

DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

NATIONAL REPORT OF LATVIA

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE
OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA**

15 August 2004

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INTRODUCTION

The National Report of Latvia on the development of the education system at the beginning of the 21st century consists of two main parts. The first part of the Report provides a general insight into the Latvian education system. It presents information on the Latvian education system and its administration. During the time period of 2002 to August 2004 special attention has been paid to the improvement of regulatory enactments regulating the field of education. The first part of the Report also provides the most important data (numerical) necessary to describe the education development aspects mentioned in the Report.

The second part of the Report looks at the Latvian education system development from different aspects over the past two years in different stages of education. This part names several regulatory enactments developed by other public administration institutions. These documents are binding also for the Ministry of Education and Science in order to create a unified national policy and development strategy.

The first part of the Report mentions the updated education classification, which is a component of the unified economic information classification system of the Republic of Latvia, and serves for the creation of a unified education statistical data base and provides comparability with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) approved by UNESCO in 1997, as well as with statistical data on education of other countries. The table of comparison of stages and types of Latvian education programmes with ISCED-97 levels is provided in Annex 1.

1. THE LATVIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21st CENTURY. SITUATION BACKGROUND

1.1 Administration of the education system and the legal framework of the sectoral policy

The main objective of the Latvian education system administration is to create favourable conditions for personality growth of an individual so that after the acquisition of quality education each inhabitant of Latvia had an opportunity to implement and guide his/her professional career, work in the chosen profession for the benefit of Latvia, of his/her family, himself/herself, and to enhance his/her proficiency, or to flexibly change his/her profession. The Ministry of Education and Science is the leading public administration institution in the field of education and science. In compliance with the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Science and the Education Law, the Ministry implements a unified national policy and development strategy in education, develops education, science, sport, youth and state language policies, organizes and coordinates their implementation, as well as develops draft regulatory enactments regulating the sector, and develops draft policy planning documents.

Subordinate bodies of the Ministry of Education and Science help to provide the education system administration.

The main functions of the **Centre for Curricula Development and Examination** are to:

- organize the development, approbation and correction of curricula for basic education and general secondary education;
- develop a standard of basic education and secondary education subjects, and samples of subject programmes;
- organize assessment and approval of textbooks;
- develop materials and a common procedure for state examinations;
- organize state language proficiency examinations (since 2001);
- address issues regarding further education of pedagogues (since 2002).

The State Education Inspectorate is a state control and education quality supervisory body. Its task is to examine on a regular basis whether the operation of education institutions is in compliance with regulatory enactments, and to provide observance of public rights in the field of education.

The main tasks of the **Vocational Education Centre** are to:

- organize licensing of vocational education programmes;
- organize accreditation of vocational education institutions, examination centres and vocational education programmes;
- organize the development and assessment of the education and methodological aids necessary for vocational education;
- provide the development of profession standards and expertise in accordance with regulatory enactments regulating the field of vocational education;
- evaluate compliance of vocational education programmes with the state vocational secondary education standard and state vocational education standard, as well as with the profession standard;
- improve the procedure of centralized professional qualification examinations in vocational education institutions and examination centres.

The Sport Department implements the national policy in the field of physical education and sport. The Department is the coordinating body in Latvia of the European Year of Education through Sport proclaimed by the European Union. The main tasks of the Department are:

- improvement of the sport funding system;
- improvement of the organizational system of youth sport;
- creation of a further education system for sports specialists;
- coordination of the development of sports centres.

The Study Fund provides crediting of studies from the state budget resources, and administration of these credits.

The State Youth Initiative Centre implements a state youth policy. The main functions of the Centre are to:

- provide improvement of the interest-related education system (a framework of regulatory enactments, further education of pedagogues and staff working with youth) and its targeted development;
- plan and implement events of state significance for children and youth.

In order to develop Latvian economy focusing on a high value-added product and to build a knowledge-based society, it is necessary to provide quality education and its compliance with the labour market, as well as to provide integration of higher education, science and innovations. It has been emphasized in a Latvian National Development Plan that the basis for Latvia's development should be society's ability to create new knowledge and use it for economic development and raising general living standard. An Education Development Concept Paper 2002-2005 adopted by the *Saeima* (Parliament) on 17 October 2002 provides that there should be a unified state education policy and strategy. The Concept Paper has been developed taking into account the objectives and courses of action set out in the Latvian Long-term Economic Strategy, National Development Plan, National Employment Plan, European Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, and bearing in mind the education development guidelines provided in a UNESCO programme Education for All.

The common goal of the Education Development Concept Paper is to ensure changes in the education system which would enhance building of a knowledge-based, democratic and socially integrated society, and would preserve and develop cultural values typical for Latvia.

In order to achieve the aforementioned, the Concept Paper sets three goals:

- increase education quality in all stages of education and shape it according to public and economic development needs;
- provide accessibility of education to inhabitants of Latvia in the context of lifelong learning;
- increase cost-effectiveness of education in all stages and types of education.

After the approval of the Education Development Concept Paper, the following political documents were developed to provide its implementation:

On 24 October 2002 the *Saeima* adopted the **Sport Law**. According to the Law the Ministry of Education and Science and the Sport Department have to implement a unified state policy and development strategy in the field of sport. The purpose of the Law is to provide general and legal basis for the organization and development of sport, interrelation among sports organizations, state and municipal institutions and their basic tasks in sport development, as well as to provide a basis for sports funding.

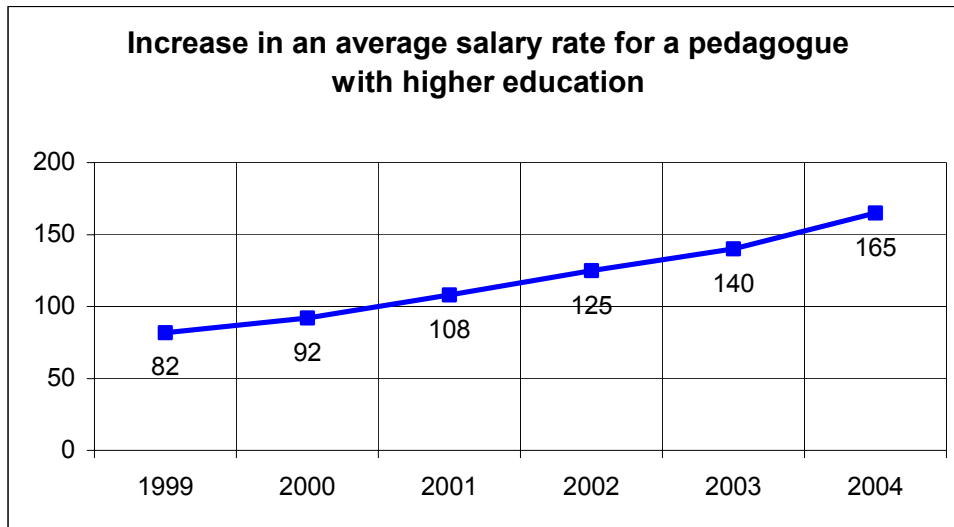
On 31 October 2002 the *Saeima* adopted the **Law on Education Innovation Fund**. The objective of the Fund's operation is to promote the development of education in the country according to a unified state policy and strategy by financially supporting education projects and by awarding lifelong stipends to outstanding educational employees for their lifelong contribution to education.

