International Bureau of Education

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

National Report of Estonia

by

the Ministry of Education

August 2001

Background

Estonia lies on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea and covers 45,227 square kilometres. The country is situated on the level north-western part of the East European platform, on which there are only slight variations in elevation. The highest point (*Suur Munamägi*) is 318 meters above sea level. Estonia has over 1500 islands and more than 1400 lakes, and its population is 1,439,197 (1 January, 2000). Its capital is Tallinn, with a population 408,329. The ethnic divisions are Estonian 65.3%, Russian 28.1%, Ukrainian 2.5%, Belo Russian 1.5%, Finnish 0.9% and others, 1.7%. The religious denominations are Lutheran, Russian Orthodox, Baptist and others. The main languages are Estonian (official) and Russian.

State independence was regained on 20 August, 1991, Independence Day being 24 February.

Adopted by a referendum on 28 June 1992, the Constitution established the principles of the rule of law. It recognises the principle of separate and balanced powers, the independence of the courts, and guarantees of fundamental human rights and liberties according to universally recognised principles and norms. Estonia is a democratic parliamentary republic whose head of state is the President of the Republic. Supreme power is vested in its citizens who have the right to vote by electing 101 members to the *Riigikogu* or State Assembly (parliament), and by participating in referendums. Executive power rests with the Government.

Estonia is divided into 15 counties (*maakond*), 207 rural municipalities (*vald*), and 47 towns (*linn*). Since 20 June, 1992, the national currency has been the Estonian kroon (1 kroon = 100 sent). Estonia has been a member of the United Nations since September 17, 1991 and a member of the Council of Europe since May 1993.

1. The education system at the end of the twentieth century: an overview

1.1. Major reforms and innovations introduced in the education system during the last ten years

1.1.1. Legal framework of education

The Law on Education of the Estonian Republic (*Eesti Vabariigi Haridusseadus)* was adopted on 23 March 1992, setting forth the general principles of the Estonian educational system.[1] The law enunciated the following general goals of the system:

- To promote the development of personality, family and the Estonian nation, as well as of national minorities, of Estonian economic, political, and cultural life and of nature preservation in the global economic and cultural context.

- To educate loyal citizens; and

- To set up the prerequisites of continuing education for all.

In the period since 1992, Estonia has made step-by-step progress in establishing and refining the legal framework for the education system. Other significant laws include:

- The Law on Basic and Upper Secondary Schools *(Põhikooli- ja gümnaasiumiseadus)* of September 1993, setting forth the conditions for establishing, operating and closing state and municipal primary schools, basic schools and gymnasia, as well as the principles governing basic and general secondary education.

- The Law on Adult Education (*Täiskasvanute koolituse seadus)* of November 1993, setting forth the legal conditions for training adults, along with legal guarantees for lifelong learning in accordance with the wishes of the persons concerned.

- Law on Universities *(Ülikooliseadus)* of January 1995. This law sets forth the conditions for establishing, operating and closing public universities, along with the principles governing higher education in accordance with the curricula of diploma and bachelor studies, and masters and doctoral studies.

- The Law on Organisation of Research and Developmental Activity *(Teadus-ja arendustegevuse korraldus seadus)* of March 1997 setting forth the basic principles governing activity to ensure the future development of creative science and technology as an integral part of Estonian culture and economic life.

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1. Ministry of Education. *Structure of the Education in Estonia*, final draft prepared for Eurydice, Tallinn 1999, pp. 1-3. The descriptions of laws in this chapter are drawn largely from the draft Eurydice report.

- The Law on Vocational Education Institutions *(Kutseõppeastuse seadus)* of June 1998 setting forth the conditions for establishing, operating and closing state and municipal vocational education institutions, along with the principles governing vocational secondary and higher education, in accordance with vocational higher education curricula.

- The Law on Private Schools *(Erakooliseadus)* of June 1998, setting forth the conditions for establishing such schools as the property of private individuals or legal entities, together with the principles for operating these institutions and the requirements for education that the schools deliver.

- The Law on Applied Higher Education Institutions *(Rakenduskõrgkooli seadus)* of June 1998 setting forth the conditions for establishing, operating and closing state applied higher education institutions, as well all the principles governing higher education in accordance with the curricula of vocational higher education and diploma studies.

- The Law on Pre-School Childcare Institutions(*Koolieelse lasteasutuse seadus)* of March 1999 setting forth the conditions for establishing, operating and closing pre-school institutions in municipalities, as well as the principles governing the pre-school education system.

1.1.2. Policy structure and governance[2]

The Parliament (*Riigikogu*) approves the laws regulating education, through which the main directions of education policy and the principles of school organisation are defined. It also approves tuition fees. The Government of the Republic (*Vabariigi Valitsus)* decides the national strategies for education, approves the national curriculum for educational institutions, establishes salary scales for educational staff and draws up rules for registering children in compulsory education.

According to the Constitution, education in Estonia is supervised by the State. The Laws on Pre-school Childcare Institutions, Basic and Upper Secondary General Schools, and Private Schools stipulate that national supervision of their activities must be carried out in line with rules established by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education *(Haridusministeerium*) is responsible for:

- Co-ordinating the implementation of education policy.

- Ensuring the satisfactory implementation of – and compliance with – educational legislation.

- Drafting the requirements for the general content of education and the national curriculum.

2. Ibid., pp. 6-11.

- Establishing the rules on national supervision and ensuring that they are satisfactory; accrediting and issuing licenses to educational institutions and financing them in accordance with the law on the national budget.

- Enforcing the financial norms for use by institutions in the design of local and school budgets.

- Supervising administration of the methodological services of institutions.

- Preparing the Government-planned training of staff in education; and

- Administering the public assets used by public educational institutions and the education system as a whole.

The Ministry of Education is assisted in defining its policy by different consultative bodies as follows:

- The General Education Management Board *(Hariduskorraldusnõu-koda*), the consultative body of heads of regional educational departments.

- The Student Advisory Chamber, (*Õppurite Nõukoda)* a consultative body for the Minister, consisting of secondary, vocational and university student representatives and their organisations.

- The Educational Forum (*Haridusfoorum*), an advisory body of different interest groups discussing development issues in education.

- The Higher Education Advisory Chamber (*Kõrghariduse Nõukoda*), a consultative body of university representatives at the Ministry, which is concerned with problems of university education.

- Research and Development Council (*Teadus- ja Arendusnõukogu*), a consultative body chaired by the prime minister.

- The Estonian Science Foundation (*Eesti Teadusfond*), a consultative body of experts, concerned with financing science projects.

- Higher Education Evaluation Council (*Kõrghariduse Hindamise Nõukogu*) responsible for the accreditation of higher education institutions.

The county governments *(maavalitsus)* and their structures include the departments of education, which provide supervision at regional level of the educational activities of pre-school childcare institutions and schools. They formulate the education development plans of the county, provide information on public financing to the Ministry of Education, organise events for pupils and teachers in the counties and advise local government on educational questions.

The local government authorities *(vald, linn)* organize maintenance of pre-school childcare institutions, basic and secondary schools, schools for extra-curricular activities and school libraries. They also run cultural centres, museums, sports centres and other local institutions in the municipality or town concerned. In addition, the local

government authorities keep registers of children in the compulsory education age-range, monitor their attendance, and appoint the heads of municipal educational institutions. Local governments draw up and implement plans for the development of regional education, define and approve school districts, appoint school boards and run school medical services and meals.

During the transition from centralised decision-making and financing to decentralised decision-making at local government, school and county government level, increasing importance will be attached to negotiations entailing a comprehensive analysis of the educational institution network. Issues involved include:

- The placement of the student population living in the area.
- The need for education at different levels.
- The qualifications of teachers working in the region.
- Curricular proposals and trends in regional schools.
- Basic teaching materials in schools.
- Consistency with established teaching and cultural traditions; and
- Consistency with the social needs of regions, and the role of schools in their educational and cultural development.

1.1.3. Education renewal since 1987

As the forces for greater freedom – and evidentially, independence – began to build at the end of the 1980s, Estonia developed a strong, indigenous, grassroots movement for education renewal – even while still formally within the framework of the Soviet Union. Change at the state-level symbolised by the "singing revolution" was accompanied by an awakening and enthusiasm for change throughout the Estonian education system. The phases of the education renewal process have been described as follows:

- 1987-1989: Renewal based on enthusiasm and wide public participation resulting from relative independence from Soviet educational institutions. This included – to a certain extent – an opportunity for independent activity, self-determination in curriculum and learning organisation through school-level decisions and widespread participation in forums on educational renewal. Brainstorming sessions through the 1989 Forum of Culture and Education and the Council of Education in 1989-1991 were precursors of what would become the Estonian Education Forum in the mid-1990s. Through the state teacher in-service training system, a number of schools were challenged to introduce curricular changes providing a wider range of variations and choices. Toward the end of this period, the teacher in-service training and education research systems began to change.

- 1989-1992: A period of stabilisation focused on establishing the conditions for the functioning of the education system, preparation of the necessary legislative acts and new curricula, and disintegration and/or elimination of Soviet institutions. As indicated above, the Law on Education was adopted in March 1992.

- 1992-1994: The realisation of actual independence and the resulting search for new relationships and leadership at all levels of the system. The structure, and to a varying extent, the content – of teacher training began to change toward Western models (credits and degree structure). Institutions associated with previous times, the Teacher Training Centre and the Institute of Pedagogical Research, were eliminated. During this period, important framework laws were adopted including the Law on Basic and Upper Secondary Schools, and the Law on Adult Education.

- 1994-1996: A period of striving to bring order to the education system and to take practical steps to start democratic mechanisms and shape an educational strategy. In this period, informal seminars on the philosophy of education, including a state-wide group in 1994, evolved into seminars on educational politics and the Conference on Education in 1994-1995, and to the founding of the Estonian Education Forum in October 1995. Also in this period, the Open Estonia Foundation (SOROS) and other sponsors initiated projects to establish intellectual foundations for reform and prepare school leaders, teachers, and others for needed changes. Forums for schools leaders and teachers on education renewal and curriculum reform and the "schools of distinction," were important developments. In terms of legal and policy actions, formal legal basis was adopted for the changes already underway in higher education through the Law on Universities of 1995. In February 1996, President Lennart Meri launched the Tiger Leap National Programmes the goals of which are the modernisation of the Estonian education system, and creating the conditions for the formation of an open learning environment and for a better adaptation to the demands of an information society. The new national curriculum for basic and secondary schools was adopted in September 1996.

- 1997-2000: A period of movement from strategy to action. When Estonia made further progress in establishing and updating the legal framework for the education system. Laws adopted in the period include the Law on Organisation of Research and Development Activity (1997), the Law on Vocational Education Institutions (1998), the Law on Private Schools (1998), the Law on Applied Higher Education Institutions (1998), and the Law on Pre-School Childcare Institutions (1999).

Several initiatives in this period focused on strategic thinking regarding not only education but also Estonia as a small nation in a global, knowledge-based, information technology-intensive economy, which have contributed to a growing consensus across a broad spectrum of Estonian leadership about future policy directions:

- In February 1997, the Tiger Leap Foundation was established through the leadership of the MoE, computer companies and private individuals.

- In 1997, a first effort was made to shape the so-called "Estonian Scenarios 2010" which, under the leadership of a task force of the Estonian Education Forum, would later lead to the "Estonian Education Scenarios 2015". A consensus developed supporting the scenario of "Learning Estonia", aimed at uniting society and stimulating the country's innovative capability – through a secondary approach called "interactive Estonia."

- The Academic Council convened by the President of the Republic of Estonia presented a report to the *Riigikogu* in February 1998, and, then, issued a joint statement on November 19, 1998, entitled "Learning Estonia."

- The Educational Forum '98 in November 1998 concluded that, in order to develop into an open learning society, Estonia needs to take a fast and quantitative leap forward in education. The forum concluded that the "mainstream of this radical change is moving from the industrial era's state-centred system of education to the information era's society-centred one, to be accompanied by a substantial change in educational paradigms." The Education Strategy document was compiled by the MoE in 1998.

