

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

National report of Latvia

by

the Ministry of Education and Science

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Contents

Foreword	3
1. The education system facing the challenges of the twenty-first century: an overview	
1.1. Major reforms and innovations introduced in the education system.....	4
1.2. Main policies, achievements and lessons learned.....	16
1.3. The role of education system in combating poverty as well as other forms of social exclusion and cultural marginalization.....	23
2. Inclusive education: The way of the future	
2.1. Approaches, scope and content.....	25
2.2. Public policies.....	26
2.3. Systems, links and transitions.....	31
2.4. Learners and teachers.....	37
3. Main documentary references	42

Foreword

Modern world can be characterised as full of energy and fast developing. Policies and priorities are constantly changing, however, there are values that don't become obsolete with time and remain topical always. Education, certainly, is one of them.

Education is the most important precondition for existence and development of any society. It impacts life and development of both individuals and society as a whole. Education also belongs to basic human rights and is an important tool for reaching national goals like equality, gender equality, development of economics and civil society.

Nowadays education comprises several areas. The importance of lifelong learning has increased - both in Latvia and the European Union requirements for lifelong learning and improvement of professional qualifications have been put forward. Lifelong learning is considered one of the cornerstones of the EU Member States in the area of development of human resources. In the information based society people's knowledge and skills are essential for achieving a high level of welfare.

Education development policy in Latvia is developed in compliance to the guidelines set in both European and Latvian planning documents - the Lisbon education strategy, the Bologna process, UNESCO program "Education for all", the European Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, the European Commission Program "Education and Training 2010", Guidelines of sustainable development of Latvia, Latvia National Development Plan for 2007 - 2013, Guidelines of Education Development for 2007 - 2013, Guidelines on Lifelong Learning for 2007 - 2013, etc. In the course of development of the education development policy in Latvia the principles of cooperation, systematisation, continuity, and sustainability are followed.

The Ministry of Education and Science has developed a national report on the development of education in Latvia.

In the present Report the current situation in education in Latvia, its achievements, future plans and development directions, as well as the role of education in reducing the social exclusion have been analysed.

Special attention has been focused on inclusive education: its main goals, target groups, teachers' competences and education contents.

The National Report has been developed based upon the proposed guidelines and information from regulatory acts, policy planning documents, as well as EUROSTAT data and statistics data of the Ministry of Education and Science.

1. The education system facing the challenges of the twenty-first century: an overview

1.1. Major reforms and innovations introduced in the education system, in particular concerning:

(a) the organization, structure and management of the education system

The Ministry of Education and Science is the leading state administration institution in the field of education and science, as well as in the field of sports and state language policy. It is responsible for drafting the industry regulating legal acts and policy planning documents, supervision of the policy implementation in state administration institutions, agencies under supervision of the Ministry and companies, where the Ministry acts as a shareholder. The Ministry is directly subordinated to the Minister of Education and Science. The Ministry is the supreme authority for institutions under supervision of the Ministry.

The Ministry of Education and Science coordinates cooperation of the state educational institutions in the field of education with foreign countries and international organisations; it develops standard Regulations of educational establishments and education support institution; it maintains and supervises education support state institutions; approves classification of registers of educational establishments, education programs and teachers; submits proposals to the Cabinet of Ministers on establishment, reorganisation or liquidation of state educational establishments and education support institutions; approves Regulations of colleges, as well as state educational establishments and education support institutions under supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science in agreement with relevant municipalities; employs and dismisses managers of educational establishments (except universities) under supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science; proposes termination of employment of managers of municipal educational establishments and approves employment and dismissal of managers of municipal educational establishments.

The Ministry of Education and Science ensures development and implementation of a policy in the fields of education, science, sports and state language promoting sustainable growth of welfare of the citizens of Latvia as educated, healthy, physically and mentally developed personalities and integrity of the society of Latvia.

The education system of Latvia has recently improved and has become a part of the European education system. Its development is planned in compliance to the internationally set guidelines in the field of education. Ministers of Education of the European countries have agreed on three major

goals, which should be achieved until year 2010 for the benefit of citizens and the European Union as a whole:

1. improvement of the quality and efficiency of the EU education and training systems;
2. ensuring their accessibility for everybody;
3. opening of broader education and training possibilities.

In compliance to the stipulations of the Law on Education it is the goal of education on the national level to ensure a possibility to develop one's mental and physical potential for every resident of Latvia for the purpose of one's development as an independent and developed personality, a member of the democratic state of Latvia and its society.

(b) the aims and purposes of education at each level

The basic goal of pre-school education is to foster general development of children and their readiness to enter primary stage of the basic education.

The goal of basic education is to provide possibilities for mastering basic knowledge and skills required for an individual's life and life within society, for developing orientation of values.

Secondary education is a level of education, where comprehensive development of a person takes place, where targeted and deep development in the direction of the selected general or professional education or general and professional education is achieved, including preparation for studies at a university level, inclusion in the society life. On the level of secondary education there are two types of programs available: general secondary and vocational secondary education programs. General secondary education programs are with academic orientation and their basic task is to ensure preparation for further studies. Vocational secondary education programs focus more on providing professional qualification for either participation in the labour market and/or further education.

Post-secondary education is targeted exclusively at mastering professional knowledge and skills in compliance to the respective professional qualification level.

Higher education is the level of education, where following completion of secondary education development of an individual is provided on the basis of applied sciences or arts, or applied sciences and arts in the selected direction of academic or professional studies, or academic and professional studies. It ensures preparation for either scientific or professional work activities.

Postgraduate studies provide a possibility to improve one's knowledge and to develop new ideas in any of the offered directions of studies (social sciences, nature sciences, law, technical sciences, and arts).

(c) curricular policies, educational content and teaching and learning strategies

In compliance to the norms defined in the Lisbon Strategy on February 14, 2002 the European Commission and the European Council of the Ministers of Education approved the Action Program defining 13 primary goals, of which improvement of the quality and efficiency of the education system in the European Union, ensuring accessibility of general education and provision of an open education system are the most important for general education.

In the first Progress Report by the European Council and European Commission, adopted in 2004, on the implementation of the Action program on Education and Science 2010 it was emphasised that for the purpose of successful implementation of the Lisbon Strategy it was necessary to ensure immediate introduction of the reforms of the European education and training systems and lifelong learning strategies, development of basic skills promoting personal growth, social inclusion, civil activities and employment.

The Program for European Cooperation in the field of schools (Communication of the EC Commission to the European Parliament, European Council, European Committee of Economic and Social Affairs and Committee of Regions in Brussels, July 3, 2008) focuses on improvement of skills of modern society, which should become an objective of a training process. It was underlined that more flexible training environment was required to help pupils to master various skills, at the same time providing the basic skills.

UNESCO in the program "Education for All" sets goals of improving quality of education, improving contents and methods of education. The development of the program is directed towards implementation of the most modern information technologies and improvement of the quality of education. In compliance to the recommendations by the European Parliament and the European Council of December 18, 2006 (2006/962/EC) on basic skills in the lifelong learning the learning to learn has been mentioned among the most essential competencies. This competence is included among the most essential ones in the contents of both basic education and general secondary education.

The Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations in compliance to its competence fulfils its functions by organising development of the contents of basic education and general secondary education, its approbation and correction, by developing standards of study subjects of basic education and general secondary education and sample curricular of study subjects, by organising evaluation and approval of text books, by providing consultations and information to professional unions and associations of teachers, administrations of educational establishments, leaders of methodology unions of study subjects on the issues related to education contents, by organising and coordinating applied research programs on the issues of education contents and examination, etc.

The Guidelines of Education Development for years 2007 – 2013 contain several tasks which are under the competence of the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations. For the purpose of improving the quality of students' general knowledge, values education and basic skills the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations shall develop solutions for issues, like improvement of efficiency of the teaching process at the level of basic education, improvement of the contents of secondary education and assessment system of study achievements, provision of study and methodological materials required for high quality learning and implementation of the values education in educational establishments in cooperation with students' parents (family). In order to ensure that the offered education complies with the needs of economy development the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations by means of improving the education contents is working on solving issues related to improvement of career education for providing motivated and informed selection of further education for young people and development of their career, as well as issues related to improvement of the material base required for mastering practical skills required by the labour market and ensuring the training process. Also, for the purpose of broadening education possibilities for various groups of people the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations focuses its attention to the issue of inclusion of students with special needs in the education systems and to the aspects related to provision of education possibilities for minorities of Latvia. In order to strengthen ensuring of education quality and management capacity, the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations implements also improvement of teachers' education and the further learning system as one of directions of its operation.

The Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations emphasises development of individual abilities and general skills in the course of development of education contents for the basic education and general secondary education. Perfection and reinforcement of skills is continuously reflected in the following regulatory documents:

1) Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of December 19, 2006 No.1027 „Regulations on the national standard of basic education and standards of study subjects of basic education”;

2) Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of August 7, 2007 No. 544 „Regulations on the national standard of general secondary education and standards of study subjects of general secondary education”.

The reform of contents of basic education was completely implemented during the academic year 2007/2008. In compliance to the tasks set in the Guidelines of Education Development for years 2007 – 2013 it is planned to organise analysis of the reform of the contents of basic education and improvement of the contents based upon the obtained results of the analysis.

The mandatory content of general secondary education programs is successively based upon the mandatory contents of basic education and ensures possibilities to continue education in the selected field. The contents of general

secondary education is being improved by emphasising a student's general knowledge and skills, motivation for development of a further career, continuation of education, lifelong learning in the knowledge-oriented, democratic, multilingual and multicultural society in Europe and worldwide.

The draft Regulations of the Cabined of Ministers developed by the Ministry of Education and Science "Regulations on the national standard of general secondary education and standards of study subjects of general secondary education" provides for gradual introduction of modernised contents of education in general secondary education starting with the academic year 2008/ 2009 by ensuring successive continuation of the modified contents of basic education on the level of general secondary education. In order to ensure balanced contents of general secondary education changes in programs of general secondary education are envisaged starting with the academic year 2009/ 2010, thus increasing the number of education programs where study subjects of natural sciences – physics, chemistry and biology – are included as mandatory, and providing a possibility for all students to study subjects of art – literature, music and visual arts (upon the choice of an educational establishment).

In compliance to the Regulations on basic education and general secondary education the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations has published sample draft curricular of study subjects on its Internet site www.isec.gov.lv. They reveal a way towards achieving the targets set for particular study subjects and the general education goal, as well as emphasise mastering of various life skills and possibilities of practical application of knowledge in all the fields of education.

(d) the legal framework of education

At present the education structure of Latvia is as follows:

1. Pre-school education (ISCED level 0)

Pre-school education in Latvia, like the mandatory basic education, is provided by general educational establishments. Pre-school education programs are intended for 5 – 6 years old children. Preparation of five and six years old children for commencing their basic education has been defined as mandatory. Pre-school education for children with special needs is implemented at special pre-school education establishments.

2. Basic education (ISCED level 1 un 2)

A child normally starts basic education studies during a year when he/ she turns 7 years and these studies continue till the age of 16 years. In special cases studies of basic education may be continued until the age of 18 years. Basic education is mandatory in Latvia and the length of the program is 9 years. The mandatory contents of the basic education is set by the national standard of the basic education comprising also the primary school.

A complete program of basic education is implemented by schools called elementary school. Programs of first four grades may be implemented by a primary school. Also secondary schools may implement a complete basic education program. Basic education may be implemented also by educational establishments called a vocation school, special education establishment, evening school, boarding school, social or pedagogic correction educational establishment or class, or another education establishment if it implements a complete basic education program or a part of it.

Upon graduating from an elementary school students have to take centralised exams, the number and contents of which is defined by the Ministry of Education and Science. Students, who have obtained annual assessment in all the study subjects of the basic education program and assessment in centralised exams, receive a certificate on basic education and an achievements sheet.

The assessment on study subjects where there is a centralised exam is certified by a certificate of basic education.

The above referred documents entitle a person to continue studies in any secondary education program.

In cases when a student has not obtained an assessment in any of the study subjects or any of the state exams, a school report is issued to such a person. A school report entitles a student to continue education in vocational basic education or vocational education programs.

3. Secondary education (ISCED level 3)

There are two types of programs at the level of secondary education: general secondary education and vocational secondary education programs. General secondary education programs are academically oriented, their basic task is to prepare a student for further studies, and vocational secondary education programs are more oriented towards acquiring a professional qualification, i.e. entry to the labour market and/ or further education. Educational establishments are entitled to organise admission tests for admitting students to secondary education programs in compliance to the standards of the basic education, except study subjects where students have received a certificate of basic education.

The mandatory content of general secondary education programs is stipulated by the national standard of general secondary education. There are the following directions of general secondary education programs:

- Comprehensive direction set by a group of education programs with no emphasis on particular study subjects;
- Humanities and social sciences direction set by a group of education programs emphasising study subjects of humanities and social sciences;
- Mathematics, natural sciences and technology direction set by a group of education programs emphasising study subjects of mathematics, natural sciences and technology;

- Professional direction set by a group of education programs with special emphasis on the professional direction (for example, art, music, commerce, sports).

Upon completion of general secondary education programs it is a mandatory requirement to take centralised exams the content and procedure of which are developed by the Ministry of Education and Science and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. Graduates have to take 5 centralised exams. One of the study subjects for exams is set by the Ministry of Education and Science, a second one is set in compliance to the selected direction of the education program and a third one is defined by the school, two other study subjects are selected by a graduate.

Vocational secondary education has a task to provide possibilities for continuing education after graduating from an elementary school or secondary school to develop further the initial professional qualification, develop abilities for further professional education, and obtain rights to continue education at the level of higher education. Vocational education establishments offer education programs for all directions of economic activities.

Good communications skills, knowledge of mathematics, natural and social sciences, an ability to communicate in foreign languages, to use modern information technologies are among the requirements of today's labour market, therefore education programs include such study subjects and ensure acquiring such skills. Besides, during studies in vocational education programs attention is focused on development of initiative, understanding of environment protection and inter-cultural issues, self-development of young people to help them to achieve success in professional and personal life. A study process is organised in such a way that theory studies in the classroom are alternated with practical training in school workshops, laboratories and later also in companies and institutions.

Contents of the vocational secondary education is defined by the national standard of vocational secondary education and profession standard. Programs of vocational secondary education are developed and implemented in compliance to all the fields of national economy operating in Latvia.

Vocational secondary education can be acquired in vocational schools and vocational secondary schools.

The basic principles and procedure of assessment of the obtained education are defined by the education standard. During the period of acquiring the program the assessment takes place in theoretical and practical classes, workshops, laboratory assignments, project consultations, independent study works, exams or tests of the relevant study subjects based upon a system of grading of 10 points. Various methods are applied for assessment, including tests, project, independent and team work, practice reports.

4. Post-secondary education (ISCED level 4)

Also following completion of general secondary or vocation education it is possible to study at further education programs (their length is from 1 year to

3 years) or professional development programs (their minimum length amounts to 160 academic hours and it can be a part of qualification). In the international society this level of education is called post-secondary education, but not higher education. In Latvia this type of education is classified as the education of secondary level. The education process, assessment of study achievements is organised similarly to other secondary vocational education programs.

5. Higher education (ISCED level 5)

A certificate of general secondary education or diploma of vocational secondary education provide an entitlement to continue education at a higher education level where it is possible to acquire academic higher education programs or professional higher education programs.

Students are admitted to study programs on the basis of competition where the results of centralised examinations are taken into account. A university may also stipulate supplementary requirements in relation to the preceding education, special suitability and preparation (for example, in arts, music, sports). A university provides information on what secondary education programs correspond to the relevant studies program, what centralised examinations have to be taken and what supplementary requirements there are at least five months prior to starting admission. Selection procedures differ at different universities and in different programs. These procedures basically depend on the competition for admission (with both state funding and tuition fees). Selection procedures usually comprise one or several admission examinations (taking into account also the results of centralised examinations), as well as a competition based upon certificates/ diplomas where marks in particular study subjects may be taken into account. In some cases the selection procedure includes also an interview with representatives of the admission commission. As from year 2004 the admission examinations shall be replaced only by the results of centralised examinations.

Higher education may be acquired in a college or university.

Academic higher education programs provide possibilities to obtain Bachelor's academic degree in the relevant field of science (there are 8 groups of science branches – education science, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, engineering sciences, agriculture sciences, health sciences, environment sciences. Each group comprises several branches.).

Professional higher education programs provide possibilities to obtain professional qualification as well as professional Bachelor's degree. The professional higher education bachelor's degree is granted if the length of full time studies in a program is at least 4 years.

The Law on Universities and the Law on Vocational Education stipulates another division: professional higher education of two levels – first level professional higher or college education and second level professional higher or university education.

First level higher education programs offer to acquire a profession of a high level of complexity, however, neither the studies, nor further operations are

related to scientific research. Qualification of graduates complies with the 4th level of professional qualifications and permits them to compete on the labour market or to continue studies in the relevant university program for obtaining a higher professional qualification. The length of study programs of the fourth professional qualification level amounts to 2 – 3 years following completion of secondary education. These programs are considered to be “non-university type” higher education programs.