A Vocational Education System Development Programme 2003-2005 (accepted by the Cabinet on 4 September 2003). The objective of the Programme is to create the vocational education system which can flexibly adjust to the requirements of a market economy; which promotes employment; which is in compliance with EU human resources development conceptual basic outlines; and which enhances the preparation of workforce competitive on an EU scale. This objective can be achieved by enhancing accessibility of education for inhabitants of Latvia in the context of lifelong learning and by increasing cost-effectiveness of education.

A Higher Education Funding System Development Plan 2004-2005 (accepted by the Cabinet on 23 December 2003), whose main courses of action are: attraction of younger staff to academic work in higher education institutions, gradual provision of optimal study costs, and possibilities of obtaining a study loan for all students who want to obtain it.

A Scientific and Academic Staff Renewal Programme. It is impossible to implement the Programme due to lack of funding. However, the most important activities of this Programme are included in a national programme **Support to the Implementation of Doctoral Programmes and Post-doctoral Researches**.

Increase in Pedagogues' Remuneration from 1999 to 2004. The objective of the reform is to decrease the number of remunerable pedagogical work rates and to simultaneously increase the remuneration fund thus achieving a considerable increase in payment for one pedagogical work rate. Over the past six years the average salary rate for a pedagogue with higher education has increased twice.



It should be noted that on 19 March 2002 the Cabinet accepted a **State Youth Policy Concept Paper** and a **State Youth Policy Programme**. The Concept Paper was developed in compliance with the EU youth policy guidelines *White Paper on Youth: A New Impetus for European Youth*, and its objective is to create preconditions for the establishment and development of a sustainable youth support system. The Programme is a system of preventive measures and projects, and its objective is to enhance comprehensive development of young people so that they could become responsible members of a democratic society. It also promotes youth participation in political, economic, social and cultural processes at local, national and international levels.

1.2 Key aspects in the development of the education system

According to the Education Law, the strategic goals and main tasks of educational programmes, compulsory curricula, basic principles and the procedure for assessment of education acquired by an educatee are provided by the State Education Standards. The standards are provided by the following regulations of the Cabinet: Regulations on the State Basic Education Standard (05.12.2000, No 462), Regulations on the State General Secondary Education Standard (05.12.2000, No 463), Regulations on the State Professional and Vocational Education Standard (27.06.2000, No 211), and Regulations on the State First Level Professional Higher Education Standard (20.03.2001, No 141).

The aforementioned standards provide the main objectives of different types of education.

The objective of basic education is to:

- provide an educatee with the necessary basic knowledge and skills for his/her social and personal life;
- create a basis for further education of an educatee;
- promote harmonic development of an educatee;
- enhance responsible attitude of an educatee to himself/herself, to his/her family, society, the environment and state.

The objective of general secondary education is to:

- provide an educatee with knowledge and skills that give him/her an opportunity to prepare for continuation of education;

- promote the development of an educatee so that he/she became a mentally and physically developed personality, build awareness on health as a life quality condition;
- enhance a positively critical and socially active attitude of an educatee and build his/her awareness on rights and obligations of a Latvian citizen;
- build an educatee's skills to learn and develop independently, motivate him/her for lifelong learning and deliberate career.

The objective of vocational secondary education and vocational education:

- prepare an educatee for work in a certain profession;
- promote the acquisition of knowledge and skills, as well as the formation of attitudes that will enhance an educatee's competitiveness in changing socio-economic conditions;
- create motivation for professional development and further education, and provide an educatee with an opportunity to prepare for continuation of education in a higher professional education stage.

The objective of the first level of higher professional education:

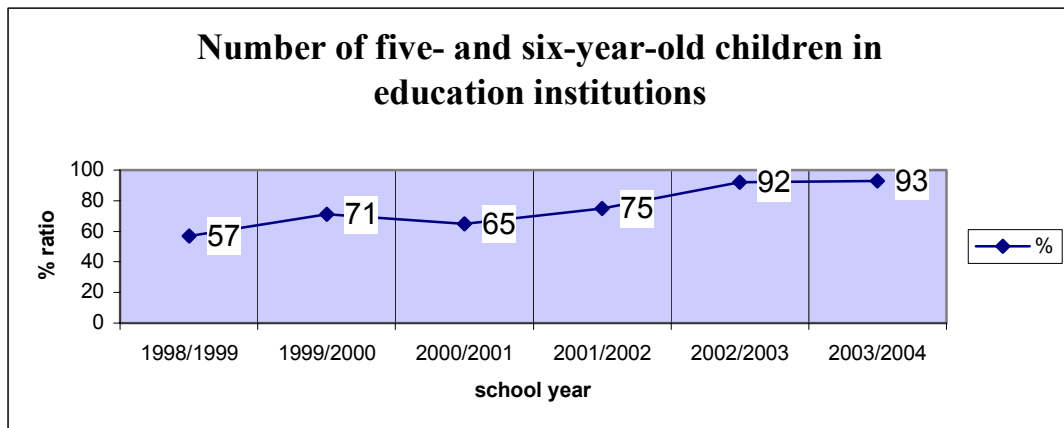
- prepare an educatee for work in a certain profession;
- implement the education process that provides an educatee with an opportunity to acquire the first level of higher professional education;
- provide an opportunity for an educatee to prepare for continuation of education in order to acquire the second level of higher professional education.

Each educational institution implements a licensed educational programme in which, according to an education stage, type, target group and state education standard, the following factors are provided:

- objectives, tasks and the planned results of an education programme;
- requirements for previously acquired education of educatees;
- a curriculum as a unified aggregate of subjects or course content;
- plan for the implementation of an education programme;
- assessment of the personnel, funds and material resources necessary for the implementation of an education programme.

When implementing changes in the education system according to the Education Development Concept Paper 2002-2005, the education accessibility principle has been observed in order to provide inhabitants' access to education in the context of lifelong learning.

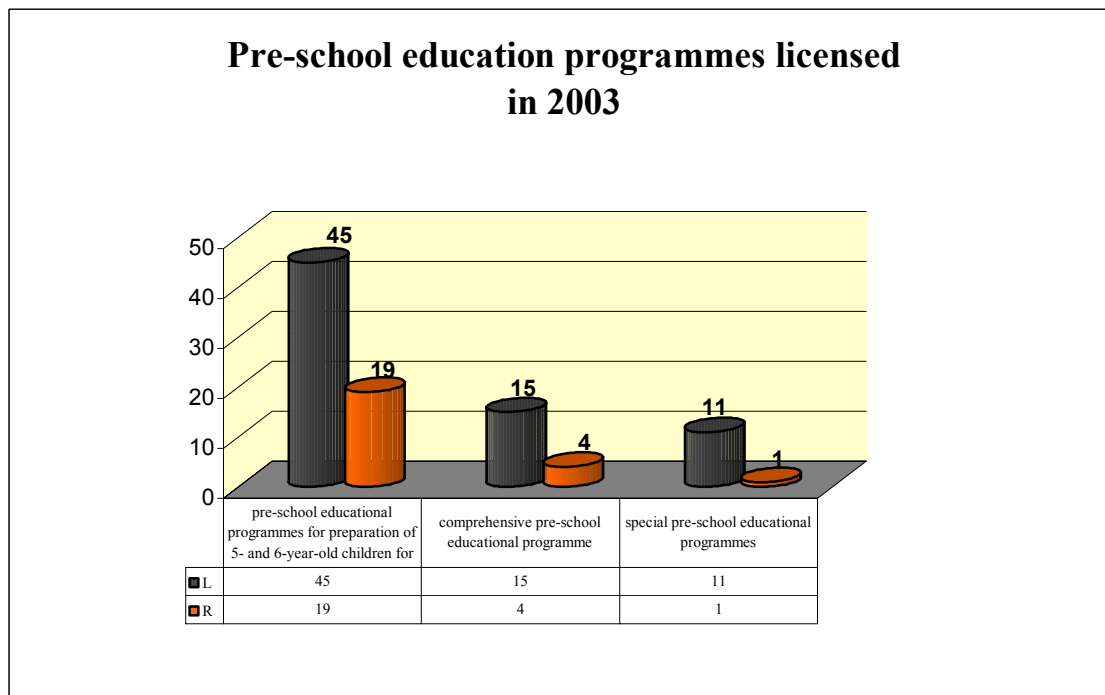
Pre-school education. In 2002 the implementation of compulsory preparation of five- and six-year-old children for the acquisition of basic education, provided by the Education Law, was started. The normative basis was established, requirements for education and qualification of pedagogues were defined. In order to implement pre-school education programmes, the following activities have been carried out: a sample of pre-school education programme has been developed, a list of compulsory documentation and material basis has been provided, an instruction for registration and enrolment of five- and six-year-old children in pre-school education programme has been developed.