1.1.4. Ongoing reforms and topics of debate in education in Estonia

The general goal for reforming the Estonian educational system consists in the creation of preconditions for all students throughout their lives for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and experience that would help them to cope successfully in personal life, work and in the society.

Following that goal the year 2001 is marked with the adoption of several reform initiatives. During the first half of 2001 the Development Strategy on the Research and Development "Knowledge-based Estonia", the Action Plan for Developing the Vocation Education, the Higher Education Reform Strategy and the National Development Strategy on Youth Work was approved by the Government.

Below basic ideas of the education reform strategies will be introduced.

General education

In general education sector the biggest developments are tied with the curriculum development efforts. The Center of Curriculum Development in the University of Tartu was established on 2000 with the responsibility of continuation of the development of the national curriculum on basic and general secondary education. As a result, the curriculum with more extensive changes will be prepared for the school year of 2004/05. Curricula for pre-primary education and general secondary education, national curriculum for students with moderate and severe learning

disabilities and supplementary learning curriculum will be developed further in the 2003/04.

Vocational education and continuing training

In the Action Plan for the Development of Vocational Education comprehensive measures are designed for improving the quality of vocational education, ensuring it's relevance to the labour market needs and broadening the access to all age groups. Under the Action Plan special emphases is put on the development of the Regional Training Centers that provide primary training for students, retraining for adults, pre-training for students in general secondary education, and vocational education and training for people with special needs. Development of the training centers is especially important as they fulfill the role of incubators for other vocational education schools on number of areas such as curriculum development and teachers training. Financial support of the Regional Training Centers for the accelerated development is allocated from the Estonian State budget as well as by the EU PHARE Program.

Other initiatives under the Action Plan include supporting the integration of practical application and theory, pursuing the development of curriculum modules in vocational education and training, consolidation of the administration of vocational education institutions, optimising resource utilisation and developing stronger links between vocational education institutions and social partners. Special emphases are put on the training of supervisors for practical training in enterprises. This measure has to secure skills and knowledge for the supervision of students in an enterprise for the acquisition of skills provided in the curriculum for training in an enterprise.

With the purpose of improving the management of the vocational schools the amendment on the Law on Vocational Educational Institutions was passed in the Parliament on June 2001. The law allows and sets conditions for transforming state vocational education schools into the municipal or private ownership by 1st September 2005. State schools can only be transformed into private foundation type of entities. It is expected that broadening of the ownership lead management of schools towards more effective utilisation of resources.

On the adult and continuous training a special working group was called to work out the respective strategy on May 2001. In the framework of lifelong learning strategy guiding principles are settled which emphasize measures that allow accommodate learning, work and personal life, and pay attention to the need to recognize all types of learning and work experience for continuing studies in formal education. Under the strategic paper social consensus should be designed for financial measures to support the training of adult population. The strategy for adult and continuous training is prepared for public discussions by December 2001 for passing it to the parliamentary discussions in the fall of 2002.

Higher education

In higher education sphere, multiple developments are carried out to adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees and to strengthen the ties with the European

system of higher education. On June 2001 the Government approved the higher education reform proposal. Under the proposal concerning the so-called Bologna process the position was taken by the Government that all higher education institutions would have the discretion for determining the length of the studies in the undergraduate and postgraduate study circle. Depending of the field the bachelor studies may take 3-4, master studies 1-2 years. However, the total length of studying to earn a master degree cannot be longer than 5 years (this does not apply to professions such as physicians and veterinarians). Other issues in a Government higher education reform package include the changes in the principles of financing and developing the non-university sector.

Under the reform proposal principles of management by objectives will be enforced. The system of allocating resources for the state-commissioned study places will focus on preparing the master level students. Each year the Ministry of Education and a higher education institution will negotiate the number of master level graduates from each institution in certain training areas for the respective study cycle. The financing of higher education institutions on the following years will depend on the number of graduated students in respective training area. The Ministry of Education will mark the number of study places in broader training areas. For example, the Ministry will not determine exactly how many political scientists and sociologists should be enrolled at a university, resources are allocated for educating the social scientists. Each university makes the decision regarding the exact study places on the university level. It is expected that 2/3 of graduates of bachelor studies at an university will continue their studies at the Master level. According to the plan, each year between 2003-2008 the government will pay for 2500 **new** Master level students and 250 Doctoral level students.

In a reform package measures are designed for stimulating the graduation during the nominal study period. Until now a student with best academic results at the entry to the university received the right to study without any fee until graduating from the university. Under the new rules, the free of charge study places will be rotated each year among the best students.

Estonia has offered the governement guaranteed study loan for students already since 1993. Under the higher education reform proposal the types of available social guarantees will be increased and the conditions of application will specified more precisely. All social benefits like the right to study loan (õppelaen), tuition loan (õppemaksulaen) and study assistance (õppetoetus) will be available only to the full time students. So far, it has been tied to the stationary status of a student which was defined differently in different universities, i.e. in Tartu University it has been 75% of the of the year's study requirements, in Tallinn Technical University it was until very recently 25%. The new requirement is that to be qualified for full-time student position one needs to fullfill 75% of requirements for a current study semeste

Other major changes take place in developing the non-university sector. Currently, instruction in non-university sector is offered following the diploma and vocational higher education curricula. This practice has proven to be unreasonable because it is difficult to make a difference between requirements for diploma studies and vocational higher education studies especially on regards to the labor market outputs. Under the higher education reform plan unified regulations will be worked for all curriculas in a non-university sector. In order to maintain the transparency of the

higher education system instruction following a professional higher education curricula will be mainly concentrated to the vocational higher education institutions.

Youth work

In recent years growing attention is paid to the youth work programs that aim to make young people more interested in social decision-making. Over the years the area of youth work has been regulated inconsistently, therefore, the Concept and the Development Plan on Youth Work which were approved by the Government on July 2001 mark big step forward. The Concept and Development Plan define the areas of activities and envision the measures for the development in

- special youth work,
- hobby education,
- guidance and information services,
- training for people working in youth work area,
- recreation and camp activities,
- youth employment,
- international relations, and
- establishing and developing the structures for youth work and their involvement.

There were more concrete activities proposed and approved in each of these areas in the Concept and the Development Plan. The activities are mostly project based prioritizing the community youth work, preventive and rehabilitative youth work, emphasizing experience and adventure pedagogy. Under the Development Plan special actions are targeted to the children of non-Estonian community, and children with special needs (drug addiction, homelessness, crime, etc.).

In the public debate in this area the biggest focus is given to the possible change in the financial principles of youth work. It is proposed for each person on the age of 7-26 that there will be allocated “a youth kroon” which makes up 10% of the minimum wage. According to the idea “youth kroons” are not distributed but are rather the bases of calculation for financing different youth work projects following percentage points agreed beforehand. The idea would give more solid bases for planning the youth work, however, it is still in the stage of public discussions.

1.2.The main achievements in education sector during the last 10 years

In the past decade great changes have taken place in the Estonian educational system. There have been changes in the contents of studies, educational systems and the organisation of education as a whole. In the transition period, national curricula for pre-school education and general education, together with the Standard of Higher Education, have been drawn up, and the importance of fields of training has changed both in vocational and higher education. A network of educational institutions is emerging that reacts flexibly to changes in the number of students, and most institutes of the former Academy of Sciences have been merged with universities. The importance of the private sector has considerably increased in the entire educational field, and the proportion of paid studies in particular has gone up in public universities. Reform in vocational education is being carried out in order to prepare personnel qualified to play a part in the modern development of Estonian society. During the first years of reform in vocational education, 1996-2000, a social agreement was reached concerning ways to reorganise vocational education, and preconditions were created for the direction in which the development of the system should move. In the preparation of changes in principle, the launching of different PHARE programmes has played a crucial role, since the curricula and various courses meant to raise the qualification of vocational instructors were developed on the basis of these programmes.

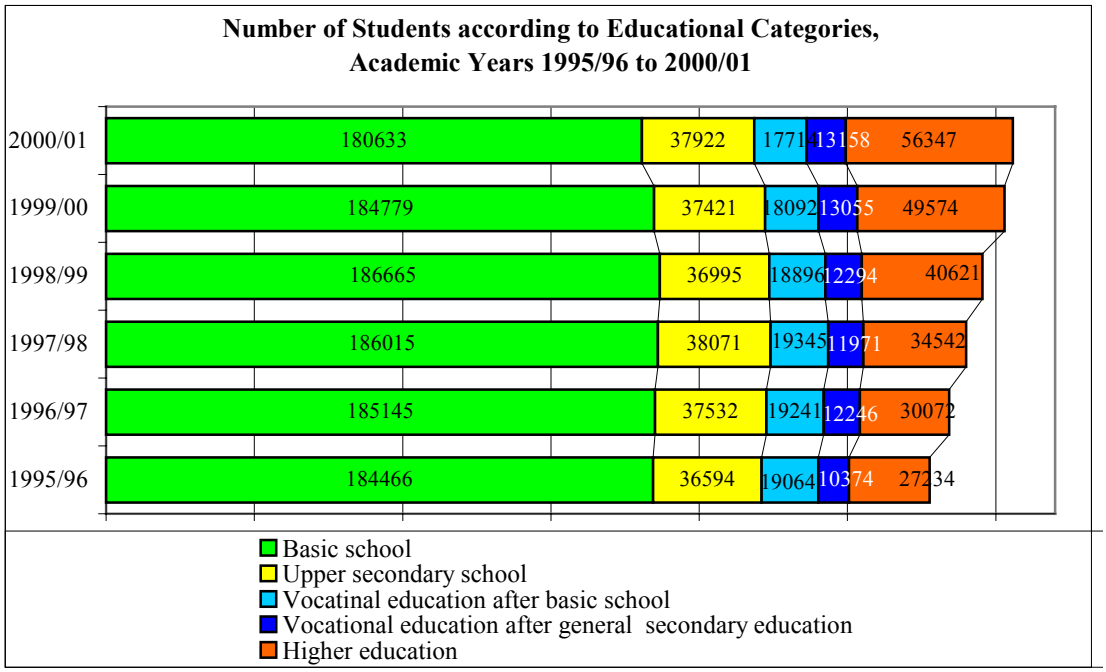
Estonia has signed international framework agreements that will secure its inhabitants equal opportunities for participation in the European educational sector and labour market. These include the Bologna and Sorbonne Declarations, which created a common European higher education area, and the Lisbon Convention on the recognition of certificates of higher education and certificates allowing access to higher education. It has also passed the Act on the Recognition of Vocational Qualification Acquired in a Foreign Country.

Qualification standards have been raised in order to ensure that only those with accepted pedagogical qualifications may teach.

A national curriculum framework, adopted by Government 27.09.1996, has given to each school the right and obligation to develop its own curriculum, taking into consideration the features particular to the school and the region, as well as the wishes of students.

A system of external evaluation for study results has gone into effect – for example, tests at the end of various stages of study to determine standards, graduation examinations at the end of basic school with uniform materials, state examinations in upper secondary school – and conditions have been created that allow students with special needs to study in ordinary schools.

The teaching of Estonian to different age groups of other ethnic groups has become more efficient as well.



Ministry of Education, Division of Information and Statistics, 2000

In the framework of the national Tiger Leap Programme (for the implementation of the 1997 to 1999 Programme, a specific Foundation was established on February 21, 1997 and the follow-up of the programme, the Tiger Leap Plus 2001–2005 was approved by the Government on January 23, 2001), school supplies of computers have risen, with one computer for every 31.5 students in 2000. Nevertheless, quite large regional disparities in that respect remain.

Instruction in vocational education started in 1999, following the curricula of post primary school and post secondary school vocational education, in order to accelerate the preparation of skilled workers. Regional multifunctional centres of vocational education are being developed to serve students of different ages and different needs, and work has started on developing national modular curricula based on vocational standards. Vocational councils are forging a vocational qualification system with the participation of different social partners: employers, employees and representatives of the general public from educational communities. Qualification requirements for vocational instructors have been adopted, according to which all vocational instructors have to have either higher education in their speciality, or pedagogical higher education by 2003. Very soon the earlier opportunity to provide vocational education to people with no basic education will be restored.

