



Estonia

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Principles and general objectives of education

Article 37 of the Constitution, adopted by referendum on 28 June 1992, states that all persons residing in Estonia shall have the right to education. Both state and local governments should have a sufficient number of educational institutions to secure this right.

According to the Basic and Upper Secondary Schools Act, “general education shall be a system of knowledge, skills, proficiency, values and rules of behaviour that enable a person to develop constantly, thus making him/her able to live in dignity, to have self-esteem, to honour his or her family, other human beings and nature, and to select and acquire a suitable profession, to act creatively and to be a responsible citizen.”

The education system must ensure the preservation and development of the Estonian nation and culture, including ethnic minorities, taking into account at the same time the global economy and the global culture. Education is based on the principles of humanism and democracy, and on the respect for human beings and laws. Education focuses on the issues that are important in contemporary society: permanent change, lifelong education, sustainable development, and competitiveness in the global market.

Current educational priorities and concerns

The restoration of independence on 20 August 1991 (national independence was gained on 24 February 1918) marked the beginning of the democratization of Estonian society. Changes in social life led to a profound revision of the rigid and highly politicized Soviet education system which is still ongoing. New directions in educational policy aim at an education system which is inherently dynamic, responsive and individually focused. Educational policy is oriented to facilitating integration into Europe, strengthening the democratic foundation of the country, and enhancing humanism.

Since independence major changes have been introduced in the education system. The structure and contents of the curriculum have been renewed, new types of educational institutions were introduced, the institution network was restructured, and new principles have been applied in the management and funding of the system.

The new education system consists of compulsory basic education (Grades I-IX), followed by upper secondary education (at either an upper secondary general or vocational school) and higher education. Upper secondary education can now be obtained in some evening schools and private schools, and separate study of selected subjects is now possible. A national curriculum framework 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 of learning outcomes has also been put into place. 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. Conditions have been created that allow students with special needs to study in ordinary schools. Reforms have been particularly important in the sector of vocational education, where schools were inadequately located and courses outdated. Comprehensive measures have been designed to ensure the relevance of vocational education to labour market needs. For example, new courses on computers, law, tourism and catering, commerce and business, and mass media, have been introduced in the curriculum. In order to broaden the access of vocational education to all age groups, a special emphasis has also been 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 learners with special needs.

Since 1998, the government has also adopted higher education as a priority. Multiple developments took place to adapt the system the structure of higher education in the European Union (the country is member of EU since 2004) and to follow the Bologna process. In order to ensure quality in higher education, a national accreditation system has been applied. Furthermore, opportunities for obtaining higher education have become more extensive: an open university has been created and the state has increased the number of places available for master's and doctorate degree courses.

In sum, educational priorities have included: regional development, according to the priority of the State policy; developing a modern system of state supervision and monitoring in education; reorganizing the network of higher education institutions and unifying the levels and qualifications of the higher education system; vocational education and the reform of vocational-professional education; rebuilding the technical base of the school system, providing all schools with a computer network. In addition, the Ministry of Education has set up one more priority, namely the integration of the non-Estonian (and mainly Russian) population by special educational programmes. Priorities in the field of teacher training include: training of school leaders; promotion of Estonian language as the national language; improvement of language skills of teachers in Russian-speaking schools; retraining of foreign language teachers; computer training; and implementation of the national curriculum (i.e. co-operation between teachers and students, teamwork between teachers, recognition of the students' individuality in the teaching process, openness of schools).

At the beginning of 2004, with the view of reforming the content of general education, school regulations and the financing system, the Ministry of Education and Research initiated the Twenty-first Century Education Programme. The main objective of this Programme is to create opportunities for all students irrespective of their residence or social status to acquire quality education. The expected outcomes of the Programme are: (i) improved quality of teaching, i.e. good teachers, curricula,



modern learning environment, assessment systems; (ii) improved opportunities of access to education (reorganizing the school network, organizing school transportation, implementing support systems, etc.); (iii) transparent and effective use of resources; (iv) transparent and expedient allocation of the power of decision-making and legal liability of all stakeholders. (Ministry of Education, 2004).

The Government approved the Strategy for Lifelong Learning for 2005-2008 on 3 November 2005. Based on the strategy, the development of a financing system of adult education started in 2006, enabling people a better access to in-service training and retraining. The development of a quality system of adult education will also be started. In the course of the process, it is intended to significantly update the currently existing system of issuing education licenses. The reform of the doctoral programmes in the framework of the Bologna Process has begun and should be completed by 2007/08. The new programmes will pay greater attention to research methodology, philosophy of science, etc., which are no longer part of the master's programmes. In recent years, the number of higher education institutions has decreased mainly to the 2004 amendments to the Private Schools Act in 2004 which established more transparent requirements for running private institutions, including the minimum amount of the share capital for the owner of a private institution. The Higher Education Strategy for 2006-2015 was adopted by the Parliament in 2006. (Estonia Eurydice Unit, 2007).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

Legislation pertaining to education, vocational training and youth includes the following:

The **Education Act**, adopted on 23 March 1992, regulates the school education system. According to this law, all children who turn 7 by 1 October of the current year are obliged to attend school until the completion of compulsory basic education (nine years) or their 17th birthday. At the parents request, and taking into account the applicant's maturity, children who by 30 April of the current year turn 6 may be enrolled in the first grade of basic education. Basic and secondary education is free for all students.

. The **Pre-school Childcare Institutions Act**, enacted on 9 June 1993 and amended in 1999, determines the functions and operating procedures of pre-school establishments.

The **Basic and Upper Secondary Schools Act**, enacted in 1993, regulates the legal status and operating procedures of basic and upper secondary schools (*gymnasia*). The Act has been amended several times. The 2002 amendment concerned the language of instruction at the upper secondary level. (Ministry of Education, 2004).

The **Adult Education Act**, adopted on 10 November 1993 and amended in 1998 and 2004, establishes legal guarantees for adults for their lifelong education and regulates issues related to vocational education, on-the-job training and open education.



The **Universities Act**, adopted on 12 January 1995 and amended in 2004, contains basic regulations concerning the universities, their management and organization, admission, graduation, and awarding of academic degrees. Since 2003/04, university programmes have been structured into a three-cycle scheme according to the Bologna process. The **Law on the University of Tartu**, enacted on 16 February 1995, determines the status and the principles of management of this University. The **Hobby Schools Act**, adopted on 14 June 1995, contains basic regulations concerning the hobby school system. The **Vocational Education Institutions Act**, adopted on 14 June 1995 and amended in 1998 and 2004, determines the operation of vocational education institutions, the form and conditions for acquiring vocational education, the principles of school management, the financing of the schools and the use of school property, and the rights and obligations of the staff.

The **Law on the Academy of Science** (1997) determines the status and the organization of the Academy of Science and the basic principles of co-operation between the Academy and universities. The **Law on the Organization of Research and Development Activities** (1997) defines this type of activities and determines the basic principles of organization and management of research and development activities.

The **Private Schools Act** (1998, amended in 2004) contains improved principles concerning the management of private schools compared with the precedent law adopted on June 1993. The **Professional Higher Education Institutions Act** (1998) determines the status of applied higher education and the principles of management of applied higher education institutions. In June 2001, the Estonian Qualifications Authority was created in order to coordinate and organize the national qualifications system.

All laws have been improved and changed according to practical needs. Recently, the Education Act has been amended to include a section on study loans (guaranteed by the State at low interest rates) as subsidy credits for students of diurnal vocational and higher education institutions. The Private Schools has also been amended, reducing the obligatory state taxes for granting operating licenses.