Children, whose native language is not Latvian, have an opportunity to start acquiring the Latvian language already in a pre-school institution. There are Latvian, Russian, Estonian, Jewish and Polish groups in pre-school institutions in Latvia, where the respective language is used as a language of instruction.

Special education programmes are also implemented in pre-school education. In 2003 the demand for special pre-school education exceeded offer, therefore on 1 September 2003 a new special pre-school education institution for children with speech and movement disorders was opened. The total number of children enrolled in pre-school education programmes increased in the school year 2003/2004. In the school year 1998/1999 44% of children attended pre-school education institutions, but in 2003/2004 – 72%. This increase is caused by the fact that women have to return to work very soon after childbirth due to economic reasons.

95 pre-school education programmes were licenced in 2003 in addition to the 1,353 ones (486 of which are for compulsory preparation of five- and six-year-old children) licenced during the previous years.



General basic education and general secondary education.

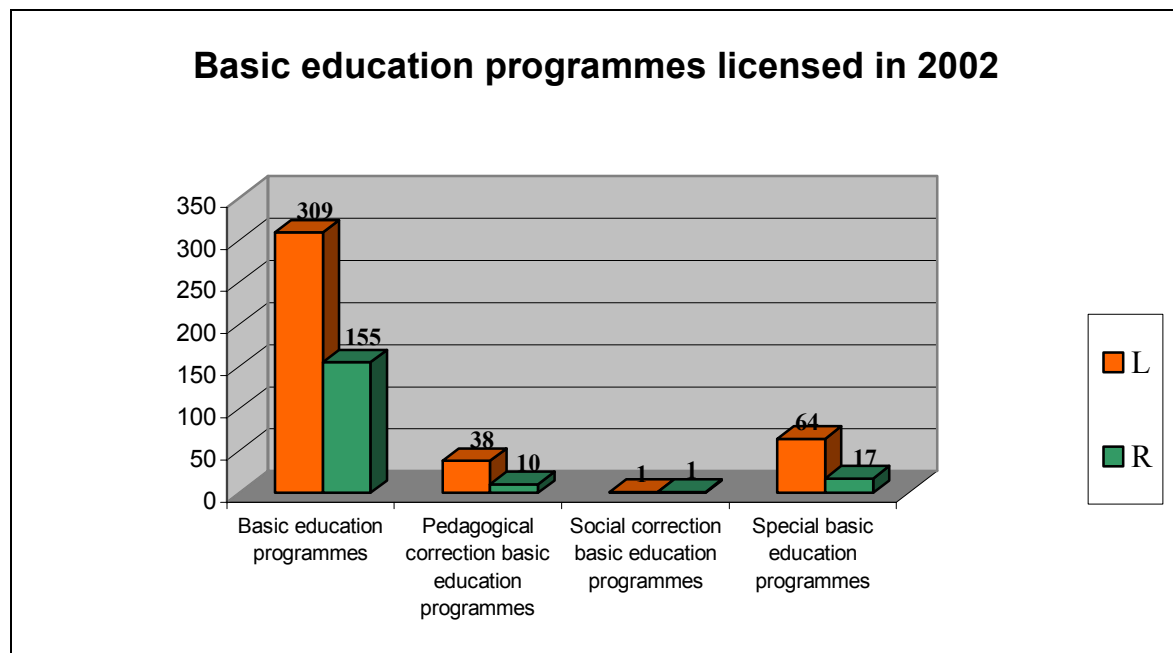
Section 4 of the Education Law provides that the acquisition of basic education, or continuation of acquisition of basic education until the age of 18, shall be compulsory.

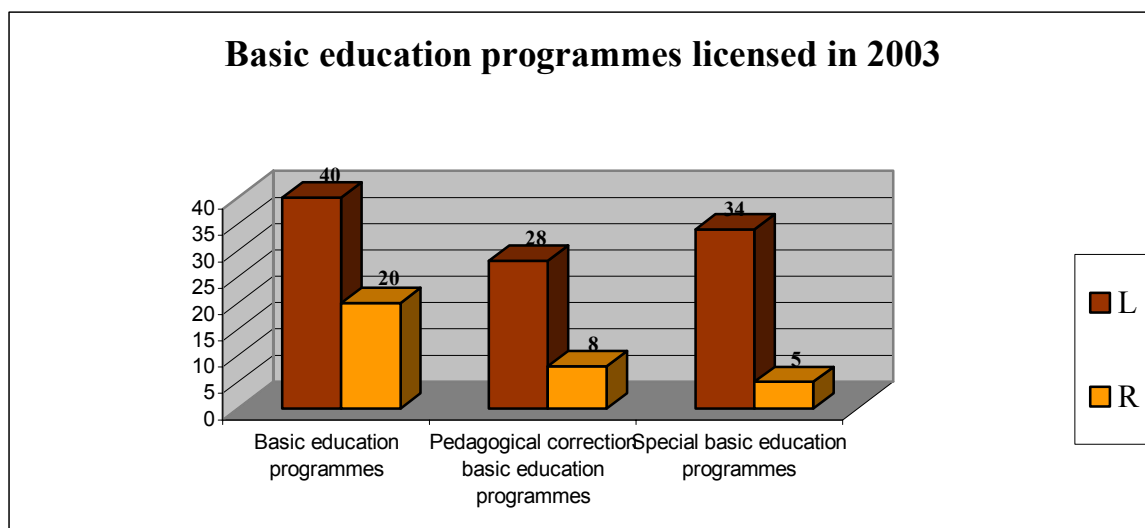
In 2001 the Ministry of Education and Science approved a General Education Curricular Reform Plan to be implemented by 2004. The objective of the Plan is to introduce, in compliance with the Education Law and General Education Law, a state guaranteed and regionally administered quality and effective basic and secondary education system, which provides all school-age children, according to their special needs, with the acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary for their social and personal life, provides a stable basis for the acquisition of further education and profession, formation of a responsible attitude, possibilities for the development of a creative, polymathic and physically developed personality.

In order to implement the curricular reform of general education, discussions with heads of all Latvian educational institutions were started at the beginning of 2002. In-service training courses were organized for pedagogues. They were attended by 938 deputy heads of schools in charge for studies.

The second task was to prepare state examination papers and provide the procedure for examinations. Statistical and qualitative analysis of state examination papers was carried out and the concept of the examination model was improved. The third task was licensing of educational programmes. 920 basic education programmes were licensed by 2002. In 2002 595 basic education programmes were licensed, but in 2003 – 135.