In order to ensure quality in higher education, a national accreditation system is being applied in which foreign experts are to be engaged as a guaranty of impartiality. Opportunities for obtaining higher education have become more extensive: the number of private higher educational establishments has increased, an open university has been created and the state has increased the number of places available for master's and doctorate studies. The merger of most former institutes of the Estonian Academy of Sciences with universities has created good preconditions for making better use of the existing research potential in university education. In reaction to the needs of the labour market, the curricula of applied diploma studies and those of

vocational higher education were opened to all, and applied higher educational institutions were created. For securing access to higher education to capable students, a general system of study loans, guaranteed by the state, has been developed, and in the next few years plans are to make this system more sensitive to the prospects and regional background of specific students. A loan with an interest rate of 5% has been made available to students, with the difference between the student interest rate and the commercial interest rate being covered from the state budget. The maximum annual study loan established by the Government has increased several times in the course of five years, and currently stands at 15,000 kroons a year. Public universities are financed from the state budget on the basis of the education service ordered by the state. In 2000, the state ordered for the first time specialists from the selected specialities of private universities as well.

In the second half of 1990s single educational surveys were continued, but the use of their results has been limited to narrow areas. There is currently no applied educational research that could be used in the curricula of the original and further training of teachers and that would support either decision-making on different levels of educational policy or effective implementation of the decisions.

Despite the financial difficulties of the transition period and the strict budgetary policy, the expenditures of the Estonian public sector on education are comparable to developed industrial countries. The resources allocated to education have shown a constant increase in the course of the last five years.

Table 1. **Percentage of public expenditures (state and municipal budgets) on education in Estonia in total public expenditures in 1995-1999 (thousand kroons*)***

	1995	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**
Education expenditures from the state budget:	1,392,987.5	1,786,467.2	2,144,134.3	2,520,226.1	2,948,011.7
% of the state budget:	10.1%	10.1%	10.4%	10.5%	11.3%
Education expenditures from municipal budgets:	1,533,232.3	1,910,621.6	2,171,531.9	2,564,643.8	2,791,233.8
% of municipal budgets:	45.5%	40.4%	39.2%	39.9%	39.8%
Total public expenditures on education:	2,926,219.8	3,718,707.8	4,320,516.2	5,085,479.9	5,726,680.5
% of total public expenditures:	17.1%	16.6%	16.6%	16.7%	17.3%

Ministry of Education

1.2.1. Accessibility of education

Pursuant to the Education Act every Estonian inhabitant should have the opportunity to access any education level or type according to their abilities, with no regard to age, mental and physical health, social status or place of residence.

General education

Pre-school education

Pre-school education is an initial prerequisite of satisfactory progress in everyday life and subsequent school activity. It is provided in accordance with legal responsibilities placed on parents and local government authorities. Pre-primary institutions are for children aged up to seven.

In comparison to the 1980s, pre-school institutions have become significantly more "open", with greater emphasis than previously on the personal contribution, at this level, of family and the home. The role of pre-school institutions is to support and complement the family contribution, by promoting the growth, development and individuality of children. Several novel practices have emerged, including family care, the setting up of 'integration' groups (in which children with special needs are able to mix with other children and develop alongside them while remaining close to home), family advice services, and the establishment of private kindergartens and children centres. The related aims and tasks are set out in the 1999 Law on Pre-School Childcare Institutions and in the 1996 National Curriculum for Pre-school Education (the counterpart, at pre-school level, to the National Curriculum for Basic and Secondary Education referred to on p. 4), a new draft of which is under discussion. Enforcement of the curriculum implies development of the family advice service.

From 1992–94, the number of pre-school institutions decreased, following a reduction in the birth rate, and other socio-economic changes. Among additional factors behind this trend were increased involvement of parents in their children's upbringing, and institutional fees that, for some families, were too high.

Pre-primary school groups are based on the age of children, as follows: 1-2 years, 2-3, 3-4, 4-5 and 5-6, with 7 the upper age limit; sometimes combined groups bring together children of different ages. Groups are not based on children's level of personal development. Evaluation of this is informal and plays no part in the possible transfer of children from one group to another.

The amounts parents pay in fees may be means tested at the discretion of local councils.

A pre-primary school may share premises with the primary grades of basic school. The local government executive also determines the timetable of institutions, in accordance with parental needs. The number of pre-school children in classes immediately preceding basic schools is greater than in pre-school classes for the very

youngest. The size of classes, which are usually coeducational, is determined by the local authorities.

The work of pre-school institutions is governed by the National Curriculum for Pre-school Education which is also the basis for the family advice services. Rather than regulating the time spent on specific activities, the curriculum defines the fields, subject matter, knowledge and skills that have to be presented to or acquired by children.

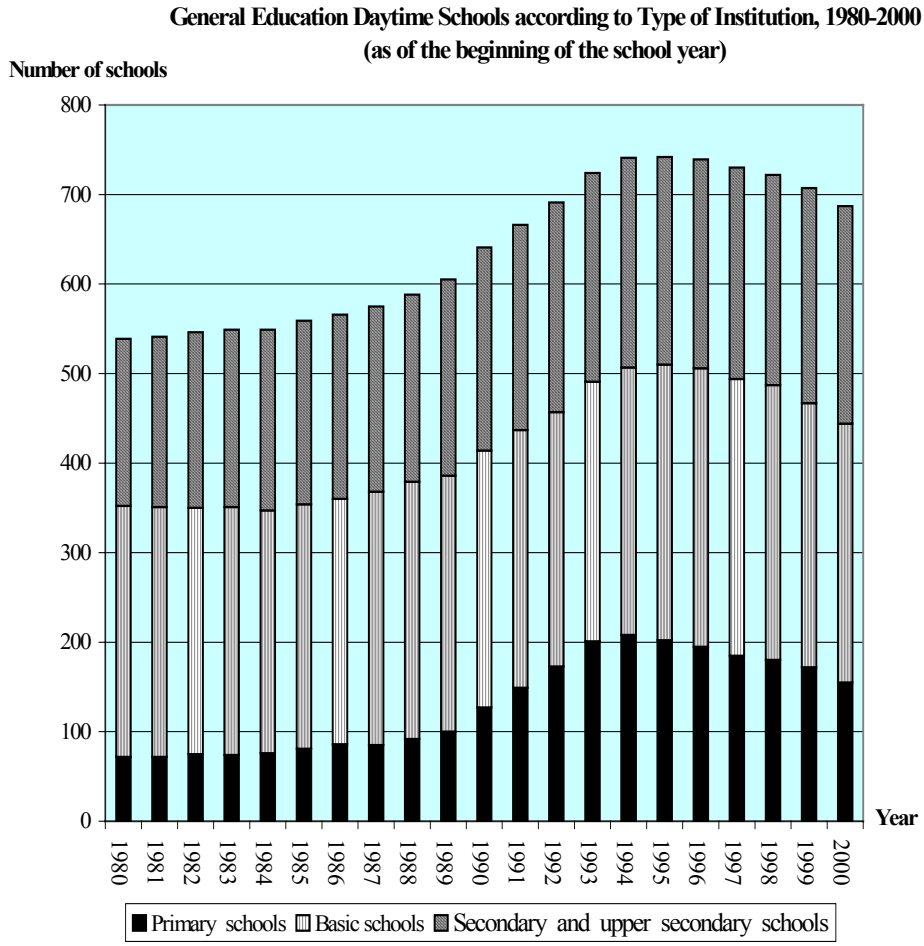
A pre-school institution is entitled to draw up its plan of activity and daily work schedule, in accordance with national tradition and the cultural peculiarities of its region. The local government authority determines which language should be used in institutions employing only a single language for their classes.

Table 2. **Percentage of children attending kindergarten, as compared to the overall figure of children in the same age (1997-2001)**

Age	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**
1	8,0%	9,4%	9,5%	10,8%	12,8%
2	39,5%	44,5%	46,2%	46,6%	49,0%
1+2	24,1%	27,0%	28,3%	29,0%	30,7%
3	61,8%	64,8%	66,5%	67,5%	72,3%
4	67,0%	71,8%	71,3%	74,2%	76,4%
5	69,1%	71,7%	75,0%	76,3%	80,1%
6	68,9%	72,3%	74,1%	76,6%	79,2%
5+6	69,0%	72,0%	74,5%	76,4%	79,7%
1+6	55,1%	57,7%	58,7%	59,9%	62,4%
7	13,7%	14,8%	15,8%	16,5%	15,7%
5+6+7	48,8%	50,8%	53,3%	53,9%	57,1%
8	0,3%	0,3%	0,2%	0,1%	0,1%

Statistical Office of Estonia

In order to improve their children's readiness for basic school, most parents of 5-6-year-olds try to make the most of opportunities offered by pre-school establishments. Special school preparation groups are also quite common, although attendance at them is not a precondition for entry to the first grade.



General education institutions

1) pre-primary institution -primary school;

2) primary school;

3) basic school;

4) upper-secondary school

Regarding the form of ownership, there are private, municipal and state schools.

In order to ensure access to education for all, different curricula are being implemented, as well as different types of institutions and different learning modalities, taking account of educational requirements of persons with special needs.

Basic education

In Estonia, Basic education is a compulsory education minimum, established by the state education standard. Acquisition of basic education establishes the conditions to continue studies for acquisition of secondary education.

Studying is free within the limits established in legal acts. A child is at the age of compulsory school attendance if he or she is seven years old on 1 October of the current year. A student is at the age of compulsory school attendance until the acquisition of basic education or until he or she is 17 years old.

Compulsory school attendance may be fulfilled in the form of home study on the conditions established by the Ministry of Education. The procedures for fulfilment of compulsory school attendance and the tracking of children of the age of compulsory school attendance are regulated by legal acts. Children of foreign citizens or stateless people who are residents of Estonia shall fulfil the requirement of compulsory school attendance, except children of the representatives of foreign countries.

In general, the duration of studies in basic school is nine years. The duration of studies may be prolonged. In the case of an individual curriculum, the duration may be shorter or longer than the norm. As a result, the age of students in one grade may differ from 1-3 years.

The parents of a child of the age of compulsory school attendance may freely select the institution subject to the availability of places. The institutions are bound to ensure learning opportunities for all compulsory school attendance age children who live within the institution's servicing area (or the school district). The school districts (or catchment areas) are determined by local government councils. The principle of establishing school districts is that during the first school years the pupils should have the shortest possible distance from home to school, i.e. the school should be near home.

The school director may, with the consent of the local government, form preparatory groups for pre-school children to provide opportunities to acquire pre-school education, form remedial groups (groups formed to provide learning support outside of lessons for students with learning difficulties), long day groups and school dormitories in the school.

Basic education is available according to three categories of national curriculum:

- the national curriculum for basic and general secondary education;
- the national curriculum for simplified basic education (for slightly mentally challenged pupils; 1.4% of basic school pupils currently study according to this curriculum);
- the curriculum for coping skills (for moderately and severely mentally challenged pupils, 0.4% of basic school pupils currently study according to this curriculum).

The curriculum for special care institutions (*hoolduskool*) is being established.

Upper secondary schools

An upper secondar school (["gümnaasium"]) is a school, which provides opportunities to acquire general secondary education (["keskharidus"]). An upper secondary school includes grades 10-12.

The number of young people who continue their studies in upper secondary school after the basic cycle has increased every year (27 140 pupils in 1992 and 32 954 pupils in 2000). The share of young people who enter higher education after

graduating from the secondary cycle has also increased (24 464 pupils in 1992 and 56 437 pupils in 2000). New opportunities in higher education – vocational higher education study programmes and opening of private higher education insitutions – has contributed to this trend.

The number of students involved in higher education has increased considerably. The primary causes for this have been the possibilities of acquiring higher education in three different types of educational institution, an increase in the number of (particularly private) higher educational establishments, the greater role played by paid studies in public universities, and the lengthening of the actual time of study. Up to recently (i.e. the years 1995-1999) the number of people to actually graduate from public universities has remained on a level of 50%.