Administration and management of the education system

As a result of the updating of legislation and the enforcement of new regulations in all aspects of life, the administration of education has been divided between different leadership/government levels. There are fifteen counties and 207 municipalities in the country. The population (1,462,130 on January 1997) includes Estonian (64.2%), Russian (28.7%), Ukrainian (2.7%), Belorussian (1.5%), Finnish (1%) and other nationalities (1.9%).

The Parliament (*Riigikogu*) adopts the laws regulating education, through which the main directions of education policy and the principles of school organization are defined. The Parliament has also to approve the amount of tuition fees. The Government approves the national curricula, decides upon the national credit remissions, establishes the principles of work compensation for education



personnel, and works out the rules concerning the assessment of compulsory school education age.

The Ministry of Education (since January 2003, the **Ministry of Education and Research**) coordinates the implementation of the education policy. It has to: ensure that the application of educational legislation is running properly; carry into effect the legal acts; ensure that the legal acts are observed; elaborate the requirements for the general contents of education and for the national curricula; establish the rules on national supervision; execute the national supervision; issue licenses to the educational institutions; recognize educational institutions; finance educational institutions according to the Law on the National Budget; enforce the financial norms to be used in the preparation of local and school budgets; ensure the methodological services for educational institutions; train the education personnel as planned by the state; administrate the public assets utilized by the public educational institutions and the education system as a whole.

After the re-organization which took place in 2001, some of the functions and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and Research were transferred to other bodies, e.g. curriculum development became the responsibility of the **National Examination and Qualification Centre** and the **Curriculum Development Centre**. Some of the functions of the Ministry were allocated to the recently established units, such as the **School Network Bureau** and the **State Properties Administration Bureau**. (Ministry of Education, 2004).

The **county governments** and their structures include the **Departments of Education**, which have to: execute national supervision over the activities of pre-school institutions and schools; formulate the education development plans of the county; disseminate information on public financing, and to inform the Ministry of Education; organize events for students and teachers of the counties; and advise the local governments on educational issues.

Local governments have to: organize and maintain pre-school institutions, primary, basic, secondary, evening schools, schools of voluntary education, gymnasiums, libraries, cultural centres, museums, sport centres, and other local institutions in the municipality or town concerned if these are under the responsibility of the local government; assess the number of children at compulsory education age; control how the requirements of compulsory education are met; assign positions to leaders of the municipal educational institutions; prepare and implement the regional education development plans; establish the supervisory bodies of schools and childcare institutions; organize and be responsible for medical services and catering.

The **supervisory body** of the school has to: discuss the school development plans; select and recruit the candidates to the post of school leader; co-ordinate the schools charter, budget plan and curriculum; approve the membership of the school staff before appointment; approve the salary rates of the educational personnel proposed by the school leader; participate in the process of recruitment of teachers; help to solve problems in schools; supervise school activities; decide upon the provision of material support to students based on the school's proposals; and organize support for schools.



The **head teacher** has to: ensure the effective running and organization of the school; manage effectively the teaching and the school's financial activities in co-operation with the supervisory body, the Education Council and the Students Board; sign the employment contracts of staff; and organize job interviews for vacant posts of teacher. The **Education Council** has to define, analyze, and evaluate teaching activities in schools and carry out the necessary decisions concerning the management of schools.

Private schools are administered according to the procedures fixed in their statutes. Their educational activities are supervised pursuant to the regulations of the Ministry of Education.

Universities and higher education institutions are free to determine their academic staff and organizational structure, the content of study programmes and research, curricula and study plans, admission and graduation criteria, organization of research, and eligibility criteria for lecturer applicants and researcher posts, according to the current laws and regulations.

The major administrative novelty is that educational institutions now enjoy greater autonomy. The decentralization of administration in education means that decision-making powers together with broader responsibilities have been delegated to localities, and teachers are encouraged to contribute to the school improvement process.

The Pre-school Childcare Institutions Act, the Basic and Upper Secondary Schools Act and the Private Schools Act stipulate that the national supervision over schooling activities is carried out according to the rules established by the Ministry of Education, which determines the priorities for state supervision.

The national supervision is carried out by the Department of Supervision of the Ministry and Education Departments of the county governments, whereas the **National Exam and Qualification Centre** organizes and carries out the national examinations. The **Estonian Qualifications Authority**, established in June 2001, coordinates and organizes the national qualifications system.

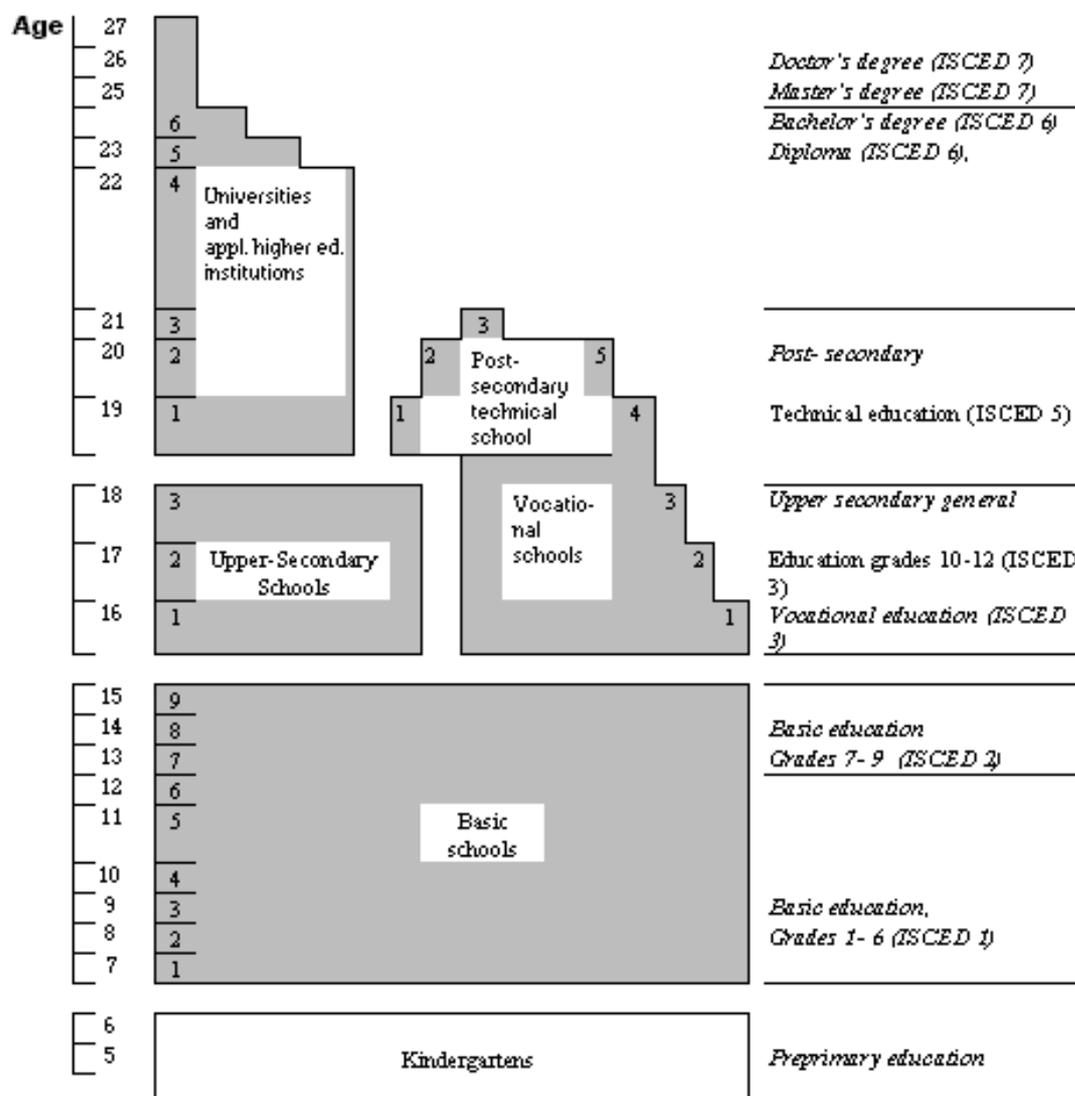
In addition to the external evaluation, internal evaluation of school activities is becoming increasingly more important. From the perspective of self-evaluation, efficiency has been mostly emphasized, in particular concerning the following aspects: material basis; costs per student; teachers qualifications; teachers in-service training; ratio of teachers to students; age and sex composition of personnel; failing classes; usage of school buildings; teachers optimal exploitation; development potential of teachers, students, and the school; participation of parents; study conditions for problematic children. Other aspects are also taken into account: the internal environment (psychological climate; organizational culture; clarifications of the objectives and problems; adoption and acknowledgement of the objectives; information exchange); outcomes (study results; progress of the students; students individual skills; students self-motivation, active attitude and responsibilities; students participation in out-of-school activities; balanced structures of the curricula and achievement of the objectives); and influence (competitiveness, success and progress in life; confidence in life; willingness to communicate; correlation between