In order to improve general education curricula, standards for 15 basic education subjects and a draft standard for one subject were prepared for approval in 2003. The quality of teaching literature was also improved. The Centre for Curricula Development and Examination developed a new regulation for textbook approval. This regulation conforms with the State Basic Education Standard and the State General Education Standard.

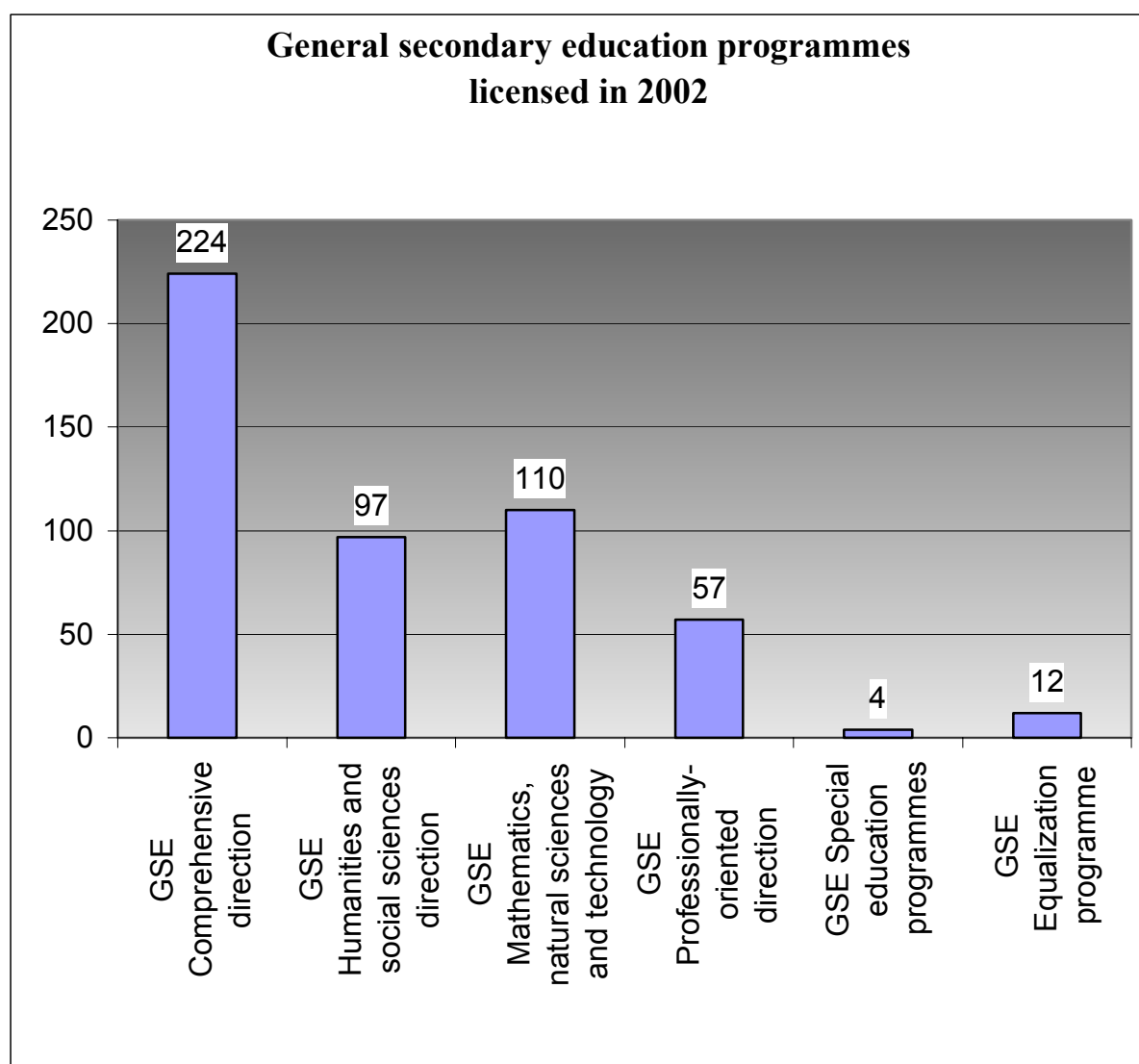




L – education programmes with the Latvian language of instruction

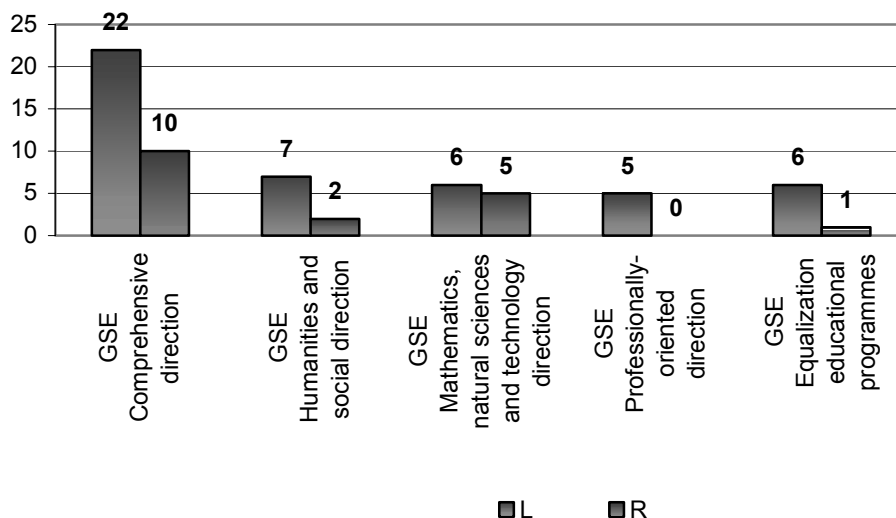
R – education programmes for ethnic minorities

With regard to accessibility of general secondary education, it should be noted that education institutions have an opportunity to develop education programmes in one out of four directions (comprehensive; humanities and social sciences; mathematics, natural sciences and technology; and professionally-oriented). 573 general secondary education programmes were licensed by 2002. In 2002 504 programmes were licensed, but in 2003 – 64.



GSE – general secondary education

General secondary education programmes licensed in 2003



L – education programmes with the Latvian language of instruction

R – education programmes for ethnic minorities

GSE – general secondary education

One of the priorities in 2002 was the development of an education policy for ethnic minorities. When implementing the requirements provided in the Education Law, the following transitional periods have been observed:

- a transitional period of three years has been foreseen for the implementation of education programmes for ethnic minorities in basic education. As of 1 September 2002 pupils of basic school (grades 1 – 9) learn in two languages;
- as of 1 September 2004, starting with grade 10, pupils acquire no less than five subjects in Latvian within education programmes for ethnic minorities. The acquisition of subjects in an ethnic minority language can be provided up to 2/5 of the total lesson load within a school year. In the school year 2004/2005 in grades 11 and 12, and in the school year 2005/ 2006 in grade 12 no less than three subjects shall be acquired in Latvian, but as of 2007 the content of state examination papers will be in Latvian. Education in a different language can be acquired in private education institutions.

Specialists of the Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with the Advisory Board on Ethnic Minority Education Issues have developed a *Support Plan* in order to help education institutions prepare for transition to studies in the Latvian language. In 2003 meetings with the management of each education institution, which will implement an education programme for ethnic minorities in grade 10 as of 1 September 2004, were organized; regional meetings with heads of these institutions also took place.

