More than 1,500 students participate in academic mobility study programmes (up to a year), practice, internships, etc. each year.

Preferred countries for studies are (most preferred first): Germany, Russia, UK, Poland, Ukraine, France, Sweden, China, Italy, the Netherlands.

These are the academic mobility tools:

- European Union Programmes (Erasmus+ tools), DAAD, IAESTE;
- Intergovernmental agreements on student exchange (quota-based training);
- Inter-institutional agreements on educational cooperation;
- National instruments for students' education financing outside Belarus.

In 2014, 135 Belarusian students were sent to study at foreign institutions, including: Russia, 17 students; China, 59; Lithuania, 13; Oman, 9; Germany, 7; Korea, 8; and so on. Of these 135, 41% were sent abroad to study foreign languages.

Throughout 2014, higher education institutions organised about 2,500 training missions for their staff, postgraduates, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle students to participate in international scientific activities, seminars, study visits, inclusive training, and internships.

Short-term mobility results are recognised by higher education institutions themselves; recognition of degrees – by the Belarus ENIC operating as a department under the National Institute for Higher Education.

### 8.2 Academic Staff Mobility

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Teaching staff mobility is organised only within the framework of inter-institutional agreements and using the tools provided by European programmes. Academics are sent to partnering higher education

institutions to lecture, participate in seminars and master classes and engage into scientific activity within the framework of the joint research fields.

The total share of academic staff involved in mobility is under 1%.

In 2010-2015, 670 Erasmus Mundus programme scholarships were allocated to ensure the mobility of 224 first cycle students, 173 second cycle (master's) students, 127 postgraduates, 54 scientists, and 92 staff members from higher education institutions.

As for the incoming academic staff's mobility, there are financial arrangements proposed by the Belarusian Government (Governmental Resolution #362 dd. May 10, 2013) that include financial support for their travel, accommodation, and salaries.

### **8.3 Other Dimensions of Internationalisation in Higher Education**

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#### **8.3.1 European, Global and Intercultural Dimension in Curriculum Development**

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Belarusian higher education institutions are involved in international projects, particularly, Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, Jean Monnet. Belarus participated in the Tempus project since 1994, with a total of 64 projects in 1994-2013 with Belarusian universities as participants. Currently 21 programme-based projects are underway. In 2010-2013, there has been an upward trend in projects with Belarusian participation selected on the annual competition basis: 2010 – 2 projects, 2011 – 3, 2012 – 8, 2013 – 13. In 2015, 4 projects with the participation of Belarus were selected for funding within the new Erasmus+ programme aimed at capacity building in higher education (and 6 projects in 2016). The number of Belarusian universities participating in Tempus projects is also growing: 18 universities in 2011, 23 in 2012, 29 since 2013. The most active ones among them include Belarusian State University, Belarusian National Technical University, Belarusian State Economic University, Grodno-based Yanka Kupala State University.

The implementation of the Tempus programme projects facilitated the reforming and optimisation of university management, modernisation of curricula and programmes, strengthening the international cooperation. New approaches to management, administration, planning, and quality assurance in higher education have been developed. The use of ECTS-compatible credit system can now be used within new educational standards and programmes.

As a result of 2011-2013 competitions within the Erasmus Mundus Action 2 programme, 20 projects involving 16 Belarusian universities are being implemented.

Before 2015, Belarus had experience of implementing projects on European integration (Jean Monnet projects): Belarusian State University (4 projects) and Brest State University (1 project).

In order to further promote integration of Belarus into the European Higher Education Area, the Minister of Education issued an order "On measures for introducing tools of European Higher Education Area into the national education system" of 07.30.2015 №628, aimed at implementing the provisions of the Roadmap for the Republic of Belarus to achieve the principles, objectives and values of the Bologna Process.

Teaching foreign languages (English, French, German, Spanish or Chinese) at higher education institutions is a mandatory component at each higher education cycle.

An important direction in internationalisation is the development and implementation of joint educational programmes. 32 educational programmes are being implemented at 17 Belarusian higher education institutions.

### **8.3.2 Partnerships and Networks**

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Belarusian higher education institutions are involved in the activities of many international educational organisations.

Higher education institutions located in the near-border regions are actively cooperating with foreign partners. They are members of appropriate international regional associations (The "Baltic University" Programme, Baltic Sea Region University Network (BSRUN), Inter-University Centre for Research and Cooperation in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (CIRCEOS)).

Higher education institutions of Belarus are presented in the Eurasian University Association (EUA), the University Network of the Central European Initiative (CEI UniNet), the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE), the European Association of Universities (EAU), etc.

In September 2015, "MITSO" International University joined the Magna Charta of the European Universities.

