



# Structures of Education and Training Systems in Europe

Estonia

2009/10 Edition

European Commission





# STRUCTURES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

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## ESTONIA

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If you wish to obtain more details on education systems in Europe, please consult the EURYBASE database (<http://www.eurydice.org>), the Cedefop database ([http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information\\_resources/NationalVet/Thematic/](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information_resources/NationalVet/Thematic/)) and the website of the European Training Foundation (<http://www.etf.europa.eu/>)



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## INTRODUCTION: GENERAL POLICY CONTEXT

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Estonia is a sovereign and independent democratic republic wherein the supreme power is vested in the people and the head of the state is the President. The powers of state are exercised solely pursuant to the Constitution and laws, which are in conformity therewith. The activities of the Government of the Republic and the courts must be organized on the principle of separation and balance of powers.

The country became a member of the European Union and NATO in 2004. Estonia joined the so-called Schengen area in December 2007.

The supreme power of state is exercised by the people through the citizens who have the right to vote by electing the *Riigikogu* (Parliament) or on a referendum. There is universal suffrage for Estonian citizens over 18 years of age. On a regional level, the interests of the state are represented by county governors; all issues concerning local life are decided and managed by local governments.

Legislative power is vested in the *Riigikogu*, a unicameral parliament of 101 members. The *Riigikogu* is elected for 4 years. Members of the *Riigikogu* are elected in the course of free elections on the principle of proportionality. Elections are general, uniform and direct. Voting is confidential. Every Estonian citizen who is over twenty-one years of age and has the right to vote may be a candidate for the *Riigikogu*.

The main task of the *Riigikogu* is proceeding and passing laws and resolutions.

Executive power is vested in the Government of the Republic but the Government also participates in exercising legislative power. The Government of the Republic has the right to submit bills to the *Riigikogu*; it is in its competencies to prepare the draft of the state budget and submit it to the *Riigikogu*. The government executes the domestic and foreign policies of the state and manages relations with other states; directs and co-ordinates the activities of government agencies; administers the implementation of laws, resolutions of the *Riigikogu*, and legislation of the President of the Republic; issues regulations and orders on the basis of and for the implementation of law; declares a state of emergency throughout the state or in a part thereof, in the case of a natural disaster or a catastrophe, or to prevent the spread of an infectious disease; performs other duties which the Constitution and the laws vest in the Government of the Republic.

The Government of the Republic is comprised of the Prime Minister and ministers. The Prime Minister represents the government and heads its work.

The State Chancellery, directed by the State Secretary, is within the Government of the Republic. The State Secretary, as the director of the State Chancellery, has the same rights that are granted by law to a minister for managing a ministry.

The President of the Republic is the Head of State, who represents executive power but stands apart from the Government: he or she is not subjected to the Government nor is the Government subjected to him or her. The President of the Republic represents the Republic in international relations; he or she also has some controlling and co-operational functions with regard to the *Riigikogu* and the Government of the Republic. The President has been vested with the right to proclaim laws passed in the *Riigikogu*. The President of the Republic is entrusted with authorities in case of a state of emergency. He or she is the supreme commander of national defence.

Corresponding ministries are established, pursuant to law, for the administration of the areas of government. Currently there are 11 ministries and 12 ministers. A minister manages a ministry, administers issues within its area of government, issues regulations and directives on the basis and for the implementation of law, and performs other duties assigned to him or her on the basis of and

pursuant to, procedures provided by law. The President of the Republic may, on the proposal of the Prime Minister, appoint ministers *without portfolio*. These ministers are responsible for a specific area e.g. population or regional policy. The tasks of Ministers without portfolio are established by an order of the Prime Minister.

The territory of Estonia is administratively divided into 15 counties, 194 rural municipalities and 33 cities. Local governments act independently in compliance with laws. All permanent residents over 18 years of age, regardless of citizenship are eligible to vote in local government elections. The representative body of a local government is the council, the members of which are elected on free elections for three years. The functions of a local government include responsibilities for the maintenance of pre-primary institutions, basic schools, upper secondary schools, hobby schools, libraries, community centres, museums, sports facilities, shelters, care homes, health care institutions and other local agencies if such agencies are in the ownership of the local government. Law may prescribe payment of specified expenses of such institutions from the state budget or other sources.