study life and private life; the school as creator, preserver and consumer of values; social activity; students' orientation towards citizenship). Both the quantitative and qualitative indicators are used for evaluation and both the internal and external evaluations are of special importance.

During the transition from centralized decision-making and financing to decentralized decision-making on local government, county government and school levels, negotiations have become more important. Issues subject to negotiations include: the comprehensive analysis of the education institutions network; the placement of the student contingent; the needs for education at different levels; the qualifications of teachers working in the region; the curriculum in the regional schools; the teaching material base of schools; the established pedagogical and cultural traditions; the historical consistency; the regional social needs; and the role of the school in the educational and cultural development of the region.

Structure and organization of the education system

Estonia: structure of the education system





Pre-school education

Pre-school education is not compulsory and is mainly offered by the following types of establishment: baby care centres or crèches for children up to 3 years old; kindergartens for children aged 3-6; day-care centres for children aged 1-6; and kindergarten-primary schools.

Primary education

Basic education is compulsory for all children aged 7 and lasts nine years (Grades I-IX). General basic education is offered in primary schools (Grades I-IV), basic schools (Grades I-IX), and upper secondary schools (gymnasias) with basic school classes (Grades I-XII). General basic education consists of two levels: Grades I-VI and Grades VII-IX.

Secondary education

Upon completion of basic education, students may continue their studies at a school offering upper secondary general education (gymnasium), a vocational education and training school or a post-secondary technical school. Upper secondary education lasts three years (Grades X-XII) and offers students the opportunity to choose between various branches of study, including general, humanities and science.

Postsecondary technical schools, the higher level of vocational institutes, offer programmes lasting two and a half years for those who have graduated from an upper secondary education programme (i.e. gymnasium or vocational school) or about five years for those who have graduated from basic schools.

Higher education is offered by universities and professional higher education institutions; some postsecondary technical schools also offer courses leading to a higher education diploma. Professional diploma programmes normally last four to five years. Within the framework of the Bologna process, university programmes are structured into three cycles. A bachelor's degree programme takes three to four years to complete. Master's degree programmes last one to two years. Doctoral degree programmes normally last three to four years.

The school year begins on 1 September and consists of no less than 175 working days or thirty-five working weeks. At the pre-school level, the school year begins no later than 1 October and ends on 1 May, consisting of thirty working weeks. The academic year begins in September and ends in the first half of June. As a general rule, it comprises forty weeks including lectures, seminars, practical training and the examination period. The academic year is divided into two semesters. Generally lectures end in May. The length of studies is measured in credits. One credit corresponds to forty hours (one study week) of studies (lectures, seminars, practical training, independent works). The nominal study year is comprised of forty credits.

The financing of education

Pre-schools receive their resources from the local budgets, receipts from funds, parents, institutions, enterprises, organizations, and individuals single-purpose contributions. Parents cover a part of students' teaching and catering expenses according to the decision of the local council. The Ministry of Education determines the marginal rates for teaching and catering expenses.

Schools receive their resources from the national and local budgets, receipts from single-purpose funds, institutions, enterprises, organizations and individuals' contributions and paid services related to the schools' activities. Expenses of public schools are covered by the national budget. Regarding municipal schools, expenses for textbooks, teachers salaries, school leaders and their deputies are covered by the national budget resources allocated to the Ministry of Education, based on the number of students at school. The local governments are responsible for all other expenses. Local governments budgetary resources are determined on the basis of normative expenditures, which should be necessary for acting according to their responsibilities. When necessary, the local governments may apply for supplementary budget support from the State, as their actual budget is based on a local tax base.

Tuition fees are not charged at public and municipal schools. Students have not to pay for the textbooks covering the curriculum.

State applied higher education institutions and public universities are financed by the State. In these institutions, higher education is free for students who are Estonian citizens during the nominal study time. Foreign students have to pay tuition fees. Private higher education institutions are fee-paying.

In 1999, 17.3 % of total public expenditures were spent on education. The share of the municipal budget spent on education was 39.8% and the share of the state budget was 11.3%. According to Eurostat, the total public expenditure on education represented 5.09% of GDP in 2004.

The educational process

The first national curriculum framework was adopted by the government in September 1996, and its implementation was started in September 1997. In close cooperation with the working groups that consisted of teachers and researchers for different subjects, the State School Board coordinated the design of the curriculum. Before preparing the final draft, two working drafts had been published and sent out in order to receive feedback from teachers, school managers, and pedagogical researchers. Many discussion panels were held. In principle, all stakeholders, individuals and institutions may express their views about the curriculum.

The national curriculum 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.



Schools draw up their own curricula according to the state curriculum framework. Civil servants from county government education departments implement the curriculum. Whether the mandatory study results have been reached is assessed by means of aptitude tests at the end of stages I, II and III. In order to graduate from upper secondary school final exams should be passed, three of them being state exams which are assessed externally.

One of the leading principles is the further development of the curriculum. A Curriculum Centre was established by the Tartu University in 2000, with the mission of constantly renewing the curriculum, with public discussions held at all stages of work.

Pre-primary education

Pre-primary education is a prerequisite of satisfactory progress in everyday and school life. Compared to the 1980s, pre-school childcare institutions have become significantly more open, and more attention is paid to the role of the private sphere (home and family). The role of the childcare institution is to support the physical, mental and social as well moral and aesthetic development of children, in order to form prerequisites for succeeding in everyday life and at school. Several new types of education and care, and cooperation with different institutions have emerged. Innovations include family care, reconciliation groups for children with special needs, family advice services, and foundation of private kindergartens and children's centres.

The objectives and tasks of the pre-primary education are laid down in the Pre-school Childcare Institutions Act and in the national curriculum. The curriculum does not regulate the actual time spent on the specific activities, but it defines the fields, the subject matters, the knowledge and skills, which have to be dealt with or acquired by the child. The 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, while the local government authority determines which language should be used in institutions employing only a single language for their classes.

In 2000/01, the combined gross enrolment ratio for pre-primary school was 102% and the children-teacher ratio was 1:8 (1:9.5 in 2005/06). In 2006, 80% of children aged 1-6 years attended pre-schools, while for those aged less than 3 years the percentage was 34.4%. (Estonia Eurydice Unit, 2007).

Childcare institutions offer instruction until the age of 7. Groups are organized according to the age of the children: the smallest ones (1-2-year-olds) and the small ones (2-3-year-olds); younger children (3-4-year-olds); medium-aged children (4-5-year-olds); and older ones (5-6-year-olds). Sometimes combined groups of children of different ages are organized.