In the academic year 1996/97 we had approximately 30,000 students, and by the academic year 1999/2000 this number has increased to more than 53,000. In addition to traditional academic education, higher education that is more applied in nature is starting to develop in Estonia and can be acquired through diploma studies or vocational higher education. In the academic year 1999/2000, 3,165 students started studies in vocational higher education and the number of students in diploma studies reached 16,474. Problems relating to the curricula of applied education have risen mainly as a result of a certain conceptual confusion. The Ministry of Education plans to unify applied educational curricula and to develop curricula in vocational higher education that conform to uniform requirements.

Vocational education

The multifunctional vocational education centres supply original training based on the curricula of vocational secondary schools and/or institutions of professional higher education. They provide adult training, training for people with special needs, vocational guidance, training for vocational instructors, development of curricula, guidance in the preparation of curricula for other institutions of vocational education, consultation to entrepreneurs and analyses of the labour market.

As in secondary schools, relatively high dropout rates are also evident in vocational education. In the school year 1998/99, 12.2% of girls and 13.9% of boys left school. The high dropout rate points to the need for better vocational guidance and study assistance in the institutions of vocational education.

One important obstacle to attaining the best results in vocational educational is the relatively elderly staff of instructors with a somewhat low level of education. In the further implementation of the reform in vocational education, the issue of the qualification of instructors will be the most critical one. Institutions of vocational education need instructors with not only academic degrees but also with practical work experience in their speciality.

In recent years the percentage of teachers over the age of 50 has increased in vocational educational institutions. A decrease in the volume of subjects of general education from the autumn of 1999 on will surely lead to a decrease in the number of teachers necessary for the organisation of studies, and from there towards a decrease in the number of general education teachers. The need to teach general subjects along

with subjects of speciality should force vocational instructors to work towards raising their qualifications and consequently lead to the raising of the level of education. Qualification requirements demand that by 2003 all vocational instructors must have higher education in their speciality, some work experience and vocational teaching certificates. When staff replacements take place amongst vocational instructors, it is important to take on young specialists with higher education in their speciality. This will mean a staff in vocational education furnished with up-to-date skills and willing to accept fundamental changes.

In the course of several years the inadequate link between vocational institutions and employers has been the main problem in Estonian vocational education. In recent years significant efforts have been made in that respect, but unfortunately not all educational institutions have developed a working co-operation with employers. The appointment of employers on the boards of vocational educational institutions, and their participation in the management and planning of these schools, assures that the up-to-date skills and knowledge needed by them are included in the curricula.

Graduates of vocational educational institutions in the last 10 years currently account for about 12 % of labour force. Further training and retraining for those that have graduated much earlier is as important as the original vocational education. Creation of legislative preconditions for the application of curricula based on modules has given to vocational educational institutions an opportunity to start adult training on the required level. The possibilities and willingness of vocational educational institutions to organise such training accelerate the requalification of the current labour force. Next to teaching speciality subjects, institutions of vocational education need to pay more attention to the acquisition of social, IT and language skills. In north-eastern Estonia it is absolutely necessary to launch additional courses of Estonian language in order to improve the mobility of students with other native languages.

Constant development of curricula in institutions of vocational education is directly related to the development of the vocational qualification system. By spring 2000 a number of working groups with broad membership, operating out of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and consisting of representatives from the organisations of employers, employees and members of the third sector, had managed to fix 80 different vocational standards.

The infrastructure of vocational education institutions varies greatly. Study and production buildings have been predominantly constructed in the period 1970-1990. In the course of the last 10 years, no totally new school buildings have gone up, but approximately 5% of facilities have been reconstructed or renovated. In 1999-2000, the sum of 64.8 million kroons was spent on renovation in the form of investments. Approximately 15 million kroons on average is spent annually on the maintenance of study buildings, which accounts for 20% of the funds allocated for the cost of maintaining premises.

Higher education

The number of higher educational establishments has risen in recent years, mainly because of a growth in the number of private institutes of higher education, which in the past seven years have increased from 8 to 19. The total number of institutions functioning beyond the secondary-school level reached 33 at the beginning of the academic year 1999/2000. In autumn, together with vocational schools where studies are based on curricula of vocational higher education, we had 41 institutes in which higher education could be obtained. The large number of educational institutions is becoming a problem, since the scarcity of qualified personnel makes it unlikely that high-quality education can be secured in all schools.

In order to make better use of the intellectual potential of students, most former institutes of the Academy of Sciences of Estonia have been integrated into universities. This step has created preconditions for the use of the existing research potential in university education. Estonia has started to reorganise the current system of post-secondary curricula and develop a new one, proceeding from the principles of the Bologna Declaration, which is creating a common European environment of higher education. As a result, master's studies will play an increasing role in academic higher education in the next few years. Transition to new curricula creates better conditions for participation in international exchange programmes for students and lecturers. The Erasmus Programme is one of the most efficient student exchange programmes, but fuller use of its opportunities presumes substantial increases in state support.

Renewal and development in higher education requires the use of modern teaching methods by lecturers. According to the evaluation of several foreign experts, the main form of study in higher education is still auditory, with large groups absorbing information by means of passive listening and writing conspectuses on what they have heard. Instruction relies in many respects on the acquisition of factual knowledge, and the need for developing analytical skills is stressed very little. The use of such a traditional form of instruction will not prepare students for coping with the information society, where facts are easily accessible and the ability to find and critically process information in order to create new knowledge becomes very important. There is too little systematic approach to the present development of curricula, the theoretical basis for courses of study are often weak and modern research is too little reflected in them.

Pedagogics needs to be included in both basic teacher-training curricula and the programmes of continuing education for teachers, and the respective material base has to be developed for that. The need to renew the university in Estonia and the entry of Estonian higher educational institutes into international competition require an improvement in internal evaluation methods. In addition, a training system for the administrative staff of universities that makes greater use of international exchange and training programmes should be worked out. A precondition for securing the academic career of young scientists is the development of the post-doctorate system and extensive participation of young researchers and lecturers in international research and higher education programmes, together with a creation of a programme of grants for studies and scientific research abroad.

According to current laws, the Higher Education Evaluation Council is to certify all higher education curricula, both academic and vocational. Such an approach is probably not expedient, as the aims of these curricula are different and evaluation criteria should be different as well. Experts with a different background and experience should be involved in the accreditation committees of vocational higher education. Certification requirements for vocational courses of study in higher education have to be worked out in light of the developing vocational qualification system.

Securing quality in higher education requires updating the infrastructure of higher educational establishments. The technical bases for instruction and research in universities are predominantly outdated, and state investments in this area are absolutely necessary. Libraries constitute an important component in the infrastructure of higher education. In present-day conditions of limited resources, supplying them with the latest study and research literature is a problem for all higher educational establishments, but particularly for private institutes of higher learning. International expert committees have also pointed this out repeatedly in their reports on the accreditation of curricula.

1.2.2. Equity in education

The general education school in the Republic of Estonia is a cohesion school (*ühtluskool*) where the national curriculum ensures equal opportunities for pupils to pass from one class into another, from one school into another. Everyone should have the possibility to acquire education according to their abilities. Ethnic, regional, age, gender and individual characteristics are taken into account when learning structures and learning contents are being selected and established.

The Estonian system of education is based on a common set of legislation, standards and a coherent system of curricula and educational institutions. Therefore the general principles do not depend on the language of instruction, ownership issues or level of studies.

The learning structure for primary, basic and secondary level stems from the state curriculum which aims at the development of all pupils, taking into account the abilities, trends and interests both of individual pupils and the entire class. Learning assignments are planned so that their fulfilment requires effort, but without being too difficult.

All children, including those with special needs, have a legal right to education. Learning activities in schools are carried out in the form of daytime study, evening courses, distance learning and graduate from school as external students.

Also hospital or home study may take place for basic school (["põhikool"]) instruction, according to an individual curriculum.

A pre-school institution for children with special needs is generally a mainstream pre-primay instution, and in certain circumstances a special pre- primary institution (there are only 3 of these).

Conditions should be established so that children with special needs can be educated in a mediation group together with healthy children. If this is not possible at the pre-primary institution in the child's catchment area, special pre- primary institution or special groups may be started up. Special pre-school learning groups and institutions support children who have problems with their eyesight, hearing or speaking, or physical or mental handicaps. The number of children in these groups is smaller than usual. In addition, family advice centres have been established to run regular rehabilitation sessions for children unable to attend pre-primary institutions.

The following classes may be established, if necessary, in a state or municipal school by the Ministry of Education or the rural municipality or city government:

1) classes for children with physical and sensory disabilities, speech impairments, sensory disabilities and mental disturbances

2) opportunity classes for teaching children with learning difficulties

3) supplementary learning classes for teaching children with slight mental disabilities

4) coping classes for teaching children with moderate and serious mental disabilities

5) nursing classes for teaching children with profound mental disabilities.

The executive bodies of local governments establish, if necessary, special groups for children of years 7-9 with behavioural disorders. The conditions and procedures for establishing such groups are determined in an ordinance issued by the Minister of Education. The Ministry of Education or executive bodies of local governments establish, if necessary, schools for children with health disorders and students with special needs.

Special education schools are intended for pupils with physical, speech, sensory or learning disabilities, as well as for children who need special treatment due to behavioural problems. Sanatorium schools are intended for pupils with health problems, where they can study and also receive the necessary treatment. At-home study is also possible. The procedures for home schooling are determined by an ordinance issued by the Minister of Education.

Comprehensive school pupils receiving special education according to approved curriculum

The number of study places for children with special needs has remained the same, whereas the number of children studying in coping classes has increased every year. In the academic year 2000/2001 38 schools were operating coping classes where the total number of pupils was 582. Before the Republic of Estonia was re-established, such children had never been included in the school system, as judged to be “unteachable” and they stayed in special care institutions or simply at home. The teaching of moderately and severely mentally challenged pupils has become important only during the last decade.

Table 3. **Children with special needs within the basic education cycle, 1996/97-1999/2000**

	1996/97		**1997/98**		**1998/99**		**1999/2000**	
	Number of pupils	% of the total number of basic cycle pupils	Number of pupils	% of the total number of basic cycle pupils	Number of pupils	% of the total number of basic cycle pupils	Number of pupils	% of the total number of basic cycle pupils
Pupils with delayed development	2917	1,58%	3795	2,04%	4152	2,22%	4477	2,42%
Pupils with slight intellectual disabilities	3105	1,68%	2646	1,42%	2616	1,40%	2727	1,48%
Pupils with medium or with severe intellectual disabilities	307	0,17%	383	0,21%	535	0,29%	582	0,31%
Pupils with the most severe intellectual disabilities	22	0,01%	25	0,01%	45	0,02%	84	0,05%
The hearing impaired	306	0,17%	236	0,13%	256	0,14%	265	0,14%
The visually impaired	162	0,09%	290	0,16%	246	0,13%	220	0,12%
Pupils with physical disabilities	214	0,12%	243	0,13%	209	0,11%	197	0,11%
Pupils with a neurological defect or development disorder	340	0,18%	280	0,15%	271	0,15%	259	0,14%
Speech, reading and writing disorders	7393	3,99%	10446	5,62%	12273	6,57%	12381	6,70%
Others	636	0,34%	647	0,35%	647	0,35%	692	0,37%
Total	**15402**	**8,32%**	**18991**	**10,21%**	**21250**	**11,38%**	**21884**	**11,84%**

The language of instruction in school is Estonian. The language of instruction in a basic school (["põhikool"]) may be another language; in the case of a municipal school, the corresponding decision is made by the local government council, and in the case of a state school, by the Ministry of Education.

Table 4**. Basic education (grades 1-9) in 1996/97-2000/01**

Year	Pupils	Instruction language was Russian	Teachers*	Pupils/Teacher	Pupils/Class
1996/97	185 145	31.6%	14,216	13.0	22.3
1997/98	186 025	30.5%	13,913	13.4	22.7
1998/99	186 665	29.3%	14,807	12.6	23.4
1999/00	184 779	28.0%	13 550	13.6	22.7
2000/01	184 895	26.7%	13 885	13.3	22.7

*the number of teachers is estimated

In a school or class where instruction is not given in Estonian, subject *Estonian as second language* is compulsory from first grade (the requirement will be valid as of autumn 2000). Currently, 85% of the students in grade 1 study Estonian in schools with non-Estonian instruction, and all children in grade 2. The curriculum and organisation of a school with non-Estonian instruction must provide a level of knowledge of the Estonian language which in the year 2007 will permit all graduates from basic school to continue their studies in Estonian.