The total population of Estonia as of 1 January 2009 was 1 340 415. The size of the population has been in constant decrease – the birth rate in 2006 was 11.1 per 1 000 residents while the mortality rate reached 12.9 per 1 000 residents. In 2008, the natural increase for Estonians was positive for the first time in 16 years. Ethnically, the main population group is Estonians (67.9 % according to the 2000 census results). The other ethnic groups are Russians (25.6 %), Ukrainians (2.1 %), Byelorussians (1.3 %) and Finnish (0.9 %). In the 2008/09 academic year, the language of instruction of 78 % of pupils in general education schools was Estonian. Russian was the language of instruction for 19 % of pupils. There are also schools where the language of instruction is English or Finnish, the share of pupils studying in such schools was 2.8 %. In 2008, 11.6 % of the population aged between 25 and 64 years had acquired the first level of education or less. 54.1 % had second level education, education beyond the second level or prior to the third level and 34.2 % had acquired the third level of education.

The fundamental principles of provision of education in the Estonian Republic are established in the Constitution of the Republic, the Child Protection Act and the Education Act.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, everyone has the right to education. Education is compulsory for school-age children to the extent specified by law and free of charge in state and local government general education schools. The provision of education is supervised by the state. In order to make education accessible, the state and local governments must maintain the requisite number of educational institutions. The law allows the establishment and operation of other types of educational institutions, including private schools. The choice of education for children rests largely with parents.

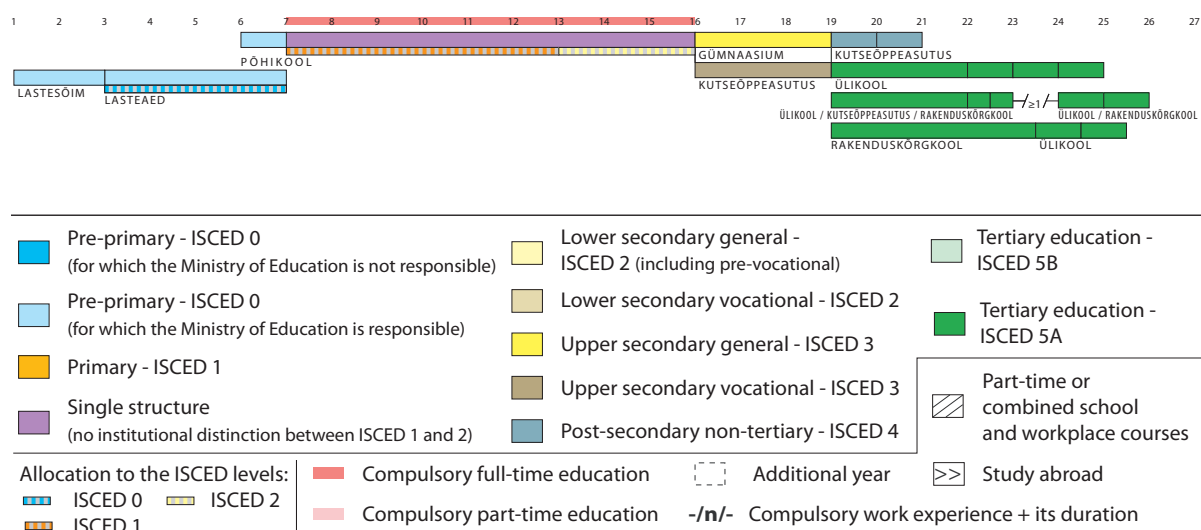
According to the Child Protection Act, every child has the right to education, which develops the child's mental and physical abilities and forms a healthy personality. Instruction must focus on the individual, take into consideration the differences between sexes and be grounded on recognition of pupils' progress. According to the Education Act, providing and accepting religious training is voluntary. The structure of the educational system and the educational standard of the state create an opportunity for everyone to proceed from one educational level to another.