Reconciliation groups, special groups and special kindergartens provide the environment necessary for children who need special teaching and special care. The size of the reconciliation group is smaller in comparison with the ordinary group, usually consisting of two or three children. It also depends on the number of disabled children in the group, usually one or two per group, and the severity of their disability. Pre-school special learning groups are created to support the children with sight,



hearing, speaking, physical or mental disabilities. In addition, several family advice service centres have been established in order to take care of periodical rehabilitation sessions.

Teaching and catering expenses are currently covered by the local government budgets and parents. The part covered by parents may vary according to the respective decision of the local council, based on the parents' financial circumstances.

A primary school can be combined with a kindergarten. The childcare institution may operate permanently or seasonally, which is decided by the executive body of the local governments based on proposals of the supervisory body. The executive body also decides upon the working hours of the child institutions, based on the needs of the parents.

Pedagogical staff of child institutions are responsible for the selection of instructional methods and materials. The institution has to establish rules for carrying out an effective evaluation of teaching activities and children's progress, based on the curriculum requirements. The evaluation is informal and the transfer of children from one group to another does not depend on the evaluation results.

In pre-schools pedagogues, music teachers and leisure-time teachers are employed. The training of kindergarten personnel entails the necessary theoretical and practical skills, emphasizing: familiarity with the child's development and his/her growing environment; consideration of the child's individual needs and peculiarities; familiarity with the curriculum requirements; and ability to use a creative approach in teaching activities. Personnel is trained at diploma-level studies and degree-level studies at higher education institutions and universities. The employer is responsible for provision of opportunities for further training for personnel at the pre-school child institutions, whereas the employment contract of pedagogical personnel does not include any obligation for the staff to attend further training courses. A development plan for teacher training, completed in 2003, describes the changed roles of a teacher and the competencies necessary for working in this profession; competency-based teacher training and evaluation of qualification are set as an objective. According to the plan, a graduate from teacher training has to pass the "on-the-job" qualifying phase, i.e. a year of practice under the supervision of an experienced mentor, whereupon the conformity of his or her competencies to the requirements of the professional standard shall be evaluated.

Pre-primary education is based on the programme approved by the Ministry in 1987, consisting of the following elements: mother tongue, mathematics, music, arts, physical training and handicraft, focusing on developing children's abilities to play, communicate and work; hygiene, tidiness and habits; introduction to the environment; nature studies; speech development; development of elementary conceptions; creative activities; music. Depending on the age, there are from one to three study units of each subject per week. A new curriculum is being developed focusing on: consideration of children's individuality; sustaining children's creativity in the learning process and play; co-operation of child care institutions and parents in the educational process; health education.



Basic education

Basic education is free and compulsory. A child generally begins basic education at 7. Compulsory school attendance may be fulfilled in the form of home study on the conditions established by the Ministry of Education.

Parents may freely select the institution. The aim of general basic education is to facilitate the cultivation of individuals in order to make them able to successfully manage their life and work, improve themselves and the society, and to identify themselves as members and citizens of their nation, responsible for the future of Europe and the world.

The National Curriculum for Basic and Secondary Education was ratified by the Government on 6 September 1996 through the Act No. 228. A transition to a more pupil-centred instruction has begun via the curriculum design process. This implies that students and teachers are co-operating partners, providing the students with an increased liberty of choice and enhanced responsibility for their learning achievement. The implementation of the national curriculum began in Autumn 1997 in Estonian-speaking schools, whereas in Russian-speaking schools the transition started in Autumn 1998.

Both the Estonian- and Russian-speaking schools are treated as parts of a uniform education system. There are special provisions for the schools whose language of instruction differs from the national language. From the school year 1993/94, the length of studies in both Estonian and Russian general secondary education institutions became the same by adding one year to the curricula of Russian-speaking schools. In 1997, a Development Plan for Schools was elaborated under the leadership of the Ministry of Education. According to this Plan the language of instruction may differ from the official language (Estonian). The Plan was approved by the Government on 22 January 1998.

The national curriculum establishes the principles governing school activities and sets up the frame for the organization of the teaching process and its content for all general education institutions, regardless of their language of instruction. The schools, based on the national curriculum, define their work programme called school curriculum. The national curriculum determines the objectives and duration of studies, the relationship between national and school curricula, the list of compulsory subjects with time duration and content, the opportunities and conditions for selection of subjects, and the requirements for students in terms of different study periods and graduation.

Teaching regulations for each stage of schooling consist of a general characterization of the educational work, academic achievements developed and subject schedules (course plans). Subject schedules specify the number of lessons for compulsory subjects and electives in basic school and the number of lessons for compulsory courses in gymnasium. The maximum weekly load for the first stage (Grades I-III) is: 20 lessons in Grade I; 23 lessons in Grade II; and 25 lessons in Grade III. In the second stage (Grades IV-VI), the maximum number of weekly lessons is 25, 28 and 30, respectively. In the third stage (Grades VI-IX), the maximum number of weekly lessons is 30, 32 and 34, respectively.

The weekly lesson timetable for the basic education school (model for the 1993/94 school year) is shown in the table below:

Basic school: weekly lesson timetable (model for the 1993/94 school year)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade								
	First stage			Second stage			Third stage		
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Mother tongue	6	8	5	5	4	3	2-3	2	2
Literature	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2	2
First foreign language	-	-	4	4	4	3	3	3	3
Second foreign language	-	-	-	-	-	4	4	3	3
Mathematics	3	4	5	5	5	5	5-4	5	5
Computer science									
Economics									
Regional studies	2	2	2	2	2	-	-	-	-
Natural sciences									
Geography	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2-1
Biology	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	1-2
Chemistry	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3
Physics, astronomy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
History	-	-	-	2	2	2	2	2	2
Civics	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Human development	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Religion									
Music	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
Artistic education	3	3	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
Handicraft	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Drawing									
Physical training	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2
Total compulsory weekly periods (max.)	20	23	25	27	28	29	29	31	32
Optional lessons	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	3

Source: Ministry of Culture and Education, 1994. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

Assessment at the basic and secondary levels is part of the educational process. Assessment can be verbal (analysis/assessment) or expressed in a numerical mark. Competencies are assessed orally, while study results are usually indicated by numerical mark using a 5-point scale (5: "very good"; 4: "good"; 3: "satisfactory"; 2: "unsatisfactory"; 1: "poor"). National examinations use two scales: a 10-point system and a 100-point system.

There are two methods of grading: process grading (grading single or interim results) and estimate grading (grading the results determined in the curriculum). Grading the study process provides information about the course of study and teaching. Students have the possibility to evaluate their previous studying process and, if necessary, make adjustments. Estimate grading is applied to the results obtained in a particular subject after covering a certain part of the programme.



The main objective of the national exam is to unify the tenor of grades on the school reports all over Estonia, to provide school diplomas recognized by the State, and to make the gymnasium final examinations compatible with the entrance exams to universities. National exams are commonly carried out in written form; the students' work is graded by a nationwide grading committee. A state exam report is issued to certify that the student has passed the exam. The regulations for carrying out state exams are enforced by the Ministry of Education.

Successful students are awarded a certificate. The format and statute of the certificate is approved by the Government. Students of general education institutions receive grade certificates for each academic year and school leaving certificates at the end of basic school and upper secondary/secondary school. Students passing the national exams receive exam certificates.

In 2000/01, the combined gross enrolment ratio for primary school was 103%, and the pupil/teacher ratio was 14:1.

Upper secondary education

The aim of secondary studies is to prepare the student for university level studies, competitive participation in the labour market and independent coping as a member of society.