As of 1 September 2004 ethnic minorities in Latvia who attend state and local government budgetary education institutions, have a guaranteed opportunity to acquire part (up to 40% of the total curriculum) of subjects, included in general secondary education programmes for pupils of ethnic minorities of grades 10-12, in an ethnic minority language. Improvement of knowledge and skills of a native language, the acquisition of issues related to the relevant culture and ethnicity will be provided through education programmes and interest-related education activities.

Evaluating the development process of the education policy for ethnic minorities objectively, it should be concluded that the opportunities provided for pupils of ethnic minorities to learn in the state language and in a language of an ethnic minority in secondary schools established by the state and local governments in compliance with requirements of regulatory enactments, is a well considered step to promote integration of the society of Latvia and to ensure rights of ethnic minorities provided and guaranteed by international instruments. In accordance with requirements of regulatory enactments, founders of private education institutions choose a language of instruction for a respective institution and provide the acquisition of Latvian.

In order to improve the quality of the organization of the general basic education and general secondary education process, in 2003 requirements for educatees' enrolment in and transference to general basic education and general secondary education institutions were supplemented. Requirements provided in the instruction with regard to pupils who have returned from studies abroad and want to continue education in any education institution of Latvia, and requirements for pupils who have not lived in Latvia so far and have been registered for enrolment in an education institution of Latvia, should be specially noted. The provision of such requirements increases opportunities of young people to acquire education and promote their integration in society.

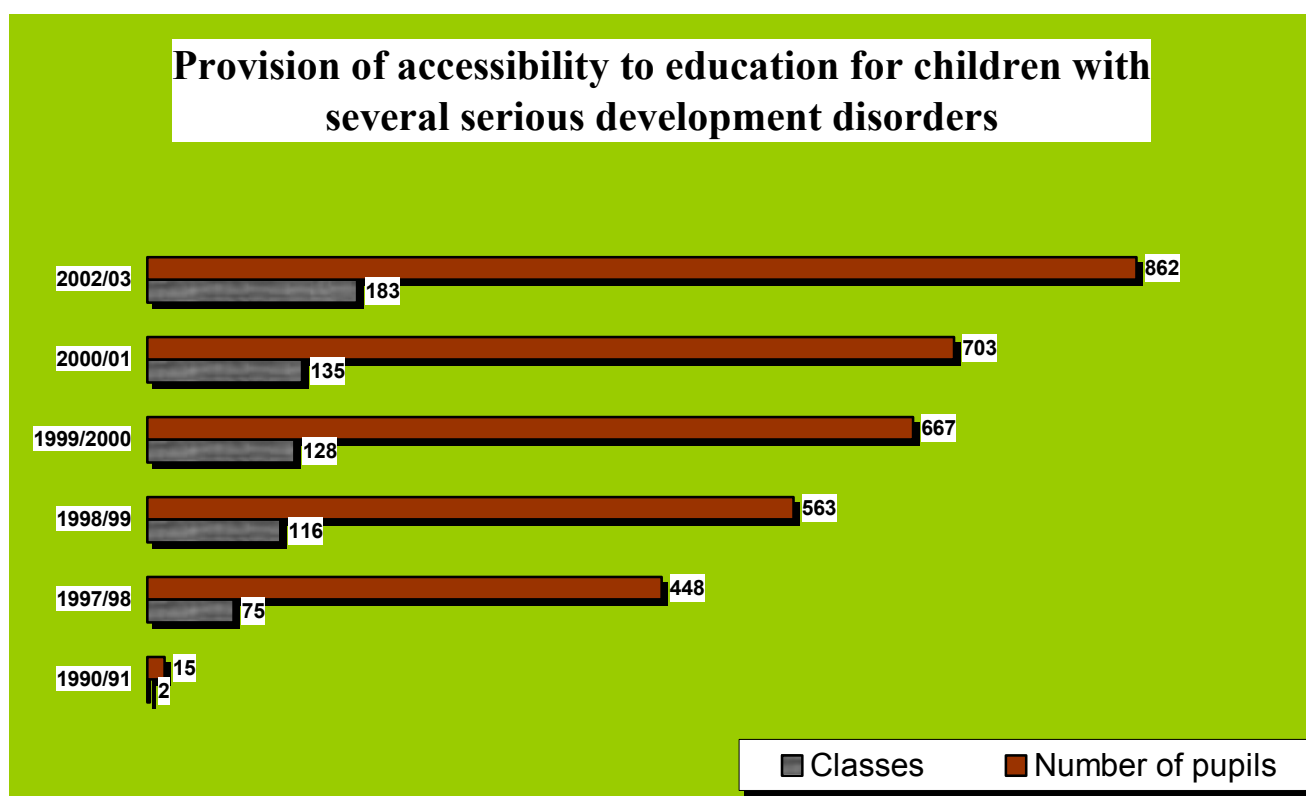
Special types of general education (special education programme, social and pedagogical correction education programmes).

In order to achieve that all children irrespective of the degree of a development disorder and health condition could acquire education in any education institution, special education institutions are being reorganized, special education classes are opened in general education institutions, and children with medium serious and serious mental retardation or with several serious development disorders are integrated into special and general education institutions. A special basic education programme for educatees integrated into general basic education and general secondary education institutions is implemented for educatees with impaired vision, for hearing-impaired educatees, for educatees with mental development disorders (with slight mental retardation – A and B levels, dg. F 70), for educatees with scoliosis, somatic diseases (for neurotic educatees with bronchial asthma and other nonspecific lung diseases; for educatees with indigestion and type 1 sugar diabetes), for educatees with language disorders, psycho-neurotic diseases, mental development delay and difficulties to learn. The main objectives of the programme are to provide possibilities for the acquisition of special basic education according to educatees' health condition and development level in order to ensure the maximum possible correction and compensation of a development disorder or disease.

Number of special education institutions and educatees

School year	2003/04	2002/03	2001/02	2000/01
Number of education institutions	63	63	63	63
Total number of educatees in grades 1 - 12	9,822	10,055	10,169	10,250
Number of educatees with special needs % from the total number of pupils	3.14	3.09	3.01	2.97

Total number of educatees with mental development disorders	5,574	5,670	5,860	5,860
The number of educatees with physical and mental development disorders integrated in general education institutions	1,785	1,663	1,287	1,223



Social correction education programmes refer to minors with socially deviant behaviour, they provide an opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for continuation of education and for independent life in society. The programmes are implemented in a social correction education institution or in a social correction class in a general education institution. Compared to the school year 2001/2002 the number of social correction classes in general education institutions has increased by nine, and the number of educatees in these classes has increased from 1,499 in the school year 2001/2002 to 1,537 in the school year 2002/2003. General basic education programmes are implemented also in penal institutions. In 2003 ten general basic education programmes were licensed for imprisoned minors.

Vocational education

The main components of the vocational education quality provision system are:

- compliance of curricula with requirements of the labour market. The compliance is characterized by the procedure of the development and approval of profession standards;
- compliance of education programmes with the education stage to be achieved and the professional qualification to be acquired. The compliance is controlled by accreditation of education programmes;

- quality of the learning process which is controlled by accreditation of education programmes;
- assessment quality of learning achievements (the acquired education, its quality) provided by participation of representatives of examination content and methodology, as well as professional organizations in examination commissions.