The Ministry of Education and Research is set the objective to develop legislation that regulates all educational relationships essential for the society by delivering an optimal number of legal acts, implements similar practices in regulation of similar fields of education, and uses the same terminology throughout the educational legislation. In addition to the Education Act of the Republic of Estonia, 9 more acts regulate the educational sphere in Estonia: the Pre-School Child Care Institutions Act, the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, the Vocational Educational Institutions Act, the Universities Act, the Private Schools Act, the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, the Standard of Higher Education, the Adult Education Act and the Organization of Research and Development Act.



# 1. INITIAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: ORGANISATION, FUNDING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

## 1.1 Organisation of the initial education and training system



Children who attain 7 years of age are subject to the obligation to attend school. Pre-primary education is provided in pre-primary institutions (educational institutions).

9-year basic education (single structure) is the minimum compulsory education. The length of upper secondary education (general and vocational) is three years. The duration of vocational education on the basis of secondary education is from 1 to 2.5 years.

Higher education may be acquired as professional higher education or academic higher education. The standard period of study in professional higher education is three to four years. Academic higher education has three cycles: Bachelor's Study (standard period of study 3-4 years), Master's study (standard period of study 1-2 years), and Doctoral study (standard period of study 3-4 years). The standard period of getting a specialist education is five years, combining Bachelor's and Master's study. In cases of medical training, veterinary training, pharmacist training, dentistry training, architectural studies, civil engineering studies and teacher's training for generalist teachers, programmes are provided in one long cycle, or in integrated curricula of Bachelor's and Master's study as they are called in the Estonian legislation. The standard period of integrated curricula is five to six years.

In Estonia, adult education is divided into formal education acquired within the adult education system, work-related training, and informal education.

Adult formal education refers to a study provided in the form other than daytime study to acquire basic education, upper secondary education or higher education. Work-related training is regarded as in-service training or retraining provided by different educational institutions in the form of courses with the aim to raise the learner's competitiveness on the labour market. Informal education is regarded as training that provides development of creativity, talents, initiative, skills and abilities. Informal education is provided in the form of either courses or study circles.

## 1.2 Distribution of responsibilities

The Estonian education system is decentralized. At the level of legislative and administrative power, the *Riigikogu* (Parliament), the government of the Republic of Estonia and the Ministry of Education and Research administer the education system. County, local government and educational institutions have their specific roles in administering the education system.

The *Riigikogu* has the exclusive authority to:

- determine the principles of the formation, functioning and development of the education system;
- establish tuition fees for public educational institutions and universities in public law;
- decide on the establishment, merger, division and termination of the activities of universities in public law.

The Government of the Republic adopts national education development programmes and provides guarantees for their implementation; establishes the procedure for the establishment and reorganization of public educational institutions and for termination of their activities, and approves the statutes of state institutions of professional higher education; establishes the funding rates for public educational institutions and universities in public law; establishes the maximum rate for study loans secured by the state and the conditions and procedure for granting, repaying and writing off study loans; establishes state concessions and benefits, including credit concessions, for pupils, students and educators; establishes the basis for remuneration for the work of teachers in state nursery-primary schools, primary schools, basic schools and upper secondary schools; establishes the Standard of Higher Education; approves the framework requirements for teacher training; gives educational establishments the right to carry out higher education level study and to attribute related academic degrees and diplomas.

The Ministry of Education and Research administers the planning of education, research, youth and language related national policies and, in conjunction thereof, managing the fields of pre-primary, basic, general upper secondary, vocational secondary, higher, hobby and adult education, organizing research and development activities, youth work and special youth work, and compiling drafts of corresponding legal acts.

The main tasks of the Ministry of Education and Research are to guarantee the expedient and effective development of education, research, youth and language policies and the high level and competitiveness of research and development activities.