Qualification obtained from the second level professional higher education programs complies with the 5th professional qualifications level. Usually, along with the professional qualification professional Bachelor’s degree in the relevant field of economy is granted. These programs are considered to be “university type” higher education programs.

There are also the so called “short” second level professional study programs (1 – 2 years), where qualification is obtained based upon the preceding first level higher education or Bachelor’s academic degree.

The length of the fifth professional qualification level study programs generally amounts to at least 4 years following completion of secondary education and at least 2 years following completion of college education.

6. Post-graduate studies (ISCED level 6)

Master’s degree provides an entitlement to study in Doctor’s studies. The length of Doctor’s studies is 3 to 4 years. In Latvia the following Doctor’s studies are available: social sciences, natural sciences, law, technical sciences, and humanities.

(e) objectives and principal characteristics of current and forthcoming reforms

In the National Development Plan of Latvia for years 2007 – 2013 the following strategic goal has been defined – education and knowledge for development of the national economy and technology excellence, and the following priorities have been set:

- An educated and creative person;
- Technology excellence and flexibility of businesses;
- Development of science and research.

Achievement of the above goal and implementation of the above priorities will promote achievement of the national development target – improvement of the quality of life.

For the purpose of ensuring continued and balanced on all levels state development it is necessary to form educated and knowledgeable society by means of purposeful promotion of establishment of knowledge, its accumulation and use and distribution.

The education system has a special, place in this process. The state shall provide high quality education possibilities at all levels for every individual. Educated and knowledgeable society becomes a guarantee for the internal and external national security. Knowledge management, coordinated and purposeful creation, accumulation and application of knowledge as a complex process become the basis for economic and social life comprising all the state and society. The knowledge of the Latvian people is capable of fulfilling these functions, however, a coordinated action is required for its use and improvement. The uniform national education program is essential for the implementation of the model of the country development.

It was identified that improvements in the education system were required by means of reducing the dissymmetry in the field of knowledge among people: a guaranteed possibility for everybody to obtain secondary education and a guaranteed possibility for everybody to obtain high quality higher or vocational education, increased preparation of the top quality experts (with Master's and Doctor's degree), increase of mastering technical knowledge and natural sciences at all the levels of the education system.

In compliance to the above facts and the guidelines of the development of the society and education defined in the planning documents of Europe and Latvia the Guidelines of Development of Education for Years 2007 – 2013 were developed. They define the development goals of the education system for next seven years and directions of action for their implementation, as well as operational results and the indices of their achievement.

In the course of development of the Basic Guidelines of Development of Education for Years 2007 – 2013 the goals and recommendations of the Lisbon strategy are taken into account, including the guidelines of development of the European higher education space (Bologna process) and priorities in the field of higher education, as well as experience of the European countries and indication that now improvements should be achieved in all the areas: teachers' education, basic skills, investments efficiency, languages training, lifelong learning, flexibility of systems, ensuring of employment of graduates of universities, provision of transparency and establishment of grades and qualifications that are easily comparable with other countries to make the education system accessible to everybody by means of implementing the European guidelines "School for everybody", etc.

Goals of the Guidelines of Education Development for Years 2007 – 2013 are focused on both improvement of the existing systems and implementation of new priorities. The reforms planned in the basic guidelines present a logical continuation of the preceding reforms, thus ensuring continuity in the implementation of the education goals.

The directions of action defined in the Guidelines for Education Development for Years 2007 – 2013 include both formal and informal fields of education. Special attention is focused on the quality of pre-school and basic education, modernisation of vocational education, improvement of

competitiveness of higher education by emphasising the improvement of training and studies material base required for acquiring the skills required by the labour market. Efficient activities are planned for providing support to children with special needs, social exclusion risk groups, etc. For the purpose of implementing the above the capacity of education management has to be strengthened, including ensuring the quality of teachers' work, promotion of cooperation with parents and society.

In the course of implementation of the development model of Latvia an individual with possibilities to acquire education based upon lifelong learning practice is put into the centre. Within the context of lifelong learning several goals have been defined that are topical to all persons depending upon their age, place of residence, social origin, as well as comply with the interests of every individual's interests, abilities and needs of the economy development.

The basic goal of the Guidelines of Development of Education for Years 2007 – 2013 has been defined as provision of a possibility to obtain high quality education on the basis of the lifelong learning approach to every individual in accordance with individual interests, capacities and needs of the national economic development.

Also four objectives were defined:

1. to improve the quality of acquiring the general knowledge, values education and life skills by students;
2. to ensure the education offer compliant to the needs of the national economy;
3. to broaden education possibilities for various groups of people in all the regions;
4. to strengthen the capacity of ensuring education quality and management.

It is planned to achieve the following results in the course of implementation of the policy:

- Increased student's competence level in natural sciences, mathematics and reading skills.
- Reduced drop-out of students at the age of compulsory education.
- Improvement of the education quality ensures sustainable development of the national economy of Latvia and transition to science-intensive economy.
- Specialists with required qualifications are provided for various fields of national economy.
- Accessibility of lifelong learning is ensured in all the regions of Latvia for all the groups of people.
- Social exclusion of people with restricted possibilities is reduced.
- Competitiveness of the education of Latvia improves on the European and worldwide level.

Taking into account the increase of importance of the lifelong learning and based upon the assessment of the current situation in Latvia the Guidelines of Lifelong Learning for Years 2007 – 2013 were developed. This document was developed based on planning documents, like the Long-term Economic Strategy of Latvia, National Development Plan for Years 2007 – 2013, Long-term Concept Document “Growth model for Latvia: People first”, “State Cultural Policy Guidelines for Years 2006 - 2015. A National State”, The Latvian National Lisbon Program for Years 2005 - 2008, Guidelines for Education Development for Years 2007 - 2013”.

The long-term goal of the Guidelines for Lifelong Learning for Years 2007 – 2013 is to ensure lifelong learning opportunities according to people’s interests, abilities and needs of regional social economic development. The following objectives have been defined:

- To ensure accessibility of lifelong learning to all people irrespective of their age, gender, preceding education, place of residence, income level, ethnic origin or functional disabilities.
- To develop an offer of high quality education for adults providing sustainable competences for work, civil participation, individual growth and promoting development of competitive knowledge based economic and democratic society with a high level of skills in Latvia.
- To form coherent system of regulatory acts and efficient management of resources (including financial resources) in compliance to the principles of shared responsibility and industry policy for ensuring development of uniform lifelong learning system.

In the result it is planned to achieve the following situation in Latvia in year 2013:

- People perceive education as the main resource of their welfare and a possibility to study all stages of life starting from childhood till old age irrespective of their age, gender, preceding education, place of residence, income level, ethnic origin or functional disabilities;
- People have confidence, initiative, knowledge, creative approach and skills for participation in economy, social and civil life;
- In the result of people’s attitudes and education based on the lifelong learning approach well-arranged, beneficial social and cultural environment is developed;
- People’s knowledge, skills and abilities are formed and developed for improving efficiency of work and ensuring the social economic development of the state based upon highly qualified labour force;
- Information, consultations, education and support is freely accessible to people to be able to take most efficient decisions related to change and to feel secure in a process of change;
- Creation of new training approaches based upon Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) will continue, their scope will

broaden, their content will deepen, their accessibility and organisation will improve.

1.2. Main policies, achievements and lessons learned especially as regards:

(a) access to education

Section 3 of the Law on Education of the Republic of Latvia stipulates that every citizen of the Republic of Latvia and every citizen entitled to receive a non-citizen passport issued by the Republic of Latvia or holding a permanent residence permit, as well as citizens of Member States of the European Union holding terminated residence permits and their children have equal rights to acquire education irrespective of their material and social position, race, nationality, gender, religious or political beliefs, health status, occupation or place of residence.

Section 4 of the Law on Education stipulates that preparation of five and six years old children for starting basic education and acquiring of basic education or continuation of basic education until the age of 18 years is mandatory.

Section 7 of the Law on Education defined target groups of education comprising children of pre-school age, children and young people of mandatory education, as well as persons with special needs, young people and adults.

One of the goals of the Guidelines of Education Development for Years 2007 – 2013 is to broaden education possibilities for various groups of people in all the regions, including inclusion of students with special needs in the education system, provision of support to students from social risk groups, development of adult and non-formal education with professional orientation and ensuring education possibilities for minorities in Latvia. For the purpose of achieving the above goal the accessibility of education for persons with special needs, young people with poor preceding knowledge and imprisoned persons has been improved.

In the field of professional education in every planning region, totally in 8 vocational education establishments there are professional assessment support centers of the Social Integration State Agency, which implement involvement of persons with disabilities in the process of receiving professional rehabilitation services, assessment of professional suitability in various fields and acquiring of education, including distance learning, and promoting balanced development of the whole territory of the state and its individual regions, provision of equal employment and environment conditions for persons facing a risk of social exclusion. Totally, persons with disabilities study in 27 vocational education establishments.