In order to provide accessibility of vocational education to inhabitants as close as possible to their place of residence, it is necessary to increase participation of local governments and local employers in the development of vocational education programmes and in the organization of learning practices. Involvement of social partners in the determination of state order in vocational education according to the territorial demand is significant. The creation of vocational education and employment regional tripartite cooperation councils has been started and is ongoing to enhance cooperation of the state, local governments and employers.

When planning accessibility of vocational education, educatees with unfinished basic education, finished basic education with insufficient assessment, graduates from special education institutions, the imprisoned in penal institutions have been included in priority target groups. Considerable attention has been paid to accessibility of vocational education to educatees with special needs. 295 children with disability group two or three acquire different types of professions in 34 vocational education institutions. The creation of separate learning groups for children with special needs has been started in vocational education institutions.

The total of 46,789 students learn in vocational education institutions. 18,525 students started their studies in 2003 (competition ratio was 1.3); 13,219 of them after grade 9 and 3,167 after graduating from grade 12.

50% of students have been enrolled in programmes of natural sciences, engineering and industry, manufacturing and processing, and architecture and building. 21% of the total number of students enrolled in 2003 have started acquisition of different kinds of professions in the field of services, but 19% - professions in the fields of humanities and social sciences.

The total number of graduates is 12.5 thousand: 44% - engineering and technology programmes; 23% - services; 20% - health and health protection - 7%, and agriculture - 3%.

In order to provide the administration of the unified system, the Government has made a decision on the transfer of state vocational secondary education institutions under supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science.

When improving the system of pedagogues' further education, attention was paid to conformity of further education and pedagogical studies programmes with requirements of curricula and pedagogical methodology in order to increase education quality.

One of the conditions for the provision of vocational education quality is strengthening of the social dialogue in vocational education according to requirements of the labour market. In this regard the vocational education and employment tripartite cooperation sub-council reviews policy documents, as well as considers and approves profession standards. 229 profession standards have been registered. In 2003 725 vocational education programmes were licensed and 350 – accredited.

Improvement of the centralized examination system is taking place to provide quality education: the regulatory enactments necessary for the implementation of the procedure of centralized professional qualification examinations have been developed; the content for centralized professional qualification examinations in 38 professions was developed in 2003. 5,866 students of vocational education institutions under supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science have been included in the centralized examination system; professional qualification has been acquired by 5,585, i.e. 95.2% of students. The graduates from vocational education institutions, who have registered as unemployed, constitute 0.6% of the total number of the unemployed.

In 2003 the number of education programmes for the unemployed and imprisoned in places of penal institutions, offered by vocational education institutions, increased. 1,383

registered unemployed persons acquired 34 further education programmes in vocational education institutions in 2003. 245 prisoners acquired eight vocational education programmes in penal institutions.

Higher education

As a result of the implementation of the project *Latvian Virtual University* and successful international cooperation in 2002 and 2003, preconditions for the use of e-technologies in learning forms and methods in Latvia's higher education institutions (an interactive multimedia CD-ROM and methodological material have been published) have been created.

One of the work directions in the field of higher education is the provision of its quality according to requirements of the European common higher education space. The main focus in this work is on the improvement of regulatory enactments. In 2004 the regulations providing the order for licencing curricula implemented by higher education institutions were improved. In order to provide the readiness of the higher education institutions to implement the study process in compliance with modern standards, and to provide students with opportunities to acquire competitive education, regulatory enactments regulating the material and technical provision necessary for higher education institutions to commence their operation were developed. Profession standards are developed and implemented every year to design quality curricula conforming with economic needs and employers' requirements. Standards of 42 professions, including standards of 20 professions for the acquisition of level 4 professional qualification (college education), were developed in higher education in 2003. Standards of 19 professions (11 of which have been developed in conformity with the priority directions, i.e. information technologies, telecommunication, engineering and natural sciences, set by the labour market and the Ministry of Education and Science) have been developed during the first half of 2004.

Another work direction is to strengthen the college education system in the country. 24 colleges, which implement first level higher professional education, have been established and registered in July 2004; 16 of these colleges have been established by the state. In order to provide the unity of the education system administration, to accelerate the development of colleges and to increase cost-effectiveness of education, colleges which previously were under supervision of the Ministries of Welfare, Health and Agriculture, were transferred under supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science as of 1 July 2004. This measure was carried out according to the Education Development Concept Paper 2002-2005.

A crediting policy of students is important with regard to accessibility of education. The provision of loans to students and control of these loans is performed in cooperation with the Study Fund.

The change of the funding principle of higher education institutions, i.e. from the historical to normative, has been fulfilled. The new principle allows to effectively provide a state policy in higher education – the state regulates the number of specialists it needs and the funding necessary for their preparation.

2. ASPECTS FOR THE PROVISION OF QUALITY EDUCATION AND ACCESSIBILITY OF EDUCATION

2.1 Gender equality aspect

In compliance with Section 3 of the Education Law, gender shall not be a restrictive factor for the acquisition of education. Changes in the education system to be implemented according to the Education Development Concept Paper 2002-2005 are implemented by taking into consideration the principle of accessibility, i.e. all members of society have equal opportunities to acquire education, also irrespective of gender.

The Government of Latvia, when approving the Concept Paper for the Implementation of Gender Equality on 16 October 2001, undertook to carry out the necessary measures to achieve gender mainstreaming in all spheres of life. The goal of the Concept Paper is to promote effective, integrated and coordinated tackling of gender equality issues at all levels. A draft Programme for the Implementation of Gender Equality 2005-2006 has been submitted to the Government in 2004. One of the sub-goals of this Programme is to build, in compliance with the gender equality principle, notions of women's and men's roles at work and at home at all levels of the education system, and to raise public awareness on gender equality issues. The Programme notes that in the field of education, on the one hand, it is necessary to approach the public at large in order to promote the change of the inculcated stereotypes. On the other hand, attention should be paid to teaching aids and education of pedagogues whose understanding of the significance of gender mainstreaming into education work should be strengthened. It is important that pedagogues deliberately and/or indeliberately did not cultivate gender stereotypes and that they showed children behavioural models in a comprehensive way, and that they allowed children themselves to choose their own behavioural models. In order to implement all that, the following tasks have been foreseen for the time period of 2005 to 2006:

- revise the content of education programmes and methodological materials, and include topics about the analysis of gender roles and stereotypes in them;
- include gender equality issues in further education programmes of teacher training and additionally provide the development of methodological materials for teachers;
- mainstream gender equality issues into curricula of social sciences and pedagogy;
- prepare informative materials on gender mainstreaming for pedagogues.

2.2 Aspect of social exclusion

Social exclusion is a many-sided phenomenon. It can be caused by economic, social, physical, education and cultural factors, therefore elimination of social exclusion is a complex and significant task.

On 25 September 2001 the Cabinet approved a Poverty Eradication Action Plan 2001-2003, in which education was determined as a priority course of action. The Plan envisaged to enhance young people's understanding of a market economy, and to prepare them for work in conditions of a market economy thus diminishing the risk of keeping them aloof from society and from getting into a poverty group.

A National Action Plan for Eradication of Poverty and Social Exclusion (2004-2006) was approved by the Government on 15 July 2004. The Action Plan points out the necessity to provide education and training according to the demand of the modern labour market, to promote the utilization of a targeted and integrated approach, to address problems with regard to pupils' dropouts and graduation from school with unsatisfactory marks or low results, to eliminate obstacles hindering full-fledged accessibility of education for children from poor families or for children with disabilities, as well as to strengthen access to lifelong learning for adults by developing programmes targeted at the most excluded groups of inhabitants.