1.2.3. Quality and relevance of education

In general education which has a crucial impact on the shaping of a person and their future decisions, the role of a teacher is particularly determinant. To a great extent, education quality depends on the teacher.

The teacher should be more and more able to direct children in the information flow and to teach them to make selections, teachers should also be able to work with students with different backgrounds and different needs.

Therefore teacher competences should be determined and corresponding study programmes should be designed as a prerequisite to quality teaching. These measures are being drafted in Estonia: teacher training framework requirements are already in place and the descriptions of qualification requirements are being drafted. Higher education institutions develop their teacher training study programmes according to these framework requirements. The vocational practice year under the guidance of a

mentor for the young teachers graduating from higher education institutions has been provided by the Estonian legislation for the first time.

The educational standards for study contents are established within state curricula.

Results of learning provided by the state curricula are mandatory for all schools. The schools are obliged to specify the learning results in their own study programmes, taking into account particular features of pupils and the possibilities of the learning environment. An overview of the learning results is obtained by a system of aptitude tests and exams.

Officials of the Ministry of Education and the county governor (state supervisory agency) exercise state supervision over schooling and education in schools. The procedures for conducting state supervision, and the evaluation criteria for evaluating the efficiency of schooling and education in a school and of management are established in an ordinance issued by the Minister of Education. The principal objective of state supervision is to facilitate the acquisition of quality education in schools and to ensure the effectiveness and legality of schooling and education

The teaching staff is evaluated internally in the schools in co-operation with the department of education of the county and the representatives of the board of trustees. The teachers are assessed by the director of the institution, and the institution is assessed by an inter-institutional attestation commission, or a commission established by the Minister of Education. The director has the authority to appoint an employee to the position of junior teacher (junior vocational school teacher, junior kindergarten teacher etc). An institutional or inter-institutional attestation commission may appoint an employee to the position of teacher (vocational school teacher, kindergarten teacher etc) and senior teacher (senior vocational school teacher, senior kindergarten teacher etc). The attestation commission established by the Minister of Education has the right to appoint an employee to the position of teacher-methodologist (vocational school teacher-methodologist, kindergarten school teacher-methodologist etc).

Institutional self-evaluation

Every educational institution is obliged to develop a system of internal evaluation. The school has a teaching council whose function is to determine, analyse and assess the schooling and education provided by the school and to make the decisions necessary for directing the school. The teaching council has as its members the teachers in the school. The authority and procedures for teaching councils have been established by an ordinance issued by the Minister of Education.

Each school has subject councils which evaluate the study results and work to improve efficiency in each subject.

In the case of internal evaluation, questionnaires and forms are also used to examine the achievement of the goals set for the teaching, and the satisfaction of the students regarding the school's organisation and instruction. Suggestions for improving the quality of the teaching are also collected.

Evaluation at regional, provincial and local level

State supervision over the instructional and educational activities of a school is carried out by officials from the Ministry of Education and by the governor of the county, i.e. the county government inspector. The procedures for state supervision and the criteria for the evaluation of management efficiency have been established by an ordinance issued by the Minister of Education.

Evaluation at national level

The state has established an education standard for every level of the Estonian education system (pre-primary, basic, secondary and higher education) that determines the general goals of study on each level, the conditions for admission and graduation (the required knowledge, skills and experience) and the methods for checking the level achieved. The quality assurance methods on the state level are the issue of teaching licenses for educational institutions and registering their curricula, state supervision, teacher quality assessment in correspondence with qualification requirements, also the evaluation of the students' study results and comparison of the results with the education standard.

State supervision of quality assurance and the function of supervision are carried out by the Ministry of Education in co-operation with the State Examination and Qualifications Centre and the Higher Education Evaluation Council, which are both under its jurisdiction. In the scope of vocational and professional qualifications, the function of quality assurance is mandated to the vocational councils, established for that purpose. Institutions that have curricula with duration longer than 6 months are obliged to apply for a teaching license issued by the Ministry of Education. For the evaluation and to improve the quality of basic study, graduation examinations based on unified materials and evaluated by unified criteria have been established. At the end of each school stage, state tests are carried out. State evaluation of students' study results and their comparison with the education standard is applied after fulfilment of the level curricula. The corresponding state examinations are organised by the State Examination and Qualifications Centre. Accreditation (["akrediteerimine"]) of curricula and institutions is carried out in those institutions with strictly formalised curricula where no comparison of study results with the education standard takes place.

The general goal of state supervision is to encourage the acquisition of quality education at school and provide efficiency and legality of study and educational activities. As a result, one of the tasks of state supervision is to analyse and evaluate efficiency of study and educational activities and management of the school, and to analyse the situation of basic and secondary education on a regional and state level. In carrying out the supervision, the state is obliged to be neutral in its evaluations, to depend on reliable information and the norms established by legislation, and to consider the results of a complete analysis when delivering a general evaluation of study and education activities at school. The results of state supervision are formulated as a report. The director is obligated to abide by any legal demands made by the state supervision body in its report. In addition, schools as a whole are checked every 3-5 years.

On a state level, higher education is evaluated through accreditation (["akrediteerimine"]).

The procedures for the accreditation of an applied higher education institution (["rakenduskõrgkool"]) and its curricula take place in accordance with the procedures established for curricula on a university (["ülikool"]) level.

The state has the primary role in ensuring the quality of formal studies by establishing the basis of a corresponding system. The quality of non-formal studies is ensured by the students themselves, trade and professional bodies and other NGOs and business sector organisations.

1.2.4. Participation by society in the process of educational change

The set of education-related legislation provides for the transfer from centralised management which characterised the Soviet era to decentralised management, whereby local decision-making and responsibility is highlighted. Therefore the prerequisite for the good functioning of the educational system is the cooperation between different actors.

Decisions on the development of the educational system are prepared with the participation of representatives from three societal sectors – public, business and third (NGOs) sector. Stakeholders are also involved in covering tuition fees to a varying extent depending on education level, learning modality and ownership.

The educational strategy vision regarding the future:

The educational system is open and flexible, able to react according to changing demands of the society and individuals, the international economy and the labour market. The system is open to international cooperation. Formal education recognised in Estonia ensures possibilities to pursue studies in other countries.

Partnership relations between the public sector, organisations, employers, employees and different associations established by civic initiative help to build a coherent society and an educational system which:

1. offers equal opportunities for all to acquire quality education,

2. regulates offers of training so that people could pursue lifelong learning and achieve compatibility between learning, working and family life according to their needs,

3. enables those who so wish to raise their qualification level in all economic branches, ensuring that the skills and knowledge acquired correspond to the changing needs of the labour market,

4. encourages people to actively participate at all levels of the social and political life of society.

1.3. Lessons learned in the process of changing and reforming education systems

1.3.1. Accepted positions

The school system renewal of 1990s resulted in transition from the *Lehrplan* to curriculum as to the learning contents. The Government of the Republic approved the national curriculum for basic and secondary education in Estonia and decided to adopt it in stages as of the academic year 1997/98 (Regulation no. 228 of the Government of the Republic from September 6, 1996). Efforts to solve curriculum implementation problems have included different cooperation projects with schools (most schools have tried to design their own development plans) and the publishing of learning materials which follow the paradigm of the national curriculum. Problems related to the implementation of the national curriculum dominate in-service training.

The Minister's Regulation No. 26 from November 13, 1996 on "Approval of the procedure regarding transfer of pupils to the next class in basic and upper secondary school, organising modalities of final exams and graduation from school" constitutes an intermediary stage in the process of establishing state examinations which have created much debate in the educational sphere. By means of state exams, a general education standard is being established. The unified contents of exams and identical conditions to conduct these exams, common assessment criteria and more impartial evaluation, due to the joint examination committee, set equal conditions for all pupils, resulting in more impartial information about the learning results and how these correspond to the standard. The preparation work has been carried out in cooperation with universities who have benifited since upper secondary graduation exams and university entry exams are now merged. Universities no longer need to organise entry exams for state exam subjects. State exams confer a basis for the recognition of our upper secondary school leaving certificate within European Union countries.

When analysing state exam results, it is possible to evaluate both the educational system and individual schools and find ways for more efficient operation of the educational system.

The principles for the renumeration of the work of pedagogical staff have been changed, and the schools and school management have more decision-making power. Within the limits of the payroll budget, school leaders have the right to allocate additional payments according to conditions agreed with the staff. The payroll budget of a school depends on the number of pupils, the cost of one study place, and the regional factor. The allocation of payroll is performed according to salary stages guaranteed for different professional stages within the salary scale of pedagogical staff.

When teacher training framework requirements were established by a Governmental regulation, job descriptions followed for teachers of general education institutions in 1995 and for pedagogical staff from kindergarten staff to university staff in 2000. Such job descriptions are based on framework requirements.

A positive example of co-operation on different levels is the way that the results of compulsory state examinations (graduation from upper-secondary school) are accepted in the admittance procedures for higher education institutions.

1.3.2. Successful and unsuccessful strategies

During the last decades major changes have taken place in the Estonian educational system both in learning contents (new structure and contents of curricula), the system structure of educational institutions (new types of institutions, restructuring of the institution network) and in organising education (new principles of managing and funding of the educational system, etc.). The progress strategies have been the most successful for developing the stronger aspects of an educational institution and the educational system. There has been less success in the so-called development strategies which were meant for overcoming bottlenecks while expecting rapid changes. Learning is becoming an activity with a long term targeted plan complete with necessary funding. In recent years the following national programmes, specific development plans and concepts have been set up:

1. "Knowledge-based Estonia". Estonian strategy for research and development activities for 2001-2006. Approved by a formal decision of the Government of the Republic of May 29, 2001;

2. Action plan for development of the vocational education system in Estonia in 2001-2004. Approved by a formal decision of the Government of the Republic of June 12, 2001;

3. Higher education reform for 2001-2002. Approved by a formal decision of the Government of the Republic of June 12, 2001;

4. Development programme "Tiger Leap Plus. Information and communication technology in Estonian schools in 2001-2005". Approved by a formal decision of the Government of the Republic of January 23, 2001;

5. Concept of Estonian youth work and development programme of Estonian youth work for 2001-2004. Approved by a formal decision of the Government of the Republic of July 3, 2001;

6. Educational strategy "Learning Estonia". Working draft

The public attention to educational issues is a positive phenomenon by which there is extended awareness of the growing importance of education to the development of the society as a whole. After the re-establishment of indpendence a system of curricula and institutions covering all levels of formal education has been developed whereas the system of in-service and voluntary training is still at the initial development stage. The Estonian educational system has extensive experience in international cooperation. In spite of growing individual features of mutual relations between the members of society, our teachers have preserved an interest regarding the future of their students. The school has maintained its important role in the development of smaller communities.

Compared to other European countries, Estonia has been relatively successful in creating popular access to the Internet. For the formation of the IT structure in schools and for the development of school education by the implementation of IT and telecommunications technology, the Tiger Leap Programme was launched in 1996 and the Tiger Leap Foundation formed in 1997 to operate the programme. In its three years of operation, the Tiger Leap Programme helped more than half of Estonian teachers to pass basic computer skills courses. However, most of them have failed to take advantage of the new information technology in teaching their subject. Curricula in our universities do not pay sufficient attention to teaching how to use opportunities for information technology, and there is no national system for further training. The largest problems relate to Internet connections in schools.

School buildings used in general education vary greatly in age. Some educational institutions are located in the rooms of old manor houses, while others are modern schoolhouses built recently. Most state schools are housed in buildings that were constructed in the 1950s. Many schoolhouses are uneconomical, built from low-quality materials and therefore in constant need of restoration and investment in capital repairs. The Rescue Board, in carrying out fire safety inspections in schools, found violations in fire-safety rules in the installation and use of electrical equipment and in the construction of heating equipment.