Upper secondary general education (Grades X-XII) is a precondition for continued studies at the higher level. Admission to upper secondary schools is based on the basic school graduation results. The maximum weekly load at gymnasium is thirty-five lessons (each lesson lasting forty-five minutes); in 2002, it has been established that the *minimum* weekly load at gymnasium is thirty-two lessons (Ministry of Education, 2004). The weekly lesson timetable (model for the 1993/94 school year) is presented in the table below:

General secondary school: weekly lesson timetable (model for the 1993/94 school year)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade		
	X	XI	XII
Mother tongue	2	2	1
Literature	2	3	3
First foreign language	2	2	2
Second foreign language	3	2	2
Mathematics	3	2	2
Computer science			
Economics			
Regional studies			
Natural sciences			
Geography	1	–	–
Biology	1	2	–
Chemistry	2	1	–
Physics, astronomy	2	2	2
History	3	3	–
Civics	–	–	2
Human development	1	1	1
Religion			
Music	1	1	1
Artistic education	1	1	1
Handicraft			
Drawing			
Physical training	2	3	3
Elective subjects	8	8	7
Total compulsory weekly periods (max.)	32	32	32
Optional lessons	4	4	4

Source: Ministry of Culture and Education, 1994. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

Curricula of upper secondary education at vocational institutions are based on the national curriculum and approved by the Ministry of Education. Compulsory subjects constitute 70%, optional subjects 20% and elective subjects 10% of the general secondary education curriculum. There are two distinct curricula in the vocational education system: the curricula offered at vocational schools (skilled workers) and the curricula provided at post-secondary technical schools (technicians).

In 2000/01, the gross enrolment ratio for secondary school was 92%, and the pupil/teacher ratio was 10:1. In 1999, 72% of students continued their studies at upper secondary schools, with numbers increasing every year. The share of young people who enter higher education after graduating from the secondary cycle has also increased from 24,464 students in 1992 to 56,437 students in 2000). New opportunities at the higher education level have contributed to this trend.

Reforms of vocational education have been taking place since 1996. At the beginning of 1996, the Department of Vocational Education and Training (VET) was



re-established. The Department has two structural units: Educational Management Services and Adult Education Services. Curriculum Services, which initially was the third unit of this Department, was merged with the National Exam and Qualification Centre in 1997. Finally, in June 2001 the Estonian Qualifications Authority was created in order to co-ordinate and organize the national qualifications system.

Institutions offering vocational training fall under several ministries, municipalities and private organizations, such as: the Ministry of Education, the National Police Board, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, municipalities and private organizations. Currently, a total of eighty-seven educational institutions provide vocational education. Out of eighty-seven, fifteen are private, the rest are public or municipal. About 60% of VET institutions use Estonian as language of instruction; 20% use Russian and the remaining 20% use both Estonian and Russian.

Different levels of vocational education (i.e. curricula based on basic education and curricula based on upper secondary education) are often offered in the same facilities, in order to effectively utilize the investment on equipment and building maintenance. The existing curricula are generally oriented towards the provision of theoretical knowledge followed by primary practice in school workshops and subsequent practical training with enterprises. In recent years, new courses have been introduced in order to meet the needs of the national market economy (e.g. business management, navigation, aviation, tourism, police and military, etc.).

In November 1997, a discussion began concerning changes to be introduced in the Vocational Education Institutions Act. The amendment ensures integrated financing of VET and makes the development and application of programmes more flexible and obvious for different parties. In the course of several years the inadequate link between vocational institutions and employers has been another important problem. 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.

An important aspect in the reform of vocational education was the establishment of the National Employee Qualification Centre in January 1997. The Centre deals with programme requirements, qualifications, examinations, grading and evaluation. Representatives of the trade unions and employers will be involved in VET through Vocational Councils, which are working bodies developing qualification requirements in order to define programme requirements.

The VET schools are relatively small. Forty-six per cent of the schools have less than 300 students, and 17% have 700-1,400 students, the rest 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 reform foresees merging the smaller VET schools and developing regional training centres.

According to the Vocational Education Institutions Act, the founder(s) of a school form(s) a body of five to seven members in order to direct the activities of the



institution and to make decisions about school development, assets and budget. The Council of the institution includes: the representatives of founder(s); professional/vocational, special and other experts on the fields taught in the school; employers connected to the educational fields; representatives of the local municipalities; outstanding persons living in the region where the school is located; and the student board. Activities of the Council should guarantee an increased involvement of the school's co-operating partners in order to create better conditions for school activities and to ensure school development. The Learning Council decides upon questions related to learning activities of the institution. The Learning Council includes teaching staff of the school and the headmaster.

Assessment in vocational schools is carried out utilizing the same five-point scale as in basic education. Graduates from vocational schools are awarded a graduation certificate, which specifies the curriculum covered but does not confirm the qualifications gained. In future, when qualifications can be graded, the situation may change. At VET schools diurnal, evening and distance learning is allowed. The academic year comprises a minimum of forty working weeks.

In 1999, the number of students continuing their education at vocational education institutions decreased to 26%. Furthermore, relatively high drop-out rates are evident in vocational education. In the school year 1998/99, 12.2% of girls and 13.9% of boys left school. The high drop-out rate points to the need for better vocational guidance and study assistance in the institutions of vocational education.

The total number of students in vocational and secondary professional education at the beginning of the academic year 1997/98 was 31,316, (27,034 in full-time courses, 1,972 in evening courses and 2,310 in correspondence courses). A total of 18,563 students studied in vocational education and 12,753 in professional secondary education. In recent years, a tendency to continue education at gymnasium instead of at vocational schools has increased among graduates from basic schools.

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The preparations for state examinations began in 1994, so that state graduation diplomas can be issued as a document confirming acquisition of a state education standard. These provide the basis to unify the upper secondary final exams and the entrance exams for higher education institutions. In spring 1996, there were test examinations in English and German, pre-testing was done in mathematics and chemistry, and preparations have been made for Estonian as the mother tongue examination. In conjunction with the implementation of the new curriculum, tests are being prepared to confirm the standard at each educational level.

Higher education

Higher education policy is defined by the Ministry of Education and Research. The Ministry is assisted by a number of management and consultative bodies which fulfil particular tasks or roles at administrative or teaching level. These include: the Higher Education Advisory Chamber, a consultative body of representatives of universities on problems related to university education; the Research and Development Council,



a consultative body chaired by the Prime Minister; the Estonian Science Foundation, a consultative body of experts on the financing of science projects; the Estonian Innovation Fund, consultative body at the Ministry of Economic Affairs regarding problems related to financing the development of science; and the Higher Education Evaluation Council, responsible for the accreditation of higher education institutions.

Higher education in Estonia consists of: (a) professional higher education, offering diploma programmes (three to four years of study); (b) academic higher education, offering bachelor's degree (three to four years of study), master's degree (one to two years of study) and doctoral degree (three to four years of study) programmes. Accordingly, there are two types of higher education institutions: universities, offering academic higher education and diploma programmes, and professional higher education institutions, offering diploma programmes.

A university is an institution of learning, culture and research in which a student may acquire the academic qualifications at the higher education level in a number of subjects. A university may also offer diploma programmes for applied higher education. A professional higher education institution is an institution offering non-academic higher education. A military higher education institution is a special type of professional higher education institution that may have special conditions for enrolment and graduation. Professional higher education is mainly concerned with professional skills and abilities. The Estonian National Defense and Public Service Academy is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and consists of five colleges. The diplomas awarded by the Academy are equivalent and have the same validity as the corresponding higher education diplomas.