Currently in Latvia in five vocational education institutions there is infrastructure suitable for persons with restricted movements. During the time period until year 2013 the number of suitable education establishments will be increased up to 10 with the help of the structural funds of the European Union.

The process of improving accessibility of vocational education for young persons with poor preceding knowledge is continued. Young people with incomplete basic education (totally 1259 persons) study in 22 vocational education establishments. The number of students in a group has been reduced, there are on average 17 students per group.

Four vocational education establishments have concluded cooperation contracts with eight prisons on provision of training for imprisoned persons (approximately 400 imprisoned persons per year are trained).

With the support of the structural funds of the European Union it is planned to set up training workshops in eight prisons and to improve material and technical provisions of vocational education programs.

It is planned to invest totally 16 MEUR of ESF resources until year 2013 for providing accessibility to education for young persons facing a risk of social exclusion and development of inclusive education. 10 MEUR of the above amount will be used for implementation of support activities for the purpose of reducing the risk of social exclusion of young people and integration of young people with functional disabilities in the education system.

In the field of general education students with special education needs may obtain education in special education establishments, special grades of general education of schools or general grades of general education schools. The inclusive education is among the priorities of the education policy, still now the number of students with special needs studying in an inclusive education establishment is quite small: during academic year 2007/ 2008 1045 students studied at special grades of general education schools and 625 students with special needs were integrated in general education grades of general education schools.

Students with special needs can be conditionally split into 2 groups – there are students who study in the general education program and there are students who have to acquire special education programs. Special education programs can also be split in two groups – the first group is the one where students acquire basic education and secondary education standards and the second group is the one in which students acquire easier and adopted contents of education.

For students, who acquire a special education program the study process is adapted to their individual needs, individual study plans are developed, thus creating beneficial conditions for comprehensive development of a child, for acquiring knowledge and skills. For the purpose of providing support to children with special needs the State Special Education Centre was established on April 2, 2007. The Centre offers methodological rules for the work with individual education plans and sample special education plans, ensures operation of the

State Pedagogic Medical Commission, as well as collects all the information in the area of special education required for the analysis of the education program and its development. In academic year 2007/ 2008 support measures for students with special needs in the state exams have been developed and teachers can use them also on daily basis in the learning process. Also methodological recommendations for the development of individual study plans have been developed.

In the field of higher education there is no age limit for students, they can select study programs in compliance to their interests and needs.

The Law on Universities stipulates that a natural person can utilise his/her rights to study in state funded programs for obtaining an academic degree (Bachelor, Master), scientific degree (Doctor) or higher professional qualification several times.

The draft law “On Higher Education” developed by the Ministry of Education and Science stipulates that higher education institutions shall promote accessibility of lifelong learning by means of implementing a flexible offer of further education. Besides the above, for the purpose of structuring higher education programs, their transparency, establishment of flexible study routes and professional orientation of students it is possible to unite studies modules and ensure that they are planned in a way suitable for lifelong learning.

(b) early childhood intervention (as a means to support children’s development, transition to primary education and learning)

Provision of high quality pre-school education, which helps to prepare students for acquiring further education is one of the directions of the development of the Latvian education system. It includes the following tasks:

- Performance of a research on preparation of five and six years old children for acquiring basic education;
- Ensuring of development of the content and methodology of pre-school education for preparation five and six years old children for school in compliance to the contents of the education of Grade 1;
- Ensuring increase of wages for teachers of pre-school education establishments;
- Increasing the number of education establishments and groups implementing pre-school education programs and funded by municipalities (including special pre-school education programs).

The number of students, who are ready for successful acquiring of basic education programs following the completion of pre-school education, is one of the major indices of quality of pre-school education. According to the statistics data in Latvia 95% of children successfully acquire the content of education of Grade 1 after completion of pre-school education.

(c) learning outcomes, particularly concerning the efforts to improve learning achievement and reduce inequalities

In order to assess the results of studies, including improvement of learning achievements and reduction of inequalities, a stable system of assessment is required. In the course of development of the Guidelines of Education Development a necessity to improve the education quality assessment system was mentioned.

The following tasks were set for the improvement of the assessment system of study achievements:

- To improve the content of general secondary education focusing special attention to the necessity to master practical application of theoretical knowledge.
- To balance the number of centralised exams in natural sciences and humanities.
- To broaden the possibilities for acquiring secondary education.
- To improve the support system of methodological work in regions, including formation of methodological centers at universities.
- To develop methodologies for high quality teaching of study subjects in compliance to the modernised education contents.
- To develop the data bank of tasks of state exams.
- To perform researches, to develop and appraise quality monitoring systems for acquiring general knowledge and skills and their assessment.
- To ensure acquiring of study subjects of arts in the general secondary education programs.
- To improve motivation for learning several languages by means of supporting mobility of students of school age by participation in the European Union and international students' exchange programs for studies, practice and voluntary work.

In the course of fulfillment of the above tasks the sample curricula of study subjects of the general secondary education and sample standards of study subjects are being developed, state examinations are prepared, establishment of methodology centers at universities is ensured, methodologies for high quality learning of natural sciences and technologies are developed in compliance to the content of the general secondary education, rooms of natural sciences at secondary schools are renovated, measures are implemented for promotion of studies of arts in the general secondary education programs.

The following tasks were defined for the improvement of the education quality assessment system:

- To introduce a uniform general education quality assessment system in the country in compliance to the methodology developed within the framework of the project on Education system development.

- To perform analysis of the process of the external analysis of education establishments and to develop proposals on elaboration of the education policy.
- To improve the system of ensuring quality of the education operations, including certification of education establishments and programs and organisation of centralised professional qualification examinations.
- To strengthen the institutional model of vocational education for the assessment of the education contents, education process and education quality.
- To assess the compliance of the quality assurance system of higher education to the European unified standards and guidelines adopted in year 2005 and to perform required corrections.
- To promote formation of internal quality assurance mechanisms in higher education establishments achieving the situation when the external assessment is based upon internal quality assurance mechanisms of higher education establishments.
- To commence periodic assessment of the quality assessment system of higher education.
- To develop the system of quality assurance and assessment of further education.
- To improve the quality assessment system of pre-school education establishments and special education establishments.
- To establish quality assessment system of interests education.

In the result of improvement of the assessment system the information of trends of the situation development and changes will be detailed and used for the development of the education policy.

(d) pre-service teacher training, recruitment, deployment, working conditions and in-service professional development

During last two years the system of further education of teachers was improved and in-service professional development of 36 hours funded by the state budget was provided for teachers. It was done in compliance to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of August 28, 2007 No. 570 „On the procedure of professional improvement of general education teachers and interest education teachers”.

A wide range of programs of further education is offered to teachers. It is based on the results of research of further education needs of teachers and the priorities of the state education policy. Teachers in compliance to their individual further education needs and in consultation with administration of the education establishment have a possibility to select 12 hours and 24 hours

course program for the improvement of the following competences: general competences, specific competences related to the relevant field of education, school management and class management competences. New further education programs on the issues of teachers' cooperation and values education, understanding of obligations, rights and responsibility in a teaching process, solution of conflicts at school, leadership in a democratic school, preparation of mentors of schools, etc. In year 2008 it was the first time when further education courses for teachers for self-improvement of own personality were offered – *Teachers' "burn-out" syndrome and ways to overcome it* and *Formation of positive thinking*. Both above courses are highly demanded. With the support of Goethe Institute in Riga, Hueber publishing house and other foreign institutions in year 2008 professional improvement courses with participation of German lecturers for teachers of German in a form of a summer camp were organised for the second time.

In cooperation with regional education boards groups of courses are selected in such a way that teachers have a possibility to attend courses as close as possible to the place of their employment/ residence. In cooperation with implementers of further education programs and education boards studies of satisfaction of teachers with the quality of courses are organised. According to random selection in February of 2008 teachers of 4 districts and towns were surveyed on the application of ideas obtained in courses of 2007 in the education process. For further improvement of the quality of courses assessment of further education programs for teachers and their implementation is performed, implementers of further education programs are notified on the results.

According to the results of survey of teachers on the quality of courses of year 2007 organised by the Centre of Curriculum Development and Examinations in February of 2008 teachers are generally satisfied with the quality of courses: 3220 teachers (48.18%) of the surveyed 6683 teachers have assessed the courses as "very good", 2601 teachers (38.92%) have assessed them as "good", 851 teachers (12.73%) have assessed them as "sufficient" and 11 teachers (0.16%) have assessed them as "insufficient".