In order to fulfil these tasks, the Ministry:

- plans, organizes and develops education, research, youth and language policies;
- develops national development plans in the areas of education, research, youth and language policies and guarantees their compliance with the national development plans in these areas;
- organizes the funding, completion and assessment of the results of development plans;
- exercises governmental supervision over the activities of educational institutions regarding provision of education and the fulfilment of national study programs and other educational standards;
- plans and develops national study programs and other educational standards and organizes their preparation and accreditation.

There are 4 governmental institutions in the Ministry's area of government – the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre, the Estonian Youth Centre, the Language Inspectorate and the Estonian Educational and Research Network – and 8 foundations.

The county governor, who has been granted the task of state supervision over schooling and education activities, participates in the management of the education system at regional level. The task of the county is to prepare county development plans that include an education development plan. Counties also have a role in organizing contests, standard-determining tests, basic school final examinations and national examinations, as well as support for parents of children with special educational needs. Also, counties are responsible for coordinating policy implementation in youth work, including career advising, criminal prevention, etc.

Local governments are vested with the primary responsibility of providing access to general education (from pre-primary to upper secondary education), monitoring the fulfilment of compulsory school attendance, as well as maintenance of pre-primary institutions and general education schools.

To prepare and implement education development programmes within the administration area, an education department of local government shall be founded or a corresponding employee appointed.

### **1.3 Financing**

Financing of educational institutions depends on the ownership of the institution. There are state, municipal and private education institutions. Public investment in education was 12.6 billion EEK in 2008 (ca 805 million EUR). The distribution of funds between study levels was the following: general education 53 %, higher education 25 % and vocational education 11 %. Other costs (i.e. horizontal costs, field of youth, language and preschool education) 14 %. The total public sector spending on education was 5% of GDP in 2007.

All expenses of a state school are covered from the state budget.

Municipal education institutions (pre-primary institutions, schools and vocational schools) are financed from the state and local budgets. In addition, revenue from foundations, donations and income received from paid services etc. may be considered both in the case of state and of municipal schools. Expenses of a private education institution are covered by the owner of a school, and by the state.

Pre-primary institutions are mostly municipally owned and they are therefore financed from the budget of the local government. Parents also participate in covering some costs. The central government finances in-service training of teachers. Since 2008, support from the state budget is given to local municipalities for widening the provision of pre-primary education and for modernisation of children's institutions.

90% of general education schools are municipally owned, 5 % are state schools and 5 % are private schools. From the state budget, support for covering education expenditures is allocated to rural municipalities and cities. Funds for ensuring the minimum wages and in-service training of teachers as well as allocations for investments, school lunches and expenditures associated with textbooks and study aids constitute the majority of the support. Support is also provided on the same principles for private general education schools.

From 1 January 2008, the financing system of general education schools was changed. The old financing system was student-based which had implications on school funding as arrival or leaving of each student respectively either increased or decreased the amount of teachers' salary funds allocated to the school. The actual expenses per class were not considered. The new model proceeds from the fact that the cost of teaching each class is the same regardless of the number of pupils in the class. This principle guarantees local governments equal opportunities in providing general education,

because support from the state budget is allocated for payment of teacher salaries and investments not only on the basis of the number of students, but also according to the number of classes and lessons. The owner of a school covers the operating expenses (management expenses; staff expenditure, except teachers; the acquisition cost of teaching aids, except the cost of obtaining the textbooks mentioned above). Classes for students who have behavioural problems, for children with health disorders and students with special needs, preparatory groups for pre-school children, long day groups and remedial groups are formed in the school with the consent of the owner and they are financed like other classes.

Out of 45 vocational schools 31 are owned by the state, 3 by municipalities and 11 by private owners. The operating expenses of state and municipal vocational schools as well as investment expenses are covered from the state budget. In vocational studies on the basis of basic education or without the requirement for basic education, all student places are financed by the state, but and in case of vocational studies on the basis of secondary education, the state pays only for state-commissioned student places. Vocational schools may offer payable services related to the main activities of the school and use other sources of revenue. Vocational schools may also be financed from the local government budget or other sources.