Depending on the supervisory power, it is possible to identify three types of higher education establishments: state establishments, financed from the State budget; municipal establishments, which receive their finances from the local government budget; the State may also participate in funding municipal institutions or certain programmes according to the needs through the Ministry of Education; private establishments, financed by their owner(s) but the State may also participate in the financing of certain programmes according to the needs.

Similar to the supervisory bodies of universities are advisory bodies in applied higher education institutions. Advisory bodies help to specify the field of activities of the institution, scope of financing and complementary sources; they evaluate the performance of the institution and provide development proposals. An advisory body consists of the rector, the representative of the responsible Ministry, and representatives of other boards/offices, professional/vocational unions and the public.

There are general and specific requirements giving access to studies at the first stage of higher education. General requirements are approved by the Ministry of Education and they are valid for all higher education institutions. General requirements include an upper secondary school-leaving certificate or a postsecondary professional (technical) school-leaving certificate; and an attestation of success in the entry examinations (state examinations). Specific requirements depend on the type of higher education institution and the specialty. Specific requirements may include: the number of examinations, which can range from one to four; the form of entrance examinations (written/oral examination or interview); additional requirements such as



the average mark on the secondary education leaving certificate or the average mark in a given subject. In public universities there is a quota for admission that is fixed by the state and covered by the state allocation. But universities have the right to accept students on a fee-paying basis in addition to the quota determined by the state.

Diploma programmes in applied higher education institutions normally comprise one stage. The normal duration of programmes is three to four years (120-160 credits). Some private business schools provide two stages of applied education: the first stage is a two-year certificate programme, and the second stage a two-year diploma level programme.

The instructors of application-oriented subjects of diploma programmes shall have no less than five years of specialist working experience. No less than half of the curriculum subjects shall be conducted by teachers having a master's degree or equivalent or by acknowledged creative artists in the field of arts and music. Diploma study shall be specialized, application-based higher education studies, consisting of studying and acquiring practical knowledge and skills. After the graduation students will be awarded with the Diploma in Higher Education.

In the framework of the Bologna process, since 2002/03, academic studies are structured into three cycles:

- Bachelor's degree is the first cycle, during which the student increases his/her level of general education and develops theoretical knowledge and skills for his/her selected area of employment and further study. The usual duration of study for a bachelor's degree is three to four years (120-160 credits), ending with the defense of a final thesis and the award of the diploma with *Bakalaureuse kraad*. No less than half of curriculum subjects shall be conducted by academics, holders of a PhD or other equivalent academic degree or by acknowledged creative artists in the field of arts and music.
- Master's degree is the second cycle. At this stage, the objective is to impart abilities and research skills in the selected specialty in order to be able to undertake research testing the theories, the comprehensiveness and the applicability of the given specialty. Enrolment in a master's degree programme is open to holders of a bachelor's degree. The normal duration of a master's degree programme is one to two years (40-80 credits), completed with the defense of a thesis which may be of a theoretical or of a professional nature. Successful students are awarded the diploma with *magistri kraad*. No less than three fourths of curriculum subjects shall be conducted by academics, holders of a PhD or other equivalent academic degree or by acknowledged creative artists in the field of arts and music.
- Doctoral degree is the third cycle, the goal of which is to raise the level of knowledge and skills of a candidate in the given specialty to that of an independent professional. Candidates are assumed to hold a master's degree or an equivalent qualification in the field chosen. The normal duration of doctoral studies is three to four years (160 credits), completed with the defense of a doctoral thesis and the award of the diploma with *Doktori kraad*. All the subjects of the curriculum shall be supervised by academics having a doctorate



or other equivalent academic degree or by acknowledged creative artists in the field of arts and music. The reform of the doctoral programmes within the framework of the Bologna process should be completed by 2007/08.

Master's and doctoral degrees are divided into two categories: academic degrees and professional degrees. An academic master's or doctoral degree is awarded to a university graduate who has written a thesis based on academic studies. A professional degree is awarded to a university graduate who, through the defense of a final thesis or by some other method (e.g. state examination), has given proof of professional creativity of the applicable level.

There are additional requirements for basic medical and teacher study. The nominal duration for basic medical studies shall be six years (240 credits in total). The graduation level of basic medical study corresponds to master's degree programmes. The graduation does not enable to work as an independent practitioner physician. Teacher's study shall be performed in the form of ordinary diploma studies or passing an additional study programme to bachelor's or diploma degree programmes.

The Standards of Higher Education is a collection of requirements that has been determined by the government for all stages of higher education, determining: the planned goals for the applicable instruction in order to acquire a specialty, vocational or professional competency; vocational and specialty area lists; and general requirements for graduating from a university, including the requirements for the final thesis. All higher education establishments are obliged to end the subject courses with an examination or a preliminary examination. There might be several independent examinations in separate parts of a subject. The result of an examination is given by a mark establishing the level of knowledge of the candidate being examined. A preliminary examination may be expressed as a mark or verbally—passed or not passed.

Only state higher education institutions and public universities recognized by the state have the right to award the applicable diplomas or degrees. Private higher education institutions must obtain a teaching license from the Ministry of Education in order to offer instruction at the higher education level. Private higher education institutions are recognized after the accreditation and then have the right to award the applicable diploma.

The Ministry of Education monitors learning activities in postsecondary vocational education institutions, professional higher education institutions and universities. In order to monitor private universities and professional higher education institutions, the Ministry establishes a special committee of experts, which controls whether the requirements derived from legal acts and rules about the single-purpose use of the resources allocated from the State budget are followed or not. Experts have the right to visit lectures, seminars, etc., to interview the owner, leaders and students of the establishment, and to consult the relevant information and the necessary documentation. If shortcomings are identified and they are not corrected after a deadline, the Ministry of Education may revoke the operating license, which is the basis for terminating the activities of the establishment.



By 2004, the network of higher education institutions consisted of 46 establishments (35 in 2006/07), including: 12 universities (six public and six in the private sector), 24 professional higher education institutions (seven public and 17 private), and ten postsecondary vocational education institutions. The total number of students was 63,600 (1,148 foreign students) in 2002/03. (Habakuk and Alas, 2007).

Special education

Special education is provided at pre-school, elementary and secondary levels as well as at university level. 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. Compared to the Soviet period, the disabled people have far more open access to education, including higher education, according to the principles of democracy and equal opportunities.

Children with minor mental disabilities are taught according to simplified curricula, which are also based on the national ones. Self-governing schools teaching children with moderate mental disabilities are using their own specialized curricula. The duration of studies and requirements at this level may also be regulated by individual curricula. Subjects selected by students and the school represents about 5% of the total time allocation at basic school, and about 25% at secondary school. Offering elective subjects contributes to develop the school's identity, i.e. focus on languages, arts, sciences and economic subjects among others. Another alternative is different directions for grades or groups of students or simply offering wide and varied elective courses, based on the wishes of the students and the competence of the teacher personnel.

New legislation has been particularly important for providing equal access to higher education for the disabled. For people with mild mental impairments, a special order for admission to vocational education institutions has been set by the Decree No. 195 of 23 July 1996. Compared to the Soviet time, better conditions have been established in order to guarantee that people with physical impairments have access to higher education. For example, institutional buildings have been reconstructed in several places to remove the architectural barriers which can obstruct stress invalids. During the Soviet period, there were no special toilets for invalids and sloping ramps were encountered very rarely. Invalids had no access to sports. Now the universities have corrected the situation.

Before the re-establishing of independence, foreign languages were left out of curricula in schools for children with hearing impairments. Without having learned foreign languages, it was impossible to be admitted in higher education institutions. Now the situation has changed. Foreign languages are taught using special methods and experiences of other countries. Teaching by using deaf language has taken place in special education institutions for five years. The result can be recognized already. Several people with hearing impairments have been graduated from Tallinn Technical University and two young people with hearing impairments were graduated from the University of Tartu last year. Their area was special education and both became



teachers in school for children with hearing impairments. The Board of Disabled People can help to solve the problems of disabled students.