The content of the courses was assessed as fully compliant to the teachers' needs by 4017 teachers (60.11%) of 6984 surveyed teachers, as compliant by 2439 teachers (36.50%), as partially compliant by 493 teachers (7.38%) and as non-compliant by 35 teachers (0.52%).

Universities have very actively involved in implementation of further education programs for teachers, non-governmental organisations and professional associations of teachers are less active. It is necessary to look for possibilities to attract also these institutions in ensuring professional development of teachers. It is also necessary to ensure regular further education of professors of universities involved in professional development of teachers on the work methods with adult audience and application of interactive teaching methods in classes.

There is a data base on further education programs for teachers offered by various institutions outside state budget means. The submitted programs and their content is assessed and programs are approved by the Commission of improvement of teachers' further education programs of the Ministry of Education and Science. Information about such programs is accessible to all the teachers on the Internet site of the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations and is updated on regular basis.

For the purpose of preparing teachers to work with children with different needs, including special needs, topical needs of further education of teachers are identified and compiled. Taking into account teachers' needs and based upon education policy documents further education programs for various target audiences of teachers are developed.

Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of October 18, 2005 No. 773 „The procedure of acquiring education of vocational education teachers and professional development” define the procedure how education is acquired by vocational education teachers, as well as the procedure of their professional development.

The Regulations stipulate that the pedagogic education of a teacher shall be certified by a diploma of graduation from a program of higher pedagogic education (academic or professional) or a certificate issued on completion of the program of pedagogic basic education of a vocational education teacher as set by the Cabinet of Ministers. For the purpose of receiving the above certificate it is possible to master the required knowledge also in a non-formal way.

In compliance to the above Regulations a teacher shall participate in further education programs or courses, seminars, projects or other pedagogic training events of at least 36 contact lessons arranged by an employer at least once during a period of three years.

In compliance to the Law on Education each teacher is entitled to use 30 calendar days during a period of three years for the purpose of his/ her education or professional development and his/ her salary at the education establishment where he/ she works shall be maintained for this period of time. Professional development of teachers is planned by the manager of an education establishment.

In compliance to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of May 25, 2004 No. 503 „Regulations of vocational education administration” the Professional Education Administration, which is an institution under supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science, organises further education and professional development of vocational education teachers.

For the purpose of management and improvement of further education of teachers the General Education Quality Assessment State Agency (hereinafter VIKNVA) during the time period from July 28, 2006 until August 20, 2008 implemented the project “Establishment of methodological networks of further education of teachers” of the national program of the European Union structural funds “Establishment of the network of teachers' education”.

The general goal of the project is to improve the education quality by means of establishing preconditions for formation of methodological network of further education of teachers to ensure purposeful and coordinated professional development compliant to the education system and each teacher's needs. The direct goal of the project is to establish methodological, human resources and institutional base for further education of teachers.

For the purpose of achieving the project goals the work is organised under four activities:

1. Establishment of the modules system of the contents of further education.
2. Development of the criteria and methodology of assessment of contents of further education of teachers.
3. Establishment of the system of supervision and organisation of the content of further education of teachers.
4. Development of recommendations for the model of development of teachers' professional career in compliance to the established system of further education of teachers.

Within the project framework the current situation in Latvia and other European Union countries was studied; the system of modules of the content of further education, criteria and methodology of assessment of content of further education of teachers, the content organisation and supervision system and recommendations for the model of teachers' professional career development were elaborated; their approbation, expert assessment and improvement has been performed; informative and training seminars and public discussion were organised.

1.3. The role of education system in combating poverty as well as other forms of social exclusion and cultural marginalization

Education is an essential and indispensable basis for development of an individual's life impacting an individual's future possibilities. Education provides a person an opportunity to acquire not only basic skills, but also to recognise oneself as a member of society, to form relations with others.

Education permits people from socially excluded groups to change their status, improves their self-assessment and provides a hope for better future for both themselves and their children.

Educated people are required for the national development. At present we live in a society which is based upon information and knowledge and which requires higher education level and qualifications than ever before. The national intellectual gross product forms an increasingly higher proportion of the national gross product.

Provision of education opens a way for everybody towards self-expression on the labour market and material welfare preventing social exclusion and cultural marginality.

2. Inclusive education: The way of the future

2.1. Approaches, scope and content:

(a) the conceptualization of inclusive education, the current vision of inclusive education, specific legal or regulatory frameworks referring to inclusive education issues

The Salamanca Statement on inclusive education (1994) stipulates that all children have fundamental rights to education and they have to be provided possibilities to achieve the relevant education level. The unique characteristics, interests, possibilities and needs of every child were also underlined and a necessity to take this diversity into account in the formation of education programs was emphasised.

In Latvia there are no obstacles for acquiring education, however, there are areas where special support and attention is required to ensure implementation of the principles of exclusive education. In the course of promotion of inclusive education it is also important to see the differences and to understand what should be done to ensure that people don't feel excluded despite the factors affecting their lives.

The principles of inclusive education were taken into account in the Guidelines of Education Development for Years 2007 – 2013 by defining a necessity to broaden education possibilities for various groups of people in all the regions as one of the goals comprising also inclusion of students with special needs in the education system, supporting provisions for students from social risk groups, broadening of the offer of interests education, development of professionally oriented adult and non-formal education and provision of education possibilities for minorities of Latvia.

The laws also reflect conditions promoting inclusive education. For example, Paragraph 24 of Section 1 of the Law on Education stipulates that for persons with special needs and health problems either special education is implemented or general and vocational education is adapted for the needs of such persons. In Latvia there is no uniform definition of special needs. However, it could be considered that non-compliance to the standards of development at relevant age (intellectual, physical, abilities and emotional development) that prevent a child to acquire the general education program present special educational needs.

Section 42 of the Law on Education stipulates that a person with special needs may acquire special education at an educational establishment if possibilities to acquire education compliant to the health status and character of development disabilities are ensured in the relevant education establishment. Section 49 of the Law on General Education stipulates that special education shall create possibilities and conditions for students with special needs to acquire education compliant to their health status, abilities and level of

development at any education establishment, at the same time ensuring a student's pedagogic, psychological and medical correction, preparation for work and life in society. Special education programs are implemented taking into account a student's health status. Special education programs provide general education focused on practical skills and professional skills for students with mental and physical disabilities and special needs.

(b) the most important challenges for ensuring educational inclusion

In order to promote development of inclusive education in Latvia the following major problems to be solved have been identified:

- Formation of the public understanding on the issues of inclusive education and encouragement of public tolerance;
- Provision of education programs;
- Cooperation and joint responsibility of institutions involved in development of inclusive education (state, municipalities, NGO);
- Accessibility of support personnel (special teachers, psychologists, social teachers) at schools;
- Implementation of a study process focused on an individual's abilities:
 - Timely identification of a child's educational problems (in particular, during the pre-school period);
 - Assessment system promoting adequate assessment of children with various learning difficulties;
 - Provision of various modern materials and study aids compliant to children's needs.

2.2. Public policies:

(a) current dimensions of the phenomenon of exclusion from and within education, indicators and data used to inform inclusive education policies

Exclusion is impacted by several factors. The ones most often referred to worldwide include disabilities, belonging to an ethnic minority, gender, poverty, religion, etc. The above aspects may impact also a person's place in the education system.

Within the directions of education development policy there are indices certifying the development of inclusive education. There are quite a few of them and the following ones can be mentioned as examples:

- Establishment of the Centre of Special Education – the State Special Education Centre was established and started its operations as from April 2, 2007.
- Students with special needs, who have been integrated in general education establishments – totally 2513 students with special needs have been integrated in general education establishments.
- Number of courses of further education for teachers for the work with students with special needs – in all the regions of Latvia 4 courses of further education with 18 hours and 36 hours programs took place for teachers for the work with students with special needs.
- Number of vocational education programs offered at special education establishments, including the programs focused on home economics subjects – in year 2007 twelve special education establishments have licensed 17 vocational basic education programs.
- Number of special education establishments where study rooms and school premises have been renovated and the material base of studies has been improved – in year 2007 funding has been allocated for renovation works and improvement of energy efficiency at 4 special education establishments.
- Number of education programs implemented in social correction education establishments – 17 education programs were implemented in year 2007.
- Number of education establishments where teaching correction programs are implemented – during the planning period of 2004 – 2006 within the framework of the ESF 3.3.6.1. activity „Development and implementation of teaching correction programs” support is provided to totally 6 vocational education establishments, 10 general education establishments and 4 higher education establishments that participate in 28 projects.
- The number of developed general education and vocational education programs for implementation at prisons – 5 vocational education programs have been licensed for implementation at prisons during year 2007.
- The number of teachers trained to work with various target audiences – further education courses (36 hours) have been provided for teachers for the work with students with special needs and for the work in teaching correction classes (20 groups, 500 teachers). Further education courses on methods of work with various target audiences have been provided for 20 vocational education teachers.
- Measures for the establishment of inclusive education and the support system for young people facing a risk of social exclusion – during the planning period of year 2004 – 2006 within the framework of the ESF 3.3.7. activity „Integration of young people with special needs in the education system” totally 36 projects have been implemented.