There are positive developments in the integration of Russian-language schools within the Estonian educational system: the number of qualified teachers of Estonian as a second language has increased and there is a growing number of teachers who are acquiring skills in Estonian (state language). However, Estonian-language subject teaching and Estonian language skills among pedagogical staff are still modest, compared to the need of skills in Estonian required to pursue studies in any upper-secondary educational institution after graduation from basic school. Further studies in Russian-language upper secondary schools reduce, one way or another, the prospect of continued studies in an Estonian higher education institution.

In spite of vocational education reform the share of vocational insitution graduates entering vocational higher education institutions has still not increased in recent years. Only 2.6% of graduates from vocational secondary schools pursued studies in higher education institutions – in other words, the vocational secondary school is still a dead-end educational path.

1.3.3. Major difficulties encountered

An increased dropout rate and the need to repeat the school year in the third stage of study have become two of the greatest problems in general education throughout the years. These problems have not worsened in recent years, but neither have they lessened since the application of the new curriculum that began with the school year in 1997. It is an alarming development, as a lot of so-called problematic young people fall under the influence of criminal groups. The large number of underage criminals that has emerged in recent years remains at an alarmingly stable level. In 1999, 2,255 crimes committed by minors were registered in Estonia, while the number of underage criminals was 1,824.

The dropout rate is also high in upper secondary school. There are several reasons for repeating the school year, or for dropping out, such as the practice of teachers working with homogeneous groups, the worsening the economic situation at home, the lack of counselling at school and so forth.

The main concerns are related to the fact that the rate of persons with basic or primary education only is especially high among those between 20 to 29 years of age. The number of people in Estonia who have had no professional training whatsoever and who have merely basic or primary education is growing. At the moment we are looking for solutions in order to avoid social marginalization.

Even though the rate of those who continue their studies after graduating from the basic school in Estonia has been rather high in recent years (98.8% continued their studies in 1999), the share of those young persons who have not managed to graduate from basic school or who no longer study at all and are aged 16 has grown in parallel to that. This figure has remained stable around 1,300 to 1,400 in recent five years. The risk groups are grades 5 to 7, and boys. Their prospects for finding a stable job are minimal and therefore this group becomes the source of major social problems (crime, drug use, etc.).

In 1999, approximately 72% of the graduates from basic school (["põhikool"]) continued their studies in upper secondary schools (["gümnaasium"]/ [keskkool]). At the same time, the number of graduates who continued their education in VET institutions (["kutseõppeasutus"]) is 26% of the age group of the graduates from the basic school. Preferring general education, aimed at achieving higher education has been a consistent tendency in recent years among young people. VET has suffered from a negative reputation in society, which is difficult and time consuming to overcome.

There are 87 VET institutions in Estonia, 15 are private, the rest are public or municipal. 10% of the schools offer only the VET programs based on basic education and 20% only the programs based on secondary education (incl. some offer also the vocational higher education programmes); the rest offer VET programmes based on both basic and secondary education. The VET schools are relatively small, 46% (40) of the schools have less than 300 students, and 17% (15) have 700 - 1400 students, the rest (32) are in between. As a system consisting of many small schools is very inefficient and therefore does not develop according to the contemporary need, the VET reform foresees merging the smaller VET schools and developing regional training centres.

The VET reform is progressing slowly and unsteadily, partly because the labour market is rapidly and constantly changing and does not give sufficiantly clear signals as to the choice and contents of professional selection, and partly because self-regulating tendencies of education have indicated that young people are convinced that in an unstable labour world general secondary education is necessary for further lifelong studies and for acquiring a profession and therefore a bigger share of VET education should be acquired after graduating from upper secondary school.

The mainstreaming of children with special needs, including children with disabilities, so that they could learn in an ordinary school and be integrated into the society is still a very painful issue.

As the salaries of teachers, university teachers and researchers are low, renewal in schools is not ensured, and it is not possible to supply enough teachers and teaching materials to the higher education sector, which is constantly expanding.

The rate of participation in adult training is modest, with the age groups being very different. Middle and senior age groups have low learning motivation, as those over 40 consider that they are too old to learn. Learning is not sufficiantly accessible to those who need it most.

1.4. Main problems and challenges facing national education at the beginning of the 21st century

1.4.1. Population decrease

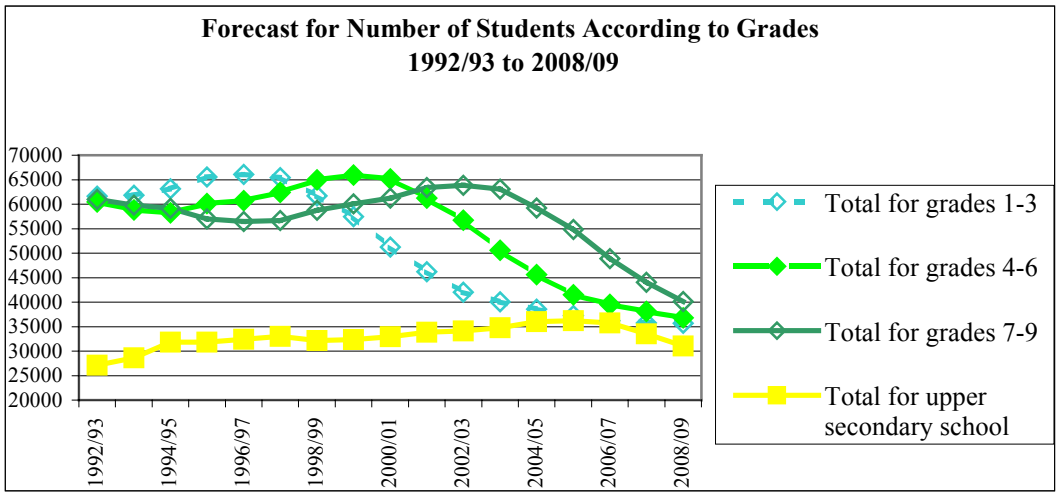
During the last decade the total number of pupils in general education has decreased by 6630 pupils. This is related to the drop in birth rate in recent years. The forecast is that the decrease tendency will continue.

The population decrease will have a very important effect on decisions concerning educational policy in the next few years. The variation in the number of students is different at different stages of study. The children born in years of high birth rate are currently studying in the 5th and 6th forms, the number of students in the 7th–9th forms will be highest in the years 2001–2003 and the number of secondary school students will be highest in the years 2004–2006. In the 2008/09 period, only 60% of the current number of basic school students will have remained; after that the decrease in the number of students will have an effect on secondary schools, vocational schools and higher educational establishments.

Lower numbers of students at different stages of study has a direct effect on the network of schools, on the basic teacher training ordered by the state and on the further training and retraining of teachers. There will be less need for form masters and a greater need for teachers specialising in various subjects. In the school year of 1999 there were 14,404 teaching posts in schools of general education. According to forecasts, by the school year 2008/09 only 66.6%, or 9,738, will remain. That is, if the ratio between the number of teaching positions and the number of students remains on the level of 1998 (14.7).

Upon graduation from primary school a student has to make his first choice about pursuing his education. In 1999, 72% of primary school graduates continued their studies in secondary school, while 26.3% went on to vocational school. The growing number of dropouts is becoming a problem in Estonia, both in primary and secondary school. The rate of primary school dropouts was approximately 0.7-0.8% in the 1993-98 period. In the 1998/99 period, it corresponded to 1,394 dropouts from primary schools, while in secondary schools the percentage was even higher – approximately

7% (2,435 students in the school year 1998/99). These young people will find it more and more difficult to cope on the labour market, since employers are not interested in hiring people with no work skills.

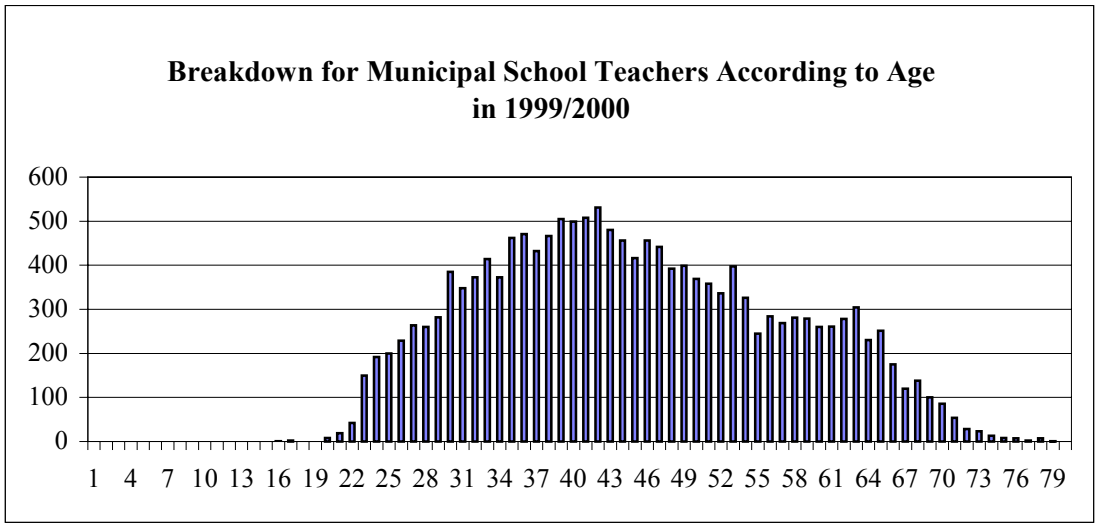


Ministry of Education, Division of Information and Statistics, 2000

1.4.2. Renewal of the system of qualification requirements of teaching staff and conferring professional skills at all levels of the educational system in order to ensure the availability of qualified teachers/teaching staff.

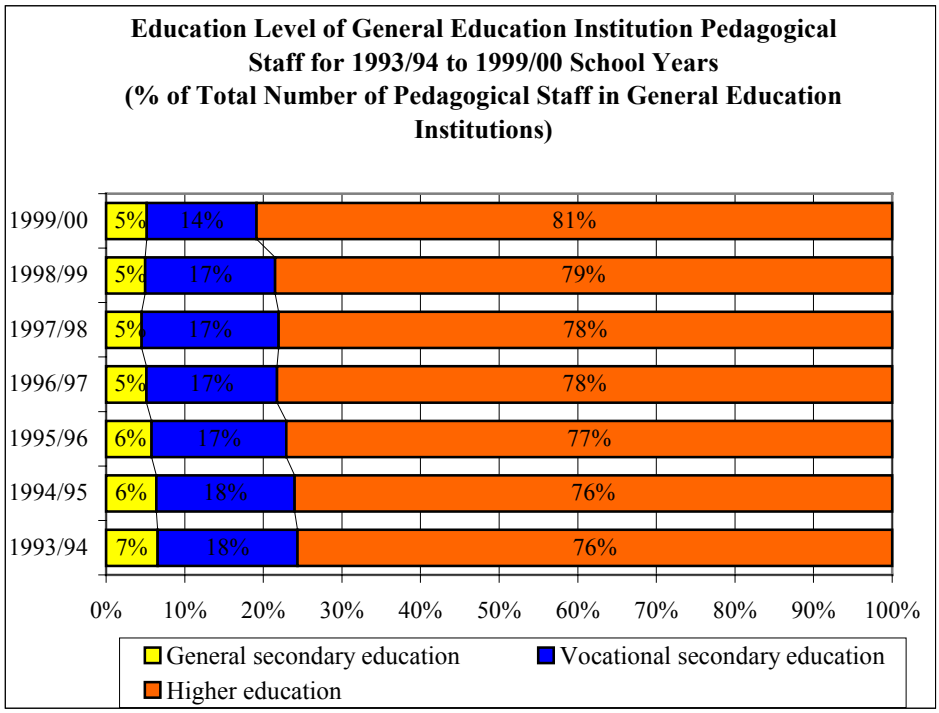
It is considered that teacher training – both pre- and in-service training – is a key issue in education, together with diversification of pedagogical literature.