In the higher education system, 34 educational institutions are active in 2009/10 and 16 of them are private institutions. The study activities of a public university, of an institution of professional higher education and higher education study in vocational schools are financed from the state budget to the extent of the state commissioned student places. Private higher education institutions may also receive state commissioned student places, granted that they fulfil national priorities and possess accredited curricula. The basic cost of a student place for each financial year and the coefficients of study fields are established by a regulation of the Government of the Republic. Student places are financed according to the number of graduates per study field purchased by the Government. Financing is carried out during the nominal period of study of a curriculum. On Doctoral level, the financing regime is different: costs of Doctoral study per study place are covered in equal parts in the first two academic years to the extent of 60 per cent, and after the end of the nominal study period to the extent of 40 per cent of the overall amount as a performance bonus for a secured PhD degree. Therefore, the provision of funds to the university for the third cycle depends on the intake on PhD programmes and the overall amount number of secured degrees in an academic year. The funding per place on PhD level is the same, there are no funding differences based on field of study. In addition to the money allocated from state budget, the revenue of a public university comprises money received to reimburse study costs, revenue from the provision of payable services related to its main activities, revenue from research and development activities and other income. A state institution of professional higher education has the right to provide payable services related to its main activities to the extent and pursuant to the procedure provided for in the statute of the institution.

The acquisition of basic and general upper secondary education by adults is financed from the state budget. The study takes place in the form of evening courses or distance learning. Vocational schools also offer distance learning possibilities financed from the state budget. Part-time higher education studies are usually payable for a student, the state finances the acquisition of higher education outside full-time study only for a few priority groups (teachers, medical staff).

Work-related training is mostly paid by the learner him- or herself or by his or her employer. The state budget provides resources for work-related training of educational staff and for civil servants. For educational staff, the amount of the resources targeted to in-service training is 3 % of the annual salary fund, in the case of civil servants – 2 to 4 %. Through the Ministry of Social Affairs, in-service training and retraining of the unemployed are covered. For people employed in the sector of agriculture, limited resources for state-funded work-related training exist in the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Informal education is payable for learners but the Ministry of Education and Research supports, on competitive grounds, the operation of informal education training centres from the state budget by covering the costs for the salary fund of the manager and of up to two trainers.

## **1.4 Quality assurance**

In 2006, the obligation of internal evaluation in pre-primary institutions, general education institutions and vocational schools was established by the Ministry of Education and Research, and the organisation of state supervision was changed. The aim of these changes was to support the creation of an internal quality assurance system in educational institutions.

Each institution must undertake the internal quality assessment every three years, identifying areas of strengths and spheres that need improvement. The internal assessment report has to be accorded by a school council. The internal assessment report is approved by the director of a school. The criteria of internal evaluation have been stipulated by the Minister of Education and Research, the methods for carrying out internal evaluation are chosen by the educational institution. Schools are assisted on questions of internal evaluation via counselling by the Ministry of Education and Research and the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre.

The legality and efficiency of the activities of educational institutions are evaluated through state supervision and supervisory control. State supervision in pre-primary institutions, general education schools and vocational schools is conducted by single issues, relying primarily upon the priorities of state supervision that are established by the Minister of Education and Research for each academic year. Supervision activities are managed by the Ministry of Education and Research and they are carried out either by the Ministry or county governors. State supervision over the legality of the universities' activities is conducted by the Ministry of Education and Research who may also involve experts in the process.

In private schools, state supervision over the education and schooling activities of the institutions is conducted according to the conditions established by the legal acts governing the activities of the state or municipal educational institution or educational institution in public law of the respective type.

To evaluate the activities of education and training institutions and the education system as a whole mechanisms like external evaluation, monitoring, state supervision and accreditation are used.

For each level of education (pre-primary education, basic education, secondary education and higher education), there is the national education standard established by the state. The national education standard is set out in the national curricula for basic school and gymnasium, in different national curricula for vocational education and in the Standard of Higher Education that form a basis for the external evaluation.