- The number of students involved in programs of interests education – in year 2007 their number reached approximately 255 000.
- The number of elaborated methodological materials in the field of interests education and education – in year 2007 totally 19 methodological materials in the field of interests education and education work have been elaborated.
- The number of carried out researches on the accessibility and offer of interests education programs – the research “Accessibility of interests education and offer in Latvia” has been carried out.
- The number of trained teachers in methodology courses in pre-school education for work with children coming from minorities – methodology courses (4 groups) have been provided for teachers of primary schools and pre-schools.
- Implemented projects for broadening the environment and use of the Latvian language – further education courses for teachers and 3 x 3 camps are organised on regular basis to improve the knowledge of the official language for parents of minorities schools and to encourage cooperation between teachers, students and parents.
- The published teaching aids for studying the Latvian language for students and adults – modern LAT2 study aids sets and methodology series have been approved and published for both schools and courses for adults.

These indices are analysed by the Ministry of Education and Science in assessing the education development trends.

(b) groups considered to be most vulnerable to various forms of exclusion from and within education, the excluded groups that current policies have yet to take into account

In relation to the basic goal defined in the Guideline on Development of Education for years 2007 – 2013 in the education system of Latvia support is provided to the groups of people, who need special support for implementation of their education potential because of insufficient level of acquiring knowledge due to personal, social, cultural or economic conditions. Such groups include people with special needs, with low income, imprisoned persons.

Schools facing most risk of exclusion in the education system consist of students coming from disadvantageous and poor families, students with special needs and learning difficulties. Children of residents of third countries present a new group facing social exclusion. The data of the State Statistics Bureau indicate that as on April 1, 2007 there were 3340 residents of third countries aged between 0 and 18 years in Latvia. The state statistics reports compiled by

the Ministry of Education and Science on academic year 2006/ 2007 indicate that 535 students from migrants' families studied in schools of Latvia.

Persons released from prisons present a serious challenge for the state in the field of both education and social inclusion. Persons released from prisons are a group subject to social exclusion, their possibilities to participate in the social life and development of the potential of the national economy are minimal. The main risk factors of social exclusion faced by former prisoners are the low education level and insufficient social skills . The above factors are even magnified by insufficiency of education measures in prisons.

The Guidelines on Education of Imprisoned Persons for Years 2006 – 2010 (approved by the Ordinance of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 443 of June 15, 2006) have been developed for the purpose of achieving integration of the education of imprisoned persons in the national education system, ensuring the rights of imprisoned persons to obtained education and promoting inclusion of imprisoned persons in the society after their release.

In the National Development Plan for Years 2007 – 2013 the social exclusion risk groups have been supplemented by prisoners due to their specific situation and special needs, because problems (including education), which are not solved on timely basis in prison, quite often cannot be solved after a person is released from prison, or a lot more resources have to be invested in solving them.

(c) inclusive education issues relevant for educational policies, current educational reforms addressing inclusive education

The following tasks are being fulfilled by ensuring education possibilities for all groups of people:

1. Inclusion of students with special needs in the education system – to establish a support system for inclusion of students with special needs in general education establishments by means of establishing the State Special Education Centre for provision of consultations and methodological work; to support establishment of regional special education centers and their operations and strengthening of competence and status of pedagogic medical commissions; to provide compliant training programs, study aids and devices for their application for students with special needs; to provide support for teachers working with children with special needs; to increase the role of the social teacher at education establishments; to promote acquiring of work and everyday skills by young persons with special needs; to improve the study environment at special education establishments; to adapt general education establishments for students with physical disabilities.

2. Provision of support for students from social risk groups – to implement teaching correction measures for young people from social risk

groups, including students at boarding schools; to improve the social conditions of students of vocational education establishments by increasing scholarships up to 20 lats per month on average; to provide support measures for young people from poor families and social risk groups by covering costs of services of hostels; to improve education possibilities at prisons; to provide education possibilities for children of refugees and asylum seekers and guest workers at the age of mandatory education; to improve teaching competences for the work with various target audiences; to increase the role of the support personnel in training and education process; to ensure performance of prevention measures directed at reducing the risk of social exclusion and developing inclusive education.

3. Broadening of the offer of interests education – to ensure improvement of the contents of interests education programs, implementation of new and diversified programs; to increase the role of the interests education for preserving, developing and accessibility of the cultural historical heritage of Latvia and strengthening of the national identity; to establish a uniform data base on the offer of interests education; to carry out a research of the interests education field from the aspects of offer and demand; to improve the capacity of interests education in the sustainable development.

4. Development of professionally oriented adult education and non-formal education – to develop the lifelong learning strategy and to ensure its introduction on regional level by providing efficient funding mechanisms; to broaden the offer of second chance education for young people and adults; to broaden the offer of professionally oriented adult education programs, including non-formal education programs; to develop methodology for assessment and recognition of professional skills obtained in a non-formal way; to improve the public understanding of non-formal education, knowledge and skills that it develops, value of non-formal education; universities, their subsidiaries and adult education establishments have to broaden their offer of further education in relation to the development directions of regions; universities have to develop study programs for training teachers of adult education; to develop and provide distance learning study aids for acquiring university programs; to increase the number of Internet access points, thus, ensuring accessibility of information and communication technologies for persons with special needs;

5. Provision of education possibilities for minorities of Latvia – to develop methodology of mastering the Latvian language as the official language in pre-school education for minorities; to assess the changes implemented during academic year 2004/ 2005 in the general secondary education programs for minorities; to improve parents' knowledge of the Latvian language, to encourage their cooperation with education establishments where their children study; to improve the diversity of text books used for studying the Latvian language as the national language; to increase the support for acquiring the knowledge of the Latvian language, history and culture in the Latvian diaspora; to provide methodological support for the process of studying minority

languages and literature at education establishments implementing minority education programs; to increase the education level of Roma children by providing compliant training programs and methodology and to broaden possibilities for Roma people to involve in the education process after exceeding the age of mandatory education; to ensure admission of citizens of third countries to schools in Latvia for the purpose of students' exchange, practice, voluntary work in compliance to the EU Council Directive 2004/114/EC.

2.3. Systems, links and transitions:

(a) the main barriers to inclusive education

Quality of the education system as such and focus on inclusion of target groups are the main preconditions for inclusive education.

Infrastructure is another precondition for provision of inclusive education. For example, students with physical disabilities require that school premises are suitable for them – there is special equipment for stairs, lifts, and adapted lavatories.

Another problem presenting an obstacle for implementation of inclusive education is readiness of teachers for this work. It should also be mentioned that sometimes teachers' attitude towards students (for example, students with special needs) is not positive and it, certainly, affects the results of the education process.

Insufficient amount of support personnel at school, as well as insufficient cooperation between municipal services, education establishments and health care institutions are other obstacles for inclusive education.

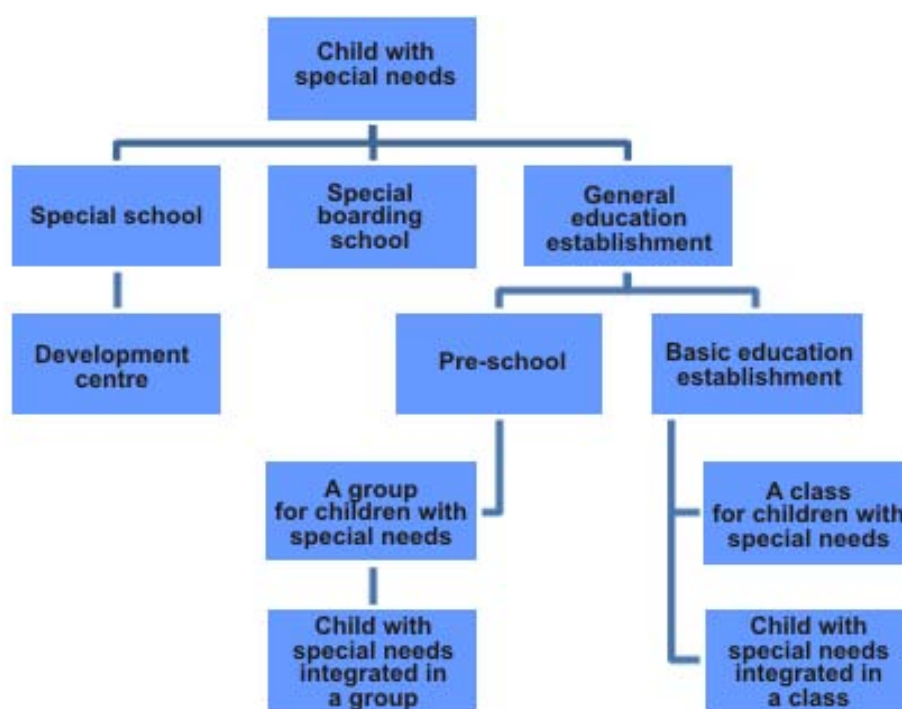
However, the most serious obstacle for inclusion is the one depending upon each of us, and it is the public attitude. It can serve as basis for prejudgments, fear and discrimination. It can be demonstrated towards persons with special needs, towards prisoners, towards children coming from poor families, etc. Unfortunately, it cannot be changed in a moment, it is developed gradually under the influence by both the family and education.