The schools have not dealt actively in developing their workforce. In the school year 2000/2001 there were 17,896 teachers in daytime general education, including 15,762 main posts and 2134 teachers who also worked elsewhere. 382 teachers worked in general education evening and distance education schools.



78.3% of teachers have higher education, 16.5% secondary professional education and 4.6 general secondary education. There should be no teachers without higher education in today's general education schools.

The highest number of subject teachers who have been trained in the subject complete with pedagogical higher education are found in Russian language teaching (mother tongue) (81.8%), German language (75.9%) and mathematics (75%). There are problems with the educational level of craft teachers for boys, music and handicrafts teachers, where the number of specialised teachers having higher education fluctuates between 40 to 50%.



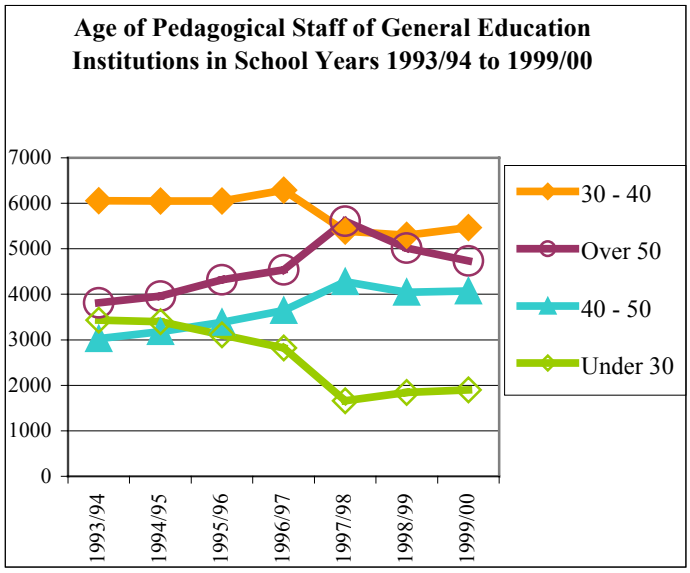
Monitoring Centre for Vocational Education and Employment, 2000

There were 15,292 female teachers (85.4%) and 2604 male teachers (14.6%) in schools.

However, the determining factor is not so much the educational level as the age. In recent years, pedagogical staff has continued to become older. The number of teachers under 40 has decreased by 2126 compared to 1993 data. As the total number of teaching staff has remained more or less the same, this means that the number of older teachers has increased.

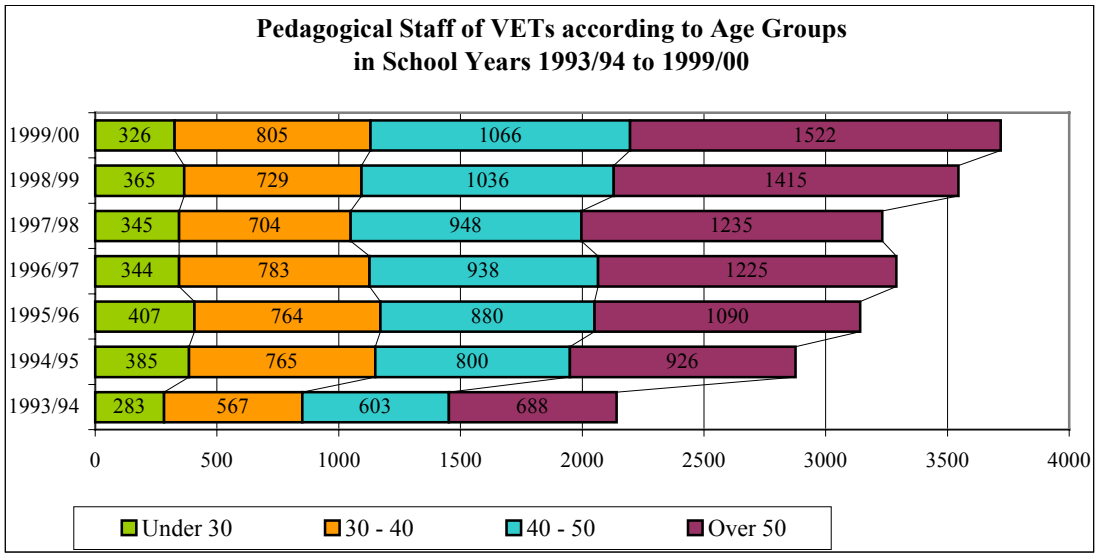
The breakdown of teachers in general education schools according to age in 2000 was the following:

56,5% female teachers aged 30-50; the percentage of those under 30 was 11,5%, that of teachers over 55 was 19,6%.
50,5% male teachers aged 30 – 50, the percentage of those over 60 was 18%, that of teachers under 30 was 11,5%.



Monitoring Centre for Vocational Education and Employment, 2000

The aging process is even clearer for VET pedagogical staff than for general education schools. The VET institutions include the biggest number of teachers over 50 and their number has steadily increased over recent years (in 1997 there were 256 teachers over 50, i.e. 8%, in 2000, 685 teachers, i.e. 18,4%). The number of teachers under 30 shows a declining tendency and this trend should be certainly reversed in order to bring more modern and youthful thinking into VET institutions.



Monitoring Centre for Vocational Education and Employment, 2000

1.4.3. Establishing to all young people up to 18 quality conditions for practising hobbies and acquiring the education which matches their abilities

In pre-primary and basic education the number of students may decrease by up to 35% until 2010, taking into account the current demographic situation.

The processes which need guided intervention include acquiring pre-primary education, school attendance in compulsory education, identification of children with special needs and creating suitable learning opportunities for them.

Study places should be ensured for all, including children with special needs, until the age of 18.

An institutional network should be established in order to detect children early who fail to attend school and to enable them to continue their studies.

1.4.4. Development of state curriculum for pre-primary, basic and general secondary education on state and school level

In the state curriculum for basic and upper secondary schools the short term main task is to translate principles expressed in the general sections of the curricula and specified aims of study into syllabi, defining more precisely study results at the end of each education level.

It is important to specify the contents of syllabi, reducing at the same time the share of mandatory study contents which is too specific and therefore interesting and necessary only for those pupils who wish to continue to study the relevant subject on an academic level.

1.4.5. Developing a modern system of state supervision and monitoring in education

Short term objectives are to further develop both internal assessment systems within institutions and external assesment systems for learning results.

The organisation of state examinations and accreditations should be improved pursuant to comparative and future-forecasting educational research. The aim is to be able to compare the state exam results by subject and by year, whereas the results of learning maths and natural sciences should be comparable on an international level.

1.4.6. Developing a network of VET institutions and relevant school curricula, taking into account particular features of the region and corresponding needs

A harmonious link between the labour market and the educational system should be established. The latter (including continuing education) should flexibly react to changes occuring in society and supply the labour market with a qualified workforce required by employers.

Professional training should be more oriented to preparing students for social changes and adaption. As the Estonian labour market is undergoing radical changes related to

integration into western markets, education should also be adapted to labour market needs. Every year, unemployment among low qualification young people is increasing, along with those who enter the labour market directly from basic or upper secondary school without any professional training. The rate of unemployment for young people aged 15 to 24 was up to 21.2% in 1999 (14.5% in 1998). Thus it may be concluded that non-attendance of compulsory school is a social problem which will amplify social problems in the future as well.

1.4.7. Reorganizing the network of higher education institutions

Taking into account the principles of the Bologna declaration, the higher education levels and qualifications should be unified.

In public educational insitutions modern systems enabling the guarantee of quality teaching should be introduced.

The accreditation process of study programmes should continue.

1.4.8. Raising awareness within the society about the necessity of lifelong learning and creating corresponding conditions to all Estonian inhabitants

In order to actively participate in a society based on knowledge it is necessary to ensure universal and constant access to learning, aiming at acquiring and improving skills.

Adult education which is a part of education should be recognised for its value, by elaborating methods of teaching and learning which will ensure lifelong learning covering all spheres of life.

The current occupational training market is oriented to employed people who mainly have higher education. Those who are already well-educated tend to be those who are ready to learn more. Training of socially marginal people should require more focusing.

Training opportunities should be brought as close to the learner as possible, with the help of ICT development.

2. Educational content and learning strategies for the twenty-first century

2.1. Curriculum development, principles and assumptions

2.1.1. The decision-making process

General principles of defining learning contents are described within the educational strategy entitled "Learning Estonia" which is subject to approval in the Estonian Parliament *(Riigikogu)*.

The curricula define which knowledge and which kind of learning and teaching is to be emphasised.

An essential parameter of selecting educational content is its relationship to practical problems of life in society, including work life. Importance is given to solution of problems of a general nature, relevant to certain professions, specialisation or crafts and those which can be foreseen for the future.

The system of curricula in a learning society should create prerequisites and opportunities for lifelong learning, offer the learner different educational options and avoid dead-ends. The quality of all curricula from pre-primary to adult education is equally important, whereas the curricula are adapted to people with special needs according to the nature of these needs. When designing and perfecting curricula for learners who have a different cultural and linguistic background to Estonians, it is important to ensure that these will support integration processes within Estonian society. At all educational levels the effort is made to suppress strict limits between general education and vocational curricula.

The development of curricula should be well-targeted and continuous, taking into account the changes occurring within society and the sciences while guiding the learning processes. When designing curricula we have to take into account the international labour market and technological developments.

When building up a **system of curricula**, the following **principles** apply:

- the system enables the learner to select different educational paths and helps to avoid dead ends;
- transfer from one curricula to another is as smooth as possible, taking into account the whole work and study experience of the student involved;
- the curriculum for basic and upper secondary schools is approved by the Government of the Republic whereas the school curriculum is approved by the board of trustees/council of the institution;
- state curricula for vocational education are approved by the Minister of Education;
- curricula for higher education are approved by the council of the relevant institution.

Pre-primary studies

The aim of pre-primary studies is to support integrated development of the child, suitable to their abilities and interests, to encourage the urge to learn, build up imagination, values and main skills needed in everyday life and progress in school. Pre-primary level studies are based on the study programme of the childcare institution within the state framework study programme.

Basic level studies

The aim of basic level studies is to develop an independent learner who is able to fix conscious choices regarding future education, who has the ability to decide and to be responsible, who is willing to cooperate, being a dignified personality and a citizen. In the basic school the student acquires the competences which help them to become integral members of society – ability to learn and readiness for lifelong learning, cooperation and work skills, ability to see the aim of their acitivites, planning and assesment, law-abiding, knowing and being able to use the principles of democracy and economy.

Bbasic education is carried out according to the school curriculum based on the state curriculum for basic level of education.

Secondary studies

The aim of secondary studies is to prepare the student for independent coping as a member of society, for competitive participation in the labour market and to continue studies at higher education level. Secondary education is carried out according to the school curriculum based on the state curriculum for the secondary level of education. Secondary curricula are characterised by their differentiation.

On the legislative level, there is a state framework curriculum and school curricula.

The state curriculum defines general education aims, length of studies, relationship between the state and school curricula, list of mandatory subjects complete with duration and syllabi, possibilities and conditions of choosing subjects and requirements regarding stages of study and school graduation, which are common in all Estonian schools. There are 4 stages of study: I stage – grades 1 to 3; II stage – grades 4 to 6; III stage – grades 7 to 9 and upper secondary school stage – grades 10 to 12.

/The standards of primary and secondary education are laid down in the national curriculum which specifies the aims and duration of study, the relation between the national and school curricula, compulsory subjects with their duration and content, opportunities for studying optional subjects and the conditions governing their selection, and the conditions that pupils or students should satisfy in terms of periods of study and with respect to their school-leaving qualifications. /

In the Republic of Estonia the state curriculum is adopted by a Regulation of the Government of the Republic. The Ministry of Education is responsible for drafting the draft regulation. The first state framework curriculum was adopted by the Government of the Republic in September 1996, its implementation started as of September 1997.

The designing of the curriculum was coordinated by the State School Board in close cooperation with panEstonian working groups for different subjects. These working groups included teachers, methodologists, researchers. Before the final draft was ready, 2 working drafts had been published in print, enabling feedback from teachers, school managers, pedagogical researchers. Many discussion panels were held, the working group introduced the curriculum principles everywhere in Estonia. In principle, all stakeholders, individuals and institutions, could express their views about the curriculum.