Vocational education is one of the numerous preventive measures providing socially vulnerable inhabitants with knowledge and skills that would increase their opportunities to enter into the labour market. As mentioned above, children with unfinished basic education, children who have finished basic school with an insufficient assessment, graduates from special education institutions, and prisoners in penal institutions should be included in priority risk target groups. Opportunities of further education for these children are limited due to their weak preliminary knowledge, and they cannot find job because of lack of professional knowledge and skills (professional qualifications). The number of students with insufficient assessment enrolled in vocational education institutions is increasing every year. The cases of dropouts are also

increasing due to the low level of their preliminary knowledge. The aforementioned National Action Plan for Eradication of Poverty and Social Exclusion (2004- 2006) envisages the improvement of education programmes and training in initial vocational education in economically important sectors. As of 1 September 2004 students with 7-class education will have an opportunity to acquire a trade of locksmith of installation work, carpenter's assistant and dressmaker's/tailor's assistant within vocational basic school programmes with pedagogical correction. Students with 8-class education will have an opportunity to acquire a profession of locksmith, bricklayer, plasterer and lathe operator within vocational education programmes with pedagogical correction.

The task of **special education** in Latvia is to provide an opportunity for persons with special needs to acquire knowledge in comprehensive subjects, social life and work skills by emphasizing the practical orientation of education. The main task of Latvia's special education institutions is to create opportunities and conditions for a child with development disorders to acquire education according to his/her health condition, abilities and development level, prepare him/her for life and integration into society. The policy of special education is targeted at education of children at their place of residence or close to it.

The network of special education institutions in the country basically meets the demand. In 2002/2003 there were 63 comprehensive special education institutions attended by more than 10,055 pupils with various special needs. Opening of special education classes in comprehensive schools close to a child's place of residence and the creation of the network of inclusive schools is being promoted. Several special education institutions are gradually shaping into inclusive schools. The work of special education institutions-development centres in the promotion of inclusive education development should be evaluated positively. All special education institutions in Latvia work on the extension of their functions and on the promotion of cooperation with general and vocational education institutions attended by children with a development disorder. The policy of special education is targeted at the promotion of education of children with special needs at their place of residence or close to it.

Education of all children with special needs is financed from the state budget. The state guarantees all tax, transport and other allowances for persons with mental and physical development disorders in order to provide them with an opportunity to improve their health, acquire general and partly vocational education. Earmarked subsidies from the state budget are granted to local governments for maintaining children with mental and physical development disorders in sanatoriums-boarding schools and in special boarding schools, for remuneration of pedagogical staff, for payments of social tax and for compensation of transport costs to pupils of these schools.

A municipal pedagogical and medical commission operates in each district of Latvia and in six cities (Rīga, Daugavpils, Jūrmala, Liepāja, Rēzekne, Ventspils). The Ministry of Education and Science leads and organizes work of the State Pedagogical and Medical Commission and coordinates work of municipal pedagogical and medical commissions. The task of a commission is to achieve that special education institutions are attended only by those children whose health condition, abilities and development level are appropriate to acquire education only in these schools.

Curricula of special education are appropriately designed to allow persons, according to their health condition and abilities, to:

- acquire a general education curriculum with a special focus on practical utilization of knowledge;
- acquire a vocational education curriculum with focus on social life and work skills;
- prepare for life in society and for performing work suitable for one's health in order to fully or partially provide means of existence.

Pedagogues of special education build a respectful attitude of pupils to any job, enhance acquisition of useful work skills, according to children's abilities practically acquaint them with

specific trades, provide them with an opportunity to try out their abilities in these trades, orient them towards the choice of a concrete trade, promote the acquisition of the professions that would provide a pupil with an opportunity to find a job in the acquired profession.

Activities in the field of special education:

- in cooperation with the Nordic Council of Ministers three projects lead by Norway and Island have been implemented: *Education of Pedagogues in Latvia 2000-2003*, *Preparation of Children with Special Needs for Learning in a Special Education Institution and Their Integration into the Vocational Education System*, and *Provision of Special Needs for Children Living in the City of Rezekne and Rezekne District within the Borders of the Region*;
- the project *Campaign for Latvia* in cooperation with Austria.

Further development tendencies. Special education institutions have several advantages: concrete pedagogical experience in work with these children; adequate education programmes and plans; appropriate buildings; material and technical means; opportunities for the acquisition of work skills and vocational training; a link with enterprises regarding the provision of jobs; and opportunities for cooperation of pedagogues and medical professionals.

For several years almost all special education institutions cooperate with general education institutions and offer methodological and practical assistance to pedagogues, parents and children who are already integrated into general education institutions. In the future special education institutions, in parallel to their functions as counselling centres, will design education and professional training programmes, and participate in further education of pedagogues. The change of functions of special education institutions is closely connected with radical reorganization of the work of comprehensive schools. In 2004 70,000 Latvian lats (LVL) of the Ministry of Education and Science budget have been foreseen for special education institutions to enhance integration of children with special needs.

Education in penal institutions. Section 32, paragraph 4 of the General Education Law provides that penal institutions ensure opportunities for educatees up to the age of 18 to acquire basic education programmes. The Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with the Prison Administration, and utilizing foreign aid, organizes vocational education of educatees in penal institutions. After the acquisition of education programmes, prisoners have an opportunity to take qualification examinations and receive state recognized documents confirming a professional qualification. 304 prisoners in penal institutions were involved in the acquisition of general education in the school year 2002/2003, but in the school year 2003/2004 – 400 prisoners. As of 1 September 2003 all compulsory education age prisoners have been involved in general education activities.

2.3 Aspect of the provision of life skills and education

The state education standard is provided by the Cabinet regulations on the state standard of basic education and on the state standard of general secondary education.

Latvia's integration into the European Union sets special tasks also for the field of education. The Latvian education system should provide compliance of education with the increasing education quality requirements and with competition on an international scale. The living standard of Latvian society and the state development in the future depend on the effectiveness and quality of education, on the preparedness of society for professional work and free competition in the European common economic space.

The General Education Curricular Reform Plan, approved in 2001, provides:

- orientation to the implementation of coordinated curricula and integration of subjects within the frameworks of fields of education (languages, the individual and society, technologies and basic principles of sciences);

- transition from the acquisition of quality and formal information to skills to operate with information in many different ways;
- introduction of modern teaching methods and information technologies, and their use in the learning process.

The Plan also provides the following basic principles:

- creation of a common understanding of processes in the development of an individual, nature and society;
- balanced and scientifically explained curricula according to characteristics of pupils' age;
- introduction of modern and future-oriented topics in curricula;
- emphasizing cultural heritage, Christian and ethic values in curricula;
- emphasizing the notions and skills necessary for practical life.

The General Education Curricular Reform Plan provides that the introduction of improved curricula be started on 1 September 2004. In order to improve the quality of curricula, standards of 15 basic education subjects and one draft standard of natural sciences were prepared for approval in 2003. In 2003 the list of basic education compulsory subjects was supplemented by ethics and/or Christian education. As of the school year 2003/2004 a new basic education standard was introduced in informatics. The number of informatics lessons will be gradually increased; one informatics lesson will be introduced once a week in grades 5 to 7. It has been foreseen to use computers to a larger extent in the acquisition of other subjects in grades 8 and 9 (up to now there was one computer science lesson per week in grade 7).