## **8.4 Bilateral Agreements and Worldwide Cooperation**

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### **8.4.1 Bilateral Agreements**

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The legal basis for international cooperation includes 93 international intergovernmental agreements in the field of higher education, science, and youth policy.

The analysis of international cooperation regional distribution shows that the relations established within the former Soviet Union have mainly been preserved; over 68% of partnership ties are with ex-USSR republics (except for the Baltic states). The leaders are Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Caucasus and Central Asian countries. Eastern Europe and the Baltic states rank second in terms of partner relations' number. The leading role in this area belongs to Polish universities. Western Europe accounts for ~10 cooperation agreements, but this cooperation is more important, because in most cases it is backed by significant funding under European Union projects. Of great importance in this region are the universities of Germany, Italy, and Sweden. Cooperation with Chinese universities ranks fifth in the structure of international relations for higher education.

On top of that, about 2,000 active direct inter-institutional agreements are geared towards international cooperation development.

### **8.4.2 Cooperation and Participation in Worldwide Programmes and Organisations**

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Within the national higher education system's upgrading framework, the Ministry of Education is cooperating with the following organisations:

- European Training Foundation – for the National Qualifications Framework development;
- Council of Europe: an Information Point of the Council of Europe operates at the premises of BSU;
- World Bank: enhanced higher education management system in Belarus in the context of European standards.

Belarusian higher education institutions are also involved in the following international organisations: Technical Universities Association, World Federation of Scientists, Association for Medical Education in Europe (AMEE), European Association of Faculties of Pharmacy, Association of Rectors of Pedagogical Universities in Europe and etc.

## **9 On-going reforms and Policy developments**

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### **9.1 Overall national education strategy and key objectives**

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At present, the higher education development strategy has been discussed and adopted at the session of the National Council of Rectors of higher education institutions (9-10 October 2014) ([http://srrb.niks.by/info/post\\_09\\_14\\_14.htm](http://srrb.niks.by/info/post_09_14_14.htm)). The Strategy provides:

- Adjustment of the higher education profiles' structure to the International Standard Classification of Education requirements and economic activity categories. Development of the National Qualifications Framework based on the European counterpart; optimised number of profiles, a better system to plan higher education provision.
- Enhanced management and optimised structure of the higher education system. The creation of new social institutions for government-societal partnership in higher education management, optimisation of the number and types of higher education institutions, establishment of enterprise-university complexes, development of distance and network learning, joint educational programmes, introducing modular-based educational programmes.
- Review of state funding principles for higher education institutions. Drafting per-student budget spending standards with regard to specific programmes, performance-based differentiation of scholarship provision, university budget management autonomy, higher public spending on education.
- Broader rights and responsibilities of higher education institutions within the national higher education system. Empowering universities to determine curricular content (50% for 1st higher education cycle), granting them the right to develop and introduce new study programmes, etc.
- Enhancing higher education quality and practical orientation. Mandatory "academic mobility" requirement for academic staff and students, providing wider training at educational-scientific-industrial compounds, increasing the high school graduates' training quality requirements, implementation of practical training of students at workplace.

### **9.2 Overview of the education reform process and drivers**

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The Higher education system upgrade is carried out lawfully and comprises several stages.

- Stage 1, Preparatory: institutions that facilitate higher education system's operation develop reform proposals and a set of required draft documents for the Ministry of Education. The Ministry arranges the discussion thereof with the Councils of Rectors and other stakeholders. Following the approval, field-testing of the proposals is run at several HEIs.
- Stage 2, Pilot Run: experimental testing of the proposed education system upgrading process is exercised for 1 year.

- Stage 3, Legal Stipulation: should the experiment succeed, the required amendments to the education system's legal framework are made.
- Stage 4, Implementation: practical implementation and evaluation of the upgrade.

### 9.3 National reforms in Higher Education

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Currently, substantial education system reforms have been introduced as draft amendments to the Education Code and provide for:

- Transition to a 3-cycle higher education system (1st cycle of higher doctorate studies to be referred to as 3rd higher education cycle).
- Broader autonomy for higher education institutions.
- Change in the higher education funding model (transition to norm-based per capita financing)

#### 9.3.1 2015

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As of January 1, 2015: the development of new "Profiles and Qualifications" State Classifier, based on ISCED 2011 (and 2013) education levels and subject areas – ongoing;

- 06.04.2015 – transition to ECTS-compatible credit system;
- 06.04.2015 – regulation of students' autonomous (independent) work.
- 21.10.2015 – introduction of the network form of higher education programmes

#### 9.3.2 2014

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- 17.01.2014 – National Qualifications Framework for pilot economic sectors developed.
- 22.05.2014 – modular studying principle implemented for social studies and humanities; elective subjects for students introduced

#### 9.3.3 2013

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- April 2013 – transition to differentiated training periods for 1st higher education cycle.
- September 2013 – transition to 1st cycle's educational standards (bases on competencies approach).