The state curriculum is a framework and the schools are obliged to draw up their own curricula according to this framework. The actual studies in school are based on school curricula. The supervision over the schools, i.e. the implementation of the curriculum is done by supervisory civil servants from county government education departments. Whether the mandatory study results have been reached is assessed by means of aptitude tests for all of Estonia at the end of stages I and II; and by graduating from stage III the student has acquired mandatory basic education, which is assessed by graduation exams according to unified materials. In order to graduate from upper secondary school final exams should be passed, three of them being state exams which are assessed externally.

The implementation of the state curriculum has been monitored by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with subject councils and the results have been published in compendia.

2.1.2. Curriculum planning and design

In planning the curriculum, the principles expressed in the educational strategy are the basis.

In learning society the aims of studies are the development of following aptitudes and skills as well as attitudes of students:

1. ability to learn;
2. ability to notice and solve problems;
3. ability of critical thinking and reflexion;
4. ability to choose and to forecast;
5. ability of abstract and system-based thinking, to analyse and to draw syntheses;
6. ability to decide and to be responsible;

7. skills for information processes and ability to create information (search, classify, structure, analyse, generalise, distribute, exchange and save information);

8. ability to communicate and cooperate;

9. ability and courage to generate new ideas, create new knowledge;

10. self-confidence, dignity, spirit of enterprise and activity;

11. ethical convictions;

12. national spirit and respect of foreign cultures, ability to feel both a patriot of the home region and a citizen of Estonia, Europe and the world;

13. ability to preserve one's physical and mental health;

14. taking into account principles of economical (sustainable) development.

The main aim of schools for general education is to help pupils and students develop into people who successfully manage their life and work, to their own benefit and that of society, while strengthening their sense of Estonian citizenship and responsibility towards the broader international community.

The general principles of the curriculum are the basis for the curricula of schools and for organizing cooperation in between schools.

1) Equal opportunities for receiving education;

2) Humanism and democracy

3) Nationalism and internationalism

4) Development of all students

5) The activity and responsibility of the student

6) Balanced and integrated approach

7) Focus on problematic issues

8) Openness of the curriculum

When designing the state curriculum, different curriculum-related theories were kept in mind, and support was found in the analyses of curricula of several countries, taking into account the principles for planning and implementing educational reforms in modern well-developed countries, as well as Estonian traditions and needs for the future.

The knowledge of different subject areas is included in the syllabi: languages – mother tongue and foreign languages; mathematics; nature sciences – nature studies, biology, geography, physics, chemistry; social subjects – history, human studies, civic education; art subjects – arts, music, literature; subjects related to skills – handicraft, physical education.

In addition to syllabi there are mandatory common themes within the state curriculum which are about important fields from the viewpoint of the development of the personality of the student and their social development, which are not dealt with any particular subject individually.

Topics common to all subjects in the syllabus concern spheres of life which are vital for the development of students' personal and social development and which are not tackled separately under one subject. More specific aims of the topics, issues covered and study results by class and by topic are determined in the curriculum of the school. The following list of topics is compulsory, but each school can add its selection, e.g., production/consumption, creating/art, etc.

1) Environment and sustainable development. Emphasis is put on the interrelations of natural, social and cultural environment and on the idea of sustainable attitude to the surrounding environment and sustainable development in particular. Through tackling the interrelationship between man, nature and society, it is possible to shape students' values and norms of behaviour. Through their region, students' attention is brought to the multiformity of the surrounding world and the interrelations between different phenomena. The students are taught to notice environmental problems and to be able to work out possible ways to solve them, to understand that man is dependent on natural resources and the condition of the environment as well as the ability of the environment to renew itself. The students are taught to understand and value a lifestyle that spares the environment.

2) Information technology and introduction to media. The ability to be an independent, critical and analytical consumer and a creator of information is developed in students. The students are also provided with information on the structure and qualities of information and on the systems of giving out and receiving information. The ability to interpret and to systematize information is also developed in students. The use of contemporary information technology varies the teaching process and teaching methods, and it helps to develop the ability of the students to think systematically and to acquire cursory skills of working with information. It is also of great importance to the school's communication with other schools and with the world. In specifying the curriculum and the syllabi, the resources of the school as well as the subjects on which the school focuses on are kept in mind.

3) Career guidance. School subjects and topic areas are taught so that their relation to different branches of economy or to different professions becomes clear to the students. Students are provided with information about different professions and qualifications needed for the professions, about study options in Estonia and abroad. The students are taught to analyze the demands and opportunities of the labour market, to determine and to evaluate their wishes and possibilities and to consciously prepare themselves for choosing a profession.

4) Safety. The theme consists of two topics: 1) traffic safety, 2) drug prevention.

The students are made familiar with traffic rules and problems concerning drugs. They are taught to make a conscious effort to live so that they would not be in danger. Safety education goes hand in hand with the parents of the students. The school has an advising and directing role. This topic is of especial importance in basic school.

2.1.3. Teaching and learning strategies

The main competence area within the curriculum is the ability to learn and the readiness for lifelong learning, communication and technological skills.

When learning-teaching, the learning process is planned in a way where the teacher is the planner and creator of learning activities as well as one who encourages students to learn. The teacher should be more and more able to help to direct the children in the information flow, to make choices and to work with students from different surroundings and with different needs. The teacher is bound to follow humanistic principles and standards of professional ethics, including the right to choose methodology and means suitable to learning targets. The student is a conscious and active learner, the one who acquires knowledge, processes and assesses it. The success of learning depends on the ability of the learner to learn, therefore the development of learning skills during learning process is essential. Problem-solving, project-learning, topic-learning, both team and pair work are topical issues.

/ During the two first years of schooling, subjects do not have to be distinguished from each other. The teaching can be arranged in several different ways, according to what children are able to understand and what interests them. The teaching can be arranged according to general educational methods (teaching is arranged by topics) of subject-based methods; it can also be a combination of the above mentioned methods.

During the third year of schooling, there is a smooth transition to subject-based methods of teaching./

The initial training of teachers involves the topic of curriculum. In-service training, aimed at setting up a curriculum and involving subject didactics, is organised for current teachers and school managers.

2.1.4. Assessment policies and instruments

Assessment is an integral part of educational activity. Abilities may be assessed verbally, or in written results usually indicated by numerical grades based on a five-point system, where 5 stands for “very good”, 4, “good”, 3, “satisfactory”, 2, “unsatisfactory” and 1, “poor”.

The main goal of assessment is to

- motivate the student to study systematically;

- inform students, teachers, the school board and the parents about the course of study of students;

- determine the individual study results of the students.

There are two kinds of assessment concerned, first with the learning process or, in other words, evaluation of the active participation of pupils in class and an appraisal

by the teacher of what they have achieved over a given period; and secondly, assessment of their results with respect to curricular requirements.

Assessment of study process provides information about the course of study and teaching. The objects and methods of assessment are chosen by the teacher who also decides whether the results of process assessment will be taken into account in assessing individual skills and capabilities in a given subject. Teachers are obliged to inform students and pupils of the principles underlying their assessment.

Results-related assessment is concerned with achievement in a particular subject once a certain amount of material has been covered. It might take the form of a straightforward set of short question/test-paper, a more elaborate oral examination, a presentation, a practical task, a research project or an examination. Results may be assessed internally.

Pupils a graded at the end of a complete school session or part of it (term, half-term), or at the end of an entire school course.

As a general rule, pupils are entitled to progress to the next year if they have been assessed in all compulsory subjects and never rated “unsatisfactory”. In fact, the law also enables teachers to allow pupils to move on to the following year if they have one or two such “unsatisfactory” gradings.

The academic achievements of pupils, including final satisfactory completion of schooling, is formally recorded in the award of a certificate. Pupils at institutions of general education thus receive grade/form certificates for each school year, as well as a school-leaving certificate at the end of basic and secondary school.

To finish basic school, students have to pass three final centrally-set internal examinations.

To complete their upper secondary schooling, students have to pass five school-leaving examinations, among them as minimum three national examinations. One of them is in the mother tongue (the only compulsory national examination). Two others then have to be chosen by students from the list of national examination subjects. The national exams are prepared centrally by groups of experts in the following subjects: the mother tongue (Estonian and Russian), Estonian as the official language, English, German, Russian and French as modern foreign languages, mathematics, history, biology, chemistry and physics.

The main aim of the national examinations which were introduced in 1997 is to unify grading across all schools, enhance the credibility of school diplomas, and to make school-leaving examinations compatible with university entrance exams. Most examinations are in written form (languages except the mother tongue include an oral session), and the papers are administered centrally and marked externally on a 100-point scale. A special certificate is issued to show the subjects in which students have passed their national examinations.

The study results determined within the state curriculum for every study stage end are compulsory for every school. The schools are obliged to define by grade/forms the study results in their curricula. An overview on study results, the possibility to

compare them is ensured by a system of aptitude tests and examinations (see above). The students who are not able to reach the results stemming from the national curriculum will study within the limits of compulsory education according to a simplified curriculum. Students who have difficulties in study or students who are very talented may follow an individual study plan which is set up in cooperation between the student, teachers and parents.

In basic and upper secondary school the school year begins on September 1 and lasts at least 175 study days. In the final grades of basic and upper secondary school there is in addition an examination period. The school year is divided into 4 half terms or two terms. Periodic studies are allowed. It is usual to have 5 periods of studies, each comprising 7 study weeks. During 6 periods certain subjects (not all) are learned and the seventh week is for assessments.

Table 5. **Plan for lesson allocation**

Subject	**Number of mandatory weekly lessons/courses ** according to study stage**			
	I study stage	II study stage	III study stage	Upper secondary school
Mother tongue and literature	19	15	12	12
Estonian as the second language*	6	12	12	9
A-foreign language	3	9	9	6
B-foreign language	–	3	9	6
Nature study	3	7	2	–
Geography	–	–	5	3
Biology	–	–	5	4
Chemistry	–	–	4	4
Physics	–	–	4	6
History	–	3	6	7
Human study	3	2	1	1
Civic education	–	1	2	2
Mathematics	10	13	13	9
Music	6	4	3	3
Arts and handicraft	9	–	–	–
Arts	–	3	3	3

Handicraft	–	5	5	–
Physical education	8	8	6	6
Number of weekly lessons/courses pursuant to the selection of the pupil/school***				
Estonian-language schools	7	10	7	24–33
Non-Estonian language schools	4	7	4	21–30

Note: * Mandatory only for Russian-language schools.
** A course is a 35-lesson study unit.
***In addition to mandatory lessons there are, at every study stage, lessons selected by the pupil/the school. In Russian-language schools there are less of them due to mandatory Estonian language lessons.

2.2. Changing educational content

One of the leading principles of the curriculum is the further development of the curriculum. The first curriculum involving changes has been drafted and will be implemented as of 2002. The following corrections are planned for 2004. The modification of curricula are mainly caused by changing needs/requirements of the society and the development of sciences.

In order to develop the curriculum, a Curriculum Centre was established by Tartu University in 2000, with the mission of constant renewing of the curriculum. In this work, the Centre is supported by expert groups set up by the Centre and the results of commissioned research studies. Modification proposals may be made by all educational institutions and individuals. The Curriculum Centre is drafting a renewed version of the curriculum and will forward it to the Ministry of Education who will prepare the draft regulation of the Government of the Republic. At all stages of work public discussions are held. The final draft should be at least during one month accessible at the MoE website, so that everybody can read it. The implementation of the Curriculum is supported by the curriculum department of the State Examination and Qualification Centre.

At the moment the priority is to achieve a greater integration of subjects, suppressing unnecessary repetitions and enabling the students to see different aspects of phenomena and events.

Our aim is to help the students to achieve, next to mandatory study results, sectorial competence (nature competence, communication competence, etc.). This presumes efficient cooperation between teachers.

The biggest problem is teacher training – both basic and in-service training. There are no good guidance materials for teachers.

We aim to commission training from the best training companies (from the state budget).

Guidance manuals for teachers which explain curriculum renewals are being compiled.

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