In basic school and upper secondary school, the external evaluation system of the learning outcomes comprises national standardised tests at the end of I and II stage of study, basic school final examinations and upper secondary school external national examinations. National standardised test papers and basic school final examination papers are marked internally at school. The analysis of the results is carried out on the basis of a sample at the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre. The papers of the external national examinations are marked by external examiners appointed by the Minister of Education and Research and their activities are organised by the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre.

With regard to vocational and professional qualifications, the quality control of education is implemented via state supervision carried out by the Ministry of Education and Research or the county governor.

In the case of the quality assurance system of universities and institutions of professional higher education, major changes are taking place. The independent Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency started its work on 1 January 2009. It is the legal successor of the Higher Education Accreditation Centre, the member of ENQA (the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), but it carries out a broader mission with an aim to encourage higher education quality development and to value and spread the best practice of quality assurance in the Estonian higher education sector. One of the main tasks the new agency has to implement is the quality assessment of all higher education institutions in Estonia during the period of 2009-2011 with the objective that these institutions receive the authority to issue state recognised diplomas. The Agency is also responsible for carrying out the accreditation of curricula within broader study groups as well as institutional accreditation. For private and municipal institutions the bases of activities is an education licence that is issued by the Ministry of Education and Research. The licence grants the educational institution the right to carry out educational activities. An educational licence issued to a private school has a fixed term; a licence issued to a municipal institution does not have an end date.

In recent years, Estonia has participated in various OECD and IEA studies for assessing the functioning of its education system. Some studies the country has participated in include PISA 2006, review on tertiary education (2007), TALIS 2009, Civic (2009) and PIAAC (ongoing).



## 2. PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Pre-primary education is provided in coeducational pre-primary institutions: nurseries for children up to 3 years and kindergartens for children up to 7 years. Pre-primary institutions are educational institutions, they are owned by local authority (about 93 %) or private sector. In most of the pre-primary education institutions, education and schooling is conducted in Estonian (80.4 %) but there are also institutions where Russian (19.1 %) or English (0.5 %) is used for that purpose. In order to assist children who do not attend pre-primary institutions, preparatory classes at pre-primary institutions or at schools may be established. Attending pre-primary education is not compulsory, but local governments must provide the opportunity to attend child care institutions to all children between 1 and 7 years of age who live in their catchment areas if this is requested by the parents. The share of children attending pre-primary institutions among the total number of children of the corresponding age rises by children's age: in the 2008/09 academic year, 13.0 % of 1-year old, 61.4 % of 2-year old and over 92.3 % of 5-year old children attended pre-primary institutions.

The Education Act determines the definition of pre-primary education and defines pre-primary institutions as educational institutions.

The Child Protection Act determines that every child has the right for education, which develops the child's mental and physical abilities and forms an integrated personality. In addition to the abovementioned acts, also the Child Protection Act and the Education Act regulate some aspect of pre-primary education. Common grounds could be found also with the Private Schools Act and the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act.

The Pre-School Child Care Institutions Act provides the definitions related to pre-primary institutions, the types of institutions, the number of children in groups, the principles of work of pre-primary institutions, the procedures for foundation, operation, merger, division and dissolution, the organization of education and schooling, the requirements concerning management and staff, the rights and obligations of parents, teachers and managers, financing, reporting, internal evaluation of the institution, counselling on internal evaluation and state supervision.

Aims and objectives of pre-primary education are presented in several acts and documents.

The Pre-School Childcare Institutions Act establishes the two main functions of a pre-primary institution:

- to create possibilities and conditions for the formation of a healthy personality who is socially and mentally alert, self-confident and considerate of others and who values the environment;
- to maintain and strengthen the health of the child, and to promote his or her emotional, moral, social, mental and physical development.

According to the National Curriculum for pre-primary education, the common objective of schooling and education is a versatile and consistent development of children in cooperation between home and the child care institution. Based on the common objective, schooling and education fosters the physical, mental, social and emotional development of children as a result of which children develop a comprehensive and positive self-image, understanding of the surrounding environment, ethical behaviour and initiative, basic