## 10 Legislation

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- Кодекс Республики Беларусь об образовании от 13.01.2011 № 243-3 / Education Code of the Republic of Belarus of 13.01.2011 № 243-3 [[http://etalonline.by/?type=text&regnum=Hk1100243#load\\_text\\_none\\_1\\_2](http://etalonline.by/?type=text&regnum=Hk1100243#load_text_none_1_2)]. Accessed on 28.01.2016.
- Национальная стратегия устойчивого социально-экономического развития Республики Беларусь на период до 2030 г., одобрена на заседании Президиума Совета Министров Республики Беларусь от 10.02.2015 / National strategy of sustainable socio-economic development of Belarus for the period until 2030, approved by the Presidium of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on 10.02.2015

[<http://www.economy.gov.by/ru/macroeconomy/nacionalnaya-strategiya>]. Accessed on 28.01.2016.

- Правила приема лиц для получения высшего образования I ступени (утверждены Указом Президента Республики Беларусь от 07.02.2006 № 80) / Rules for the admission to I cycle of higher education (approved by Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus of 07.02.2006 № 80). [[http://www.pravo.by/world\\_of\\_law/text.asp?RN=P30600080#3ar\\_Утв\\_1](http://www.pravo.by/world_of_law/text.asp?RN=P30600080#3ar_Утв_1)]. Accessed on 28.01.2016.
- Положение о порядке организации и проведения централизованного тестирования, (утверждено постановлением Совета Министров Республики Беларусь от 6.06.2006 № 714) / Regulations on the organisation and conduct of centralised testing (approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of 6.06.2006 № 714) [<http://rikc.by/37-polozhenie-o-ct.html>]. Accessed on 28.01.2016.
- Правила приема лиц для получения высшего образования II ступени (утверждены постановлением Совета Министров Республики Беларусь от 2.02.2012 N 110) / Rules for the admission to II cycle of higher education (approved by the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of 2.02.2012 № 110) [<http://www.government.by/upload/docs/filef2d28d1a123d31b4.PDF>]. Accessed on 28.01.2016.
- Положение о порядке проведения государственной аккредитации учреждений образования, иных организаций, которым в соответствии с законодательством предоставлено право осуществлять образовательную деятельность, и подтверждения государственной аккредитации (утверждено Постановление Совета Министров Республики Беларусь от 22.06. 2011 № 820) / Regulations on the procedure of state accreditation of education institutions and other organisations, which, in accordance with the legislation have the right to carry out educational activities, and confirmation of the state accreditation (approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of 22.06. 2011 № 820) [<http://www.pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=C20201239>]. Accessed on 28.01.2016.
- Положение об учреждении высшего образования (утверждено Постановлением Министерства образования Республики Беларусь от 1.08.2012. № 93) / Regulation on the higher education institution (approved by Resolution of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus of 1.08.2012. № 93) [[http://www.bntu.by/images/stories/atf/ATF\\_images/main.pdf](http://www.bntu.by/images/stories/atf/ATF_images/main.pdf)]. Accessed on 28.01.2016.
- Положение о подготовке научных работников высшей квалификации в Республике Беларусь (утверждено Указом Президента Республики Беларусь от 01.12.2011 № 561) / Regulation on the training of scientific personnel of higher qualification in the Republic of Belarus (approved by Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus of 01.12.2011 № 561) [<http://www.vak.org.by/index.php?go=Pages&in=view&id=235>]. Accessed on 28.01.2016.
- Постановление Совета Министров Республики Беларусь от 17.01.2014 №34 «О некоторых вопросах развития национальной системы квалификаций Республики Беларусь» / Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on 17.01.2014 №34 "On some issues of the development of national qualifications system of the Republic of Belarus" [<http://web6.pac.by/files/1P-CM-34-17.0114.pdf>]. Accessed on 28.01.2016.

- Должности служащих, занятых в образовании (утверждены постановлением Министерства труда и соцзащиты Республики Беларусь 28.04.2001 №53) / Positions of employees engaged in education (approved by Resolution of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus 28.04.2001 №53) [<http://www.dogma.by/index.php?newsid=4807>]. Accessed on 28.01.2016.
- Указ Президента Республики Беларусь от 6.09.2011 № 398 «О социальной поддержке обучающихся» / Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus of 6.09.2011 № 398 "On social support of learners" [[http://www.pravo.by/world\\_of\\_law/text.asp?RN=P31100398](http://www.pravo.by/world_of_law/text.asp?RN=P31100398)]. Accessed on 28.01.2016.

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