(b) the most important facilitators of inclusive education

The Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Justice, municipalities, as well as education establishments have implemented the preparatory measures for introduction of inclusive education by means of attracting also ESF funds. After assessment of the current situation it can be concluded that the following factors promote inclusive education:

- Positive examples of provision of inclusive education in several municipalities

Some municipalities have improved education possibilities for children with special needs to be able to find the most suitable solution for a child and his/ her parents.



Scheme 1: education possibilities for a child with special needs in Cēsis municipality

- Initiatives by international and non-governmental organisations, teachers and parents

The Education Development Centre, Great Britain Council and General Secondary Education Quality Assessment State Agency in cooperation with teachers representing 25 education establishments of Latvia in years 2007 and 2008 implemented the project “Inclusive school in inclusive society”. In the framework of this project the material developed in Great Britain “Index of inclusive education” was approbated in 25 schools of Latvia. The above materials helps schools to become education establishments basing upon the values of inclusive society in their operations and directed towards formation and development of an inclusive school and inclusive society. It achieved by both developing professional competence of teachers and by changing the

attitudes by teachers and all other employees at school and by developing values of inclusive society.

- Initiatives of students with special needs for provision of inclusive education

The second parliamentary hearing of young people with special needs took place on September 16-17, 2007 in Lisbon (Portugal). It was organised by the European Special Education Development Agency in cooperation with institutions of the European Parliament. Young people with special needs representing 28 European countries were given an opportunity to express their viewpoint on education possibilities, problems, wishes and future perspectives. During this event young people also had a possibility to share their experiences and to discuss improvements in education in their home countries.

The hearing took place within the framework of activities of the European year “Equal possibilities for everybody”. Its goal was to provide a possibility for people to recognise their entitlement to equal treatment in society and life without any discrimination. The European Special Education Development Agency invited three young people with special needs aged between 16 and 21 years and representing secondary education, vocational education and higher education to participate in this event.

- Infrastructure quality

Compliance of the infrastructure to students’ needs is one of the preconditions for the development of inclusive education.

The Ministry of Education and Science is promoting the implementation of the activity No. 1.2. “Infrastructure of higher education” of the EU Funds Action Program “Infrastructure and Services”. It is directed also towards provision of higher education possibilities for students with functional disabilities.

Within the framework of the European Regional Development Fund during the planning period of 2004 to 2006 the following education establishments have been adopted for persons with physical disabilities:

- Within the framework of the national program No. 1.4.4. of the Unified Programming Document “Renovation of initial vocational education establishments and modernisation of study aids” – three education establishments (Ventspils Secondary School No. 20, Jelgava Crafts Secondary School and Cēsis Vocational Secondary School No. 4);

- Within the framework of the national program No. 1.4.5. of the Unified Programming Document “Equipping higher education establishments with modern training devices, equipment and computer networks, as well as renovation of buildings” – on education establishment (Liepāja University).

In compliance to the goals defined in the Guidelines of Education Development for Years 2007 – 2013 adoption of general education

establishments for students with special needs takes place. Study rooms and school premises are renovated and the material study base is improved.

- Education programs

Education programs focused on inclusive education and ensuring teaching in accordance with students' abilities and needs are required.

- Preparation of teachers

Preparation of teachers can be ensured by means of further education courses for the work with various target audiences, including students with special needs.

In the course of improving competences for work with children with various needs teachers were educated in the following education programs during year 2007: *Provision of methodological support for teachers of boarding schools on the issues of life skills, violence, children's rights, security and health; Organisation of work and methodology in correction classes and joint classes; Provision of methodological support for teachers' assistants in the work with students of grades 1 to 6 with learning difficulties.*

The following programs of professional development of teachers are implemented in year 2008: *Formation of cooperation between a modern teacher and student taking into account peculiarities of a student's perception, interests and needs; Implementation of a modern study process in special education; Implementation of a modern study process in an after-school group; The role of a speech therapist in the implementation of a modern study process in an education establishment; Solution of conflicts at school.*

The programs of further education of teachers focused on issues of establishment of an enabling environment in a school, ensuring implementation of inclusive education at an education establishment by encouraging tolerance among young people remain topical also in year 2009.

(c) approaches and measures adopted to make the education system more inclusive

The above referred goals and tasks defined in the policy planning documents promote development of the education system, as well as ensuring its inclusive nature.

Within the framework of the ESF program „Human resources and employment” projects the required teaching and support personnel, additional

training on the relevant study subjects were provided to students, also a possibility to acquire suitable teaching correction, vocational (with teaching correction), catch-up and vocational educational programs was provided and the role of the support personnel including psychologists and social teachers was increased in the study and training process.

With the funds of the ESF project „Establishment of support points for provision of professional rehabilitation for disabled persons in Latvia” in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare eight suitability centers have been established in all the regions. The suitability centers are located in vocational education establishments. The centers implement encouragement programs for disabled persons to promote the receipt of professional rehabilitation services, determination of professional suitability and acquiring education in the form of distance learning. A possibility to receive vocational education in special education establishments has also been maintained.

During the time period from January 1, 2005 until December 31, 2007 the State Probation Service implemented the EQUAL project „New solutions for promoting employment of the former imprisoned persons”, where the Ministry of Education and Science acted as a strategic partner. At the prisons involved in the project – Valmiera, Grīva, Šķirotava and Ilģuciems prisons – vocational education programs of various types were implemented. In addition to the cooperation with the above prisons the project also supported implementation of vocational education programs in Matīsa and Jelgava prisons, where possibilities of professional practice were provided for experts of relevant specialties. 328 imprisoned persons have acquired a profession and obtained an education certificate compliant to professional qualification level No. 2 within the vocational education programs supported and funded by the above project.

There are also measures directed towards improvement of the position of students coming from poor families. In Latvia people with low income reside mostly in the countryside. As from year 2007 the state support has been envisaged from the support of agriculture and development of rural areas, comprising also supported measures for education, science and dissemination of information. Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of January 22, 2008 No. 41 „Regulations on the state support for agriculture in year 2008 and the procedure of its allocation” define the amount of the state support for agriculture and rural development in year 2008 and the procedure of its allocation. In compliance to Paragraph 98 of Appendix No. 4 to the Regulations “Support for education, science and dissemination of information” a student of a vocational education establishment acquiring vocational secondary education programs “Agriculture” (qualification – a manager of a rural property or a gardener), “Gardening” (qualification – a gardener), “Growing of plants” (qualification – a grower of plants), “Beekeeping” (qualification – a beekeeper), “Agricultural technology” (qualification – a mechanic of agricultural equipment), “Veterinary medicine” (qualification – a veterinarian assistant), “Fish farming” (qualification – a pisciculturist), “Production of dairy products” (qualification – an assistant to a

foreman of production of dairy products), “Production of meat products” (qualification – an assistant to a foreman of production of meat products), “Food processing technologies and production of products” (qualification – a technician of food processing), “Forestry” (qualification – a forestry technician), or “Forestry equipment” (qualification – a mechanic of forestry equipment) are entitled to apply for a support intended for students of vocational education establishments, if they can prove that their study achievements during the monthly attestation and at the end of a study semester in all study subjects and practices are not below the mark “four”, that there are no theoretical and practical classes missed without a valid justification and that the internal rules of procedure of the education establishment have been complied with.

In compliance to Paragraph 99 of the above Regulations the amount of support for students of vocational education programs amounts to 35 lats per month during the 1st and 2nd year, however, not exceeding 350 lats per academic year, and to 45 lats per month during the 3rd and 4th study year, however, not exceeding 450 lats per academic year. If the qualification practice period provided for in the relevant education program has taken place at a certified practice place, the support amount is increased up to 60 lats per month for students of the 4th year, however, not exceeding 600 lats per academic year. The above support is paid from January 1, 2008 until December 31, 2008.