At the beginning of the academic year 1997/98, the total number of special schools was forty-eight, among them thirty-seven Estonian-medium, ten Russian-medium and one Estonian-Russian medium. The total number of pupils enrolled was 5,429 (1,841 girls and 3,588 boys). Tuition in Estonian was offered to 3,970 pupils and in Russian to 1,459 pupils.

In 2005/06, special education was provided for 16.9 % of pupils at the basic school level. Every attempt is made to integrate children with special educational needs into mainstream schools, reserving special schools for those with more serious problems. Some 77% of basic school pupils with special educational needs attended mainstream schools. At several vocational schools, it is possible for students with special needs to get vocational education and training. (Estonia Eurydice Unit, 2007).

Private education

Private education is offered at all levels. The Private Schools Act stipulates that the supervision of schools' activities is carried out according to the rules established by the Ministry of Education. Local governments approve the status of local private schools.

The main reason for the relative popularity of private institutions is that they offer better education and heighten the competitiveness of the graduated. At the pre-school level, private institutions enrol smaller numbers of children which makes the everyday atmosphere more friendly for the child. Pre-school private institutions frequently include intensive programmes of fine arts and foreign languages in their study programmes. Private compulsory education institutions stress in particular the teaching of foreign languages or have implemented alternative pedagogical methods (Waldorf pedagogy). Vocational institution offerings are more focused on beauty services, business and commerce, and also arts and handicraft. Private higher education institutions focus on business, commerce and law. Some of them train theological personnel of different religious groups. According to legislation, the students of private education institutions have the same rights as the students of municipal, state or public institutions.

Although teaching methods in private schools may be different from methods used in municipal or state schools and the curricula may contain different subjects, the national curriculum applies to all schools. Students from private basic schools have to pass the same entrance examinations to upper secondary schools as students from municipal or state institutions. Students from private upper-secondary schools have to pass state examinations on the same conditions valid for students from municipal or state institutions. The same quality assessment procedures are used both in private and public higher education institutions.

The Private Schools Act is set for institutions with programmes including more than 120 study hours. A private educational establishment can be recognized as a university if it has been given a license for teaching more than one programme at



least at the bachelor's degree level. In addition to academic studies, a private school may offer diploma studies. Licenses to private school are given for no less than one year, depending on the nominal study time of the curriculum. Private school curricula are revised by competent experts. Educational institutions from foreign countries may open their departments in accordance with the mutual treaties and they are included in the register held at the Ministry of Education.

Private schools are managed by the Head and the Council. The Council contains at least one fifth of staff representatives; in the case of pre-school institutions, primary schools, basic schools and hobby schools, one fifth of parents representatives; in the case of upper secondary schools, vocational education institutions, higher education institutions, universities and adult education institutions, one fifth of students representatives. The State acts as supervisor of private schools.

Teachers are employed by the owner(s) of the institution. In private higher education institutions, teaching personnel from public higher education institutions are frequently employed on a part-time basis. Private schools are also eligible for financial support from the national budget in order to cover expenses for teachers salaries and instructional materials, on a similar basis as for public and municipal schools. The owner of the private school has to bear administrative expenses.

At the beginning of 1997/98, the total number of pupils enrolled in private schools was 2,668 of which 960 studying in Russian-medium schools (1.23% of total enrolment).

In the same year, the total number of students enrolled in private higher education institutions was 3,291 (236 in diploma courses, 2,840 in bachelor's degree courses, 215 in master's degree courses). No doctoral degree courses were offered by private higher education institutions. At the end of the academic year 1996/97, a total of 160 students graduated from private higher education institutions (126 bachelor's degree and thirty-four master's degree).

Means of instruction, equipment and infrastructure

There have been several innovations in instruction, equipment and infrastructure compared to the 1980s. First, openness in teaching and more free communication between students and teachers. Second, worldwide open information, available through computer networks. Third, changing and improving of teaching materials and equipment. New textbooks have been published. Different textbooks for one course are also available, which expectedly stimulates the publishers to raise the quality of textbooks. New courses and new textbooks have been implemented for Russian-medium schools, mainly on Estonian language, history and culture, and country studies.

Different institutions have been founded to support new attitudes towards instruction and to provide new equipment. In 1997, the Tiger Leap Foundation was established in order to provide schools with computers and computer software as well as heightening people's skills for using computers. The Foundation also finances the production of original software, with a priority on Estonian language and culture



studies. In 1998, the Institute of the Open Mind was established. The Institute aims at developing open and positive attitude towards learning and teaching by organizing counselling and in-service training of teachers.

Changes in equipment also consist in rebuilding classrooms and introducing modern technologies like OVS, OVS screens, tape recorders, etc. in classrooms. Frequently the equipment is donated by local authorities as rewards for outstanding study results. Sometimes embassies of foreign countries support schools with books, modern technical tools and software, focusing on schools offering study programmes in foreign languages.

At the beginning of the academic year 1997/98, 730 schools had a total of 11,732 classrooms; eighty-five schools had boarding houses with a total of 5,283 places; 70% of schools had sports halls and 32% of schools had swimming pools; 90% of the schools had dining rooms; 69% were computerized and had a total of 3,529 computers. In school libraries there was a total of 6,145,000 textbooks and 5,204 books. Basic changes in infrastructure are connected with more flexible attitudes towards the types of study, the principle being to increase opportunities for open and distance learning.

Although Estonia has obtained encouraging results in developing instruction, equipment and infrastructure, improvements do not cover all needs of schools. Most school buildings, constructed in the Soviet times, need renovation; furniture in classrooms is not sufficient any more. The problem is particularly evident in rural areas, mostly in the south-eastern part of Estonia. Another problem is the gap between new textbooks, not yet published, and the national examinations that are conducted in accordance with the new textbooks. This problem was solved by postponing the examinations based on the new curriculum and new textbooks. The third problem is computer hardware: as most of the computers in computer classrooms are donated as humanitarian aid, they belong to the former generation of teaching equipment, and contemporary software (e.g. CD-ROM) cannot be used. The Tiger Leap Foundation is on the way to solve this problem.

Adult and non-formal education

Responsibility for regulation of adult education is divided between public, private and voluntary institutions (NGOs). Ministries are responsible for formal adult education, i.e. general education leading to a qualification and/or degree, and primary vocational training for adults and young people. Training and retraining of public administrators and courses for unemployed young people are also a ministerial responsibility. Private companies deal mostly with adult education relating to the labour market, especially in-service training for adults and professional continuing education. General adult education not providing a certificate, and hobby courses, are the fields of the NGOs.

The Adult Education Act and subsequent amendments provide legal guarantees to adults who wish to pursue further studies. Formation of the adult education system proceeds from local requirements. On the regional level the establishment and development of such study institutions is co-ordinated by municipal authorities, and on the national level by the Ministry of Education. The principles of



adult education are set up in accordance with the principles adopted in Europe (lifelong learning, continuous in-service training, usually once every five years). Several countries (mainly Sweden, Denmark and Finland) have assisted in the organization and renewal of the adult education system.

Different educational institutions have correspondence departments offering either general or vocational education. Distance education for majoring in some supplementary specialty at university is popular. Language courses and courses in business, marketing and law are mainstreaming. Foreign language learning is more common in the form of directed self-study. The new political and economic situation calls for highly qualified labour. There are several training centres, and about thirty in-service training centres operate within companies.