On 18 July 2000 a national programme *Integration of Society in Latvia* was approved. The objectives set in the chapter *Education* of the programme are: to ensure that the Latvian language is learned sufficiently by all residents of Latvia, but especially so that the younger generation is able to use it freely as a means of communication; to establish the education system as a main instrument for development of an awareness of the values of civic society and tolerance; develop an awareness of the political culture of the younger generation; ensure the development and implementation of ethnic minority education programmes which promote preservation of ethnic minorities' identity and their integration into society of Latvia. The provision of education programmes for ethnic minorities both in pre-school and comprehensive education institutions is reflected on pages 9-12 of this Report; information about the education policy process for ethnic minorities is on page 13.

Currently a draft policy planning document National Programme for the Promotion of Tolerance (the Secretariat of the Minister for Special Assignments for Society Integration Affairs is responsible for the development of this document) has been prepared. Experience of international law experts and EU member states has been used in designing this document. The goal of the National Programme for the Promotion of Tolerance is the creation of tolerant society of Latvia, eradication of intolerance, and the development of Latvia's multicultural society in conditions of European integration and globalization. In order to enhance tolerance in the education process, it has been envisaged to carry out the following activities within the Programme:

- organize seminars and expert discussions on tolerance for authors of teaching aids; pay special attention to a continuous dialogue with teaching staff of humanities subjects (world history, history of Latvia, etc.);
- focus on tolerance problems in higher education institutions of Latvia and create an informative network of teaching staff, administration and students' self-governments of higher education institutions; organize conferences on tolerance for students;

- promote tolerance in Latvia's schools by organizing regular seminars and scientific conferences for teachers, pupils, and representatives of parent organizations in cities/towns of Latvia;
- design and distribute in schools of Latvia (in classes, libraries) a series of booklets about the importance of tolerance and manifestations of intolerance;
- prepare additional methodological materials and information from Latvian media on tolerance and cultural diversity for civil sciences teachers, stimulate discussions of pupils and teachers on tolerance in Latvia. Create a working group of pedagogical and human rights experts for the development of these materials;
- foresee supplementation of respective secondary education subject standards, programmes and curricula with detailed information on diversity of ethnic cultures and religions in Latvia;
- revise comprehensive school programmes and ensure that subjects concerning religion reflect diversity of religions in the world and in Latvia, and that no concrete religion or its trend is preferred to others.

2.4 Aspect of strengthening the role of pedagogues

In compliance with regulative enactments of the Republic of Latvia, a person who has higher pedagogical education or who is acquiring pedagogical education according to the requirements of professional qualifications provided by the Cabinet, is entitled to work as pedagogue. A task of the Ministry of Education and Science is the improvement of the further education system of pedagogues, since further education of pedagogues is a component of their continuous education. In order to provide pedagogues with quality professional training programmes, the harmonization procedure of further education programmes of pedagogues has been developed. According to the mentioned procedure, more than 300 further education programmes were submitted to the commission for harmonization by the end of 2002; 171 of them were harmonized. The target audience of these programmes is also pedagogues whose education and qualification comply with the requirements of regulatory enactments. Harmonization and implementation of further education programmes of pedagogues with irrelevant qualifications continued in 2003.

In 2003 priorities of further education of pedagogues were set in three main directions:

- the mentioned further education for pedagogues who implement programmes of basic education compulsory subjects and whose education does not comply with the requirements of regulatory enactments;
- enhancement of professional skills of pedagogues with regard to vital changes of content and emphasis in the new standards of basic education subjects; the development and implementation of subject programmes; and forecasting, promotion and assessment of pupils' achievements;
- enhancement of professional skills of pedagogues to provide quality education in schools with a language of an ethnic minority as a language of instruction, as well as in special education, pre-school education, interest-related education, vocational education, and higher education institutions.

In 2003 priority topics for the enhancement of pedagogues' professional skills were differentiated by suggesting a theme whose implementation and organization of further education activities should be undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Science, district municipalities or individual education institutions. In 2003 further education programmes for the enhancement of professional skills of pedagogues were implemented at state level. The programmes focused on the implementation of the curricular and pupils' achievements assessment reform system.

In 2002 3,500 pedagogues participated in further education programmes financed from the state budget, but in 2003 – 4,550 pedagogues.

In 2001 loan repayment was started for the students of pedagogical study programmes who, after graduating from the programmes, work at schools. During the time period of 2001 to 2003 state guaranteed loans were repaid for 323 pedagogues. Both in 2002 and 2003 international cooperation with regard to further education of pedagogues was organized.

2.5 Aspect of sustainable development of education

In 2002 in Sweden, ministers of education of the Baltic Sea states adopted the Hague Declaration and agreed to develop an Action Programme for Sustainable Development of Education in the 21st century. The Declaration stresses that sustainable development should be based on an integrated approach to economic, environmental and social processes, and should embrace democracy, gender equality and human rights issues. An action programme *Education for Sustainable Development in the Baltic Sea Region – Baltic 21E* was developed in cooperation with other Baltic Sea region countries. It was approved at a meeting of education ministers of the Baltic Sea countries in January 2002. The document has been translated into Latvian, and all education institutions have been invited to cooperate in order to implement the set objectives. Based on this document, issues of education for sustainable development are incorporated into all new standards of subjects to be implemented as of 2005.

An example of a successfully implemented activity in the school sector is the ecoschools programme of Latvia. The programme has six thematic chapters: waste, energy, transport, healthy lifestyles, school environment and surroundings, and water. The task of schools is to look for opportunities in each thematic group to practically address problems related to school environment or everyday life, or topical environmental issues in the concrete territory.

Conclusion

The National Report of Latvia on the development of education at the beginning of the 21st century contains information on the administration of the education system and on the sectoral policy on the whole, as well as on the provision of quality education in different aspects. Education quality, effectiveness and accessibility are the main goals of the education system development in Latvia.

The objective of any education system reform is to improve teaching and learning, and every system can provide numerous initiatives. Since education is not static and since it is impossible to establish one standard model of the education system, sectoral policymakers have to face new challenges.

On 1 May 2004 Latvia joined the European Union thus facing new challenges also with regard to the improvement of fields of policy under supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science to provide the development of society and economy.

We hope that the Report will be useful to introduce readers to the development of Latvia's education system from 2002 to 2004, and to compare approaches and experience of different countries in the provision of quality and accessible education.

**COMPARISON OF LATVIAN NATIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATION (2004)
WITH ISCED 97 LEVELS**

<u>Levels of education</u> Latvian National Classification of Education, 1999	Age groups (years)	<u>Levels of education</u> <u>International Standard</u> <u>Classification of</u> <u>Education, 1997 (ISCED)</u>
<i>Preschool education</i>	3-6	Pre-primary education (ISCED 0)
Basic education (<i>general basic education; education programmes for grades 1-6</i>)	7-12	Primary education or first stage of basic education (ISCED 1)
Basic education (<i>general basic education; education programmes for grades 7-9; basic vocational education programmes</i>)	13-15	Lower secondary education or second stage of basic education (ISCED 2)
Secondary education (<i>general secondary education; education programmes for grades 10-12; secondary vocational education programme; vocational education programmes</i>)	16-18	(Upper) secondary education (ISCED 3)
Secondary education (<i>general secondary education course after vocational education; vocational secondary education after vocational school and general secondary education; vocational education programmes after general secondary education</i>)	17-19	Post-secondary non- tertiary education (ISCED 4)
Higher education (<i>academic and higher professional education (incl. level 1 (college) education programmes</i>)	19-23	First stage of tertiary education (ISCED 5)
Higher education (<i>higher education programmes leading to doctor's degree</i>)	24-27	Second stage of tertiary education (ISCED 6)

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