In the area of education of imprisoned persons based upon ESF funding the Ministry of Justice in cooperation with the strategic partner Ministry of Education and Science is working on broadening the education possibilities at prisons by opening new licensed and certified general and vocational education programs.

In the field of general education it is planned that the number of general secondary education establishments, which are suitable for students with functional disabilities, will reach 38 until December 31, 2013.

In the field of higher education not only compliance of infrastructure is ensured, but also possibilities for development of flexible study ways and professional orientation of students by unifying study courses or their parts in study modules, thus ensuring that their planning complies with the concept of lifelong learning.

(d) approaches and measures adopted to make the education system more flexible in order to offer additional educational opportunities to those who have dropped out or have not attained an appropriate level of qualifications

There can be various reasons for leaving the school without completing basic education. They include economic reasons (especially in the countryside), disadvantageous families, careless attitude towards children’s education by parents and many more others. The above problem refers not only to young

persons. In compliance to the population census of year 2000 in Latvia 7.4% of the adult population of Latvia (2.9% of male and 4.5% female population of the above) were without basic education.

Still the data of EUROSTAT certify that in Latvia the number of young people, who have acquired secondary education, has increased from 76.5% to 81.0% during the period from year 2000 to year 2006.

In the field of lifelong learning, which also concerns young people, there is a tendency of increasing involvement in the process of education and studies. In year 2007 Latvia, in compliance to the plans of the program “Education and training 2010” has reached the percentage of involvement of lifelong learning of 6.9%, and the number of the early school leavers has decreased from 19% (in year 2006) to 16%.

In addition to the above, the results of the research of year 2008 “What are the professional plans of OPEN generation?” certify that only 5.4% of students of Grade 12 indicated that they have real plans to use some of the possibilities offered by the education system, and 3.2% planned to start to work without continuing their education.

Speaking about accessibility of education it should be pointed out that in compliance to the public opinion research performed by „Latvijas Fakti” on the social economic situation in the country the accessibility of education has received comparatively the best assessment of all the fields included in the research. It is the only item where the proportion of positive assessments has exceeded 50% (55.5%). 17.2% of the residents assess accessibility of education as excellent and 38.3% assess it as very good. 10% of residents assess the quality of basic education as excellent and 34.1% rate it as very good. The quality of the content of secondary education is assessed as excellent by 9.5% of residents and 30.7% rate it as very good.

2.4. Learners and teachers:

(a) approaches to teaching and learning implemented to increase educational opportunities for all, improving student learning outcomes and reduce disparities

In order to understand the difficulties every student faces, to identify everybody’s strengths and to offer assistance based on that individual approach is implemented in the education process. Individual approach is an important precondition for ensuring high quality education by providing education possibilities for students, for whom the generally accepted development promotion means have turned out to be inefficient. Individualisation also means that a teacher implements a creative and differentiated approach for the planning and implementation of the study process.

By means of individual approach to education beneficial conditions are created for comprehensive development of every student, for acquiring knowledge and skills. For a student with special needs to get involved in the education process and to master social skills individual learning plans are developed and implemented. The state special education centre has developed sample individual education plans and methodological recommendations for development of the plans.

The inclusion of inclusive education measures which are more or less based upon individual assessment of a student, are provided, as well as inclusion in vocational education, promotion of accessibility of education, learning achievements. They also reduce failures in education implementation. In the field of vocational education field major inclusive education measures are as follows:

- Support measures for professional education and career development;
- Support measures for adaptation of students in a vocational education establishment;
- An offer of vocational education programs compliant to abilities, wishes, special needs.

(b) ways the curriculum is designed and organized to respond to the diversity of learners

In year 2007 the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations in cooperation with teachers of special schools developed sample curricula and guidelines in ten study subjects for students with special needs (mental disabilities). Following compilation of received proposals the sample curricula and guidelines of study subjects were published on the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations Internet site (www.isec.gov.lv).

In order to implement general education functions for students with learning difficulties teaching correction is offered. The basic education teaching correction education program can be implemented for Grades from 1 to 9. The length of the teaching correction program is defined for every student on individual basis taking into account the individual development dynamics and achieved results that are assessed every semester. Standard classes are supplemented by teaching correction classes. Also after-school groups are funded for all teaching correction grades.

For the purpose of promoting creative and cognitive activities the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations in cooperation with universities of Latvia and professional associations of subject teachers organises study competitions for talented students. When students are preparing for international competitions various selection classes are organised with the purpose of broadening and deepening their knowledge and skills. These selection classes

take place in laboratories of universities where it is possible to perform more complicated practical studies.

(c) the organization of reading learning in the early primary grades

In compliance to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of December 19, 2006 No.1027 „Regulations on the national standard of basic education and standards of study subjects of basic education” provision of basic knowledge and basic skills required for social and personal life, including reading skills, to students has been defined as one of the basic goals of basic education programs.

In compliance to the list of textbooks for mastering basic education programs approved by the Ministry of Education and Science for the academic year 2007/ 2008 ABCs and reading books, language textbooks and work books are offered to students of Grades 1 to 4.

The Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations organizes the work for improvement reading and writing skills, in particular, for Grades 1 to 4. Methodology recommendations for establishment of a uniform system of speaking and writing in Latvia. A proposal to introduce the subject of calligraphy in Latvia is among the most essential recommendations. For the purpose of coordinating the improvement of reading and writing skills diagnostic tests are planned for students at the beginning of Grade 1 and at completing it.

(d) teacher training and equipment to meet the learners’ diverse expectations and needs

The Guidelines of Education Development for Years 2007 – 2013 define particular directions of action for reaching this goal, including the following:

- 1) Improvement of the efficiency of the training process at the level of the basic education by means of introducing and funding the work of teachers’ assistants providing support for the training work (Grades 1 to 6) for students with learning difficulties, providing additional consultations for better mastering the contents of study subjects for students (Grades 7 – 9) with poor learning achievements, providing possibilities to acquire training correction and equalization programs for students with poor preceding knowledge and learning difficulties by means of developing teaching methods for the class work for students with different level of preceding knowledge and learning difficulties.
- 2) Inclusion of students with special needs in the education system by means of providing support to teachers working with students with special needs, further education courses for teachers on the work with students with

special needs, by increasing the role of a special teacher in education establishments.

- 3) Provision of support for students from social risk groups by means of improving teaching competences for work with differing target audiences (including persons with special needs, persons from the places of detention, refugees, immigrants) and by means of increasing the role of support personnel – career consultants, psychologists and social teachers, in the process of learning and education.
- 4) Ensuring education possibilities for minorities of Latvia by means of offering methodology courses for primary school and pre-school teachers, preparatory seminars for lecturers of methodology courses for primary school and pre-school teachers, organising of further education courses for teachers.
- 5) Improvement of teachers' education and further education by means of improving the content of teaching studies programs in compliance to the valid standards of basic education and secondary education, by improving the studies crediting systems for teachers to ensure preparation of teachers in compliance to the state requirements, by development of the system of further education of teachers in compliance to the public needs, by providing state funding for courses for teachers of 36 hours once during a period of three years and developing further education programs for implementing the values education, civil and moral education in general education schools and improvement of the work of form masters.

Practical activities of teachers shall be paid as much attention to as theoretical training in further education programs. For example, implementation of projects at vocational education establishments and their results indicated new perspectives for the development of teaching competences by teaching professional study subjects, for an opportunity to share experiences with colleagues for promoting and developing cooperation with teachers of other vocational schools of Latvia.

The above practice will be continued by ensuring exchange of experience and readiness of teachers to work with various target audiences.

(e) the organization of formal and non-formal learning environments in order to ensure the inclusion of all learners

The formal and non-formal learning environments have to be arranged in such a way that persons can join it based upon the individual knowledge, skills and competence level and from the environment in which the particular person stays.

In Latvia the broadening of both the formal and non-formal education offer (including acquiring of basic competences) is planned and focused in particular to groups of people facing a social exclusion risk and with restricted

possibilities for education at their places of residence (including rehabilitation institutions, prisons, etc.) and places of employment. It can be achieved by increasing the number of basic competences education programs, as well as increasing the number of both formal and non-formal education in rehabilitation institutions, prisons, sports, culture and medical establishments.

Provision of basic competences education programs for adults close to their places of residence is another direction comprising the increase of the number of working population studying with the employers' support, as well as implementation of social inclusion programs – teaching of basic IT use for everybody, in particular, persons with functional disabilities and groups of persons facing a risk of social exclusion.

For the purpose of achieving high efficiency of the formal and non-formal learning environment it is necessary to ensure efficient coordination of the offer of formal and non-formal education. As a result possible links between various levels of formal and non-formal education will be established, and mutual continuity will be achieved.

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