Estonia is known for its strong folk traditions which are passed on from generation to generation. These traditions live on thanks to the non-formal liberal education provided by cultural centres and folk high schools. Limited state resources and the newly re-emerging local self-governments are unable to sustain non-formal education to the extent required. The gap is filled by voluntary societies and associations, such as the Non-Formal Adult Educators Association, the Open Education Association and many others. Since 1994, the Non-Formal Education Association acts to unite all activities carried out in this field.

In the education of children and youth, hobby education has been as important as general education. The hobby education system is evolving. Participation in the work of hobby circles and study groups has enhanced interest in conducting a professional career. Hobby centres include nature houses, technical centres and children's creativity centres. These centres operate according to programmes which have to be approved by the faculty council and the owner. At the moment there are only some hobby schools that are financed by the state government; others are run by the local governments. Hobby schools engage in class work as well as other methods of work (performances, exhibitions, competitions, traveling, camps, etc.). To open the world to school and university students, the Forselius Society has established a system of cheap travelling and sightseeing in Europe with high quality guides for the youth.

Hobby schools are managed by a director employed by the owner. They also have a faculty council comprised of teachers. An innovative approach is chargeable study groups, which, if possible, offer concessions to children from low-income families. Sports schools also provide hobby education. They are run by qualified sports specialists and employ well-trained coaches.

Music, art and arts schools form one block in hobby education. These institutions provide tuition on the pre-school, primary and secondary levels. Education is conducted according to the respective school type. The curricula are based on the thirty-five-week school year. Duration of studies at music schools is seven years. However, it is possible to have two years of preparatory or follow-up courses. Duration of studies at art schools is five years with the possibility for a two-year follow-up course. Art schools have music and art departments, with dance as an option.

Most schools (depending on the number of students) employ a hobby instructor who is responsible for the arrangement and co-ordination of hobby activities at school, who acts as a liaison person between the school and the community, establishes contacts and disseminates information about youth organizations, student societies and hobby circles in the area.

Teaching staff

Teachers are trained at:

- Universities: 40% of teachers have been prepared by Tallinn Pedagogical University, 15% by the University of Tartu, approximately 30% outside Estonia (mainly Russian teachers for Russian schools), and some music teachers by the Estonian Music Academy.
- Higher education institutions in Tallinn (a diploma course in a vocational institution), Tartu, Kohtla-Järve and Narva. Tartu Teacher Training College prepares primary school teachers and music teachers for Estonian-medium schools. Estonia has made efforts to implement Russian-based teacher training, opening colleges in Kohtla-Järve and Narva during the last years. Virumaa College in Kohtla-Järve prepares teachers of mathematics and physics for Estonian and Russian basic schools. Narva College prepares teachers for Russian basic schools.
- Vocational schools: Tallinn and Rakvere Pedagogical Schools.

Higher education institutions are active in developing a teacher training scheme. The reform concerns the transition to new forms of study and the content of education. A new teacher training scheme should lead to a new category of classification: class, cycle and subject teachers. Accordingly, a cycle teacher teaches humanities or science cycle or an integrated cycle in Grades VII-IX of basic school, a subject teacher just one subject in Grades X-XII of upper secondary school, and, in the case of a complementary specialty, also one other subject.

In addition to the direct teaching activities such as class lectures and their preparation, the teacher's work may as well include preparation of teaching materials, organization of study tours and excursions, consultations, remedial classes, class work, communications between school and parents, preparation of school events, supervision of club activities, contribution to school publications, and substitution of absent teachers.

Initial training is obtained at higher education institutions, post-secondary technical education institutions or through special courses. The attestation proves the qualifications obtained. Depending on the qualifications and seniority, teachers are divided into four categories: junior teacher, teacher, senior teacher, and teacher specialist on methods. Teachers work according to their employment contracts. The standard teaching load for pedagogical staff is as follows: twenty to twenty-four hours for teachers in Grades I-IX; and eighteen to twenty-two hours in Grades X-XII. For



teachers in vocational schools the teaching load is 720-800 hours per year. A teacher's work week consists of thirty-five hours.

According to the Adult Education Act, training of government officials and teachers is financed via the state budget. These resources are a special part of the state budget, about 3% of the teachers' annual wages fund. The Ministry of Education sets aside a part of this money to finance training at national level, while another part is allocated for regional and local training. The in-service teacher training system is unified for the Estonian- and Russian-speaking schools. Separate courses in Russian are organized regionally for primary school teachers, whereas the nation-wide subject courses are mostly in Estonian.

Courses, which cover the entire curriculum and have a duration of more than 320 hours, provide the teacher with in-service qualifications. Funds for in-service training can also be allocated from the local government budget. In-service training may take place during vacations, after work time, or during work time. In-service training has to take into account national, regional and school priorities.

At vocational schools the majority of teachers are high school teachers. As a rule, teachers are field specialists and therefore they are not qualified to provide a wide range of subjects. At the same time, many teachers lack specific pedagogical training. Most of them are not familiar with the contemporary technology and teaching methods, which emphasize personal development in addition to the theoretical level. There is a tendency to reduce the contents of lecture-based training and replace it with practical and integrated subjects (e.g. seminars, personal development, modern methods of instruction, project-related work, etc.).

In 2004, the teachers' professional standard was developed. Universities must rearrange their curricula according to the standard. After that, the accreditation of pre-service teacher training curricula is envisaged. Higher education institutions providing pre-service teacher training programmes should develop a competency model for teachers. Since 2004, graduates from the initial teacher training have to pass the final 'on-the-job' qualifying phase lasting one school year. During this period prospective teachers receive support from their tutors and universities. At the end of the period they are considered as certified teachers. After working for a minimum of three years, teachers can apply for a higher-level occupational grade (there are four occupational grades). A special share (around 3% of the amount earmarked for teacher salaries) of the state budget is allocated for in-service teacher training. (Estonia Eurydice Unit, 2007).

Educational research and information

Educational research is mostly carried out at the following institutions:

- The University of Tartu concentrates on the following topics: paradigmatic changes in education; teacher training and continuing education; design principles for curricula and textbooks; mother tongue teaching and speech therapy; structure and methods of remedial teaching; shifts in value orientation and life patterns among basic groups of the student population. Researchers of



the neighbouring disciplines contribute in pedagogical psychology, multicultural teaching and philosophy of education.

- Research conducted at Tallinn Pedagogical University is mainly on the personality development of students and teachers: teacher and pupil activity in the learning process; methods of assessment used by teachers; pupils life-style and methods of study; developmental problems of gifted pupils; societal competence of teachers and pupils; system of values and value cultivation; evolution of morals in children; educational, pedagogical and psychological aspects in practical educational work; development of health awareness; physical development.
- The Centre of Educational Research at Tallinn Technical University focuses on history of education and descriptive and comparative analysis of different educational institutions and teaching of different subjects.
- The Centre of Urban Studies carried out researches on the entrance of young people in the labour market, having collected data on the relationship between education and competitiveness in the labour market.

While research on pre-school and general education has a number of researchers and shows good results, useful for the practice, research on vocational and higher education is not of equally sufficient level. Only four researchers focus on vocational education and training and in the last thirty years only three doctoral theses have been defended on vocational education at universities. In co-operation with the European Training Foundation it is planned to establish a Centre for Vocational Education Research at Tallinn Pedagogical University. Research on higher education is not very popular.

Pedagogical information is offered by the Ministry of Education and the Statistical Office of Estonia; the Estonian ENIC/NARIC Centre mainly focuses on recognition of diplomas. The network of SOCRATES/EURYDICE is implemented and co-operates with other institutions.

Users of educational information are more frequently decision-makers and administrators than pedagogical staff or parents. Educational information is available and people have access to it. However, they need to have a deep understanding of the system as a whole and to be able to process statistical data.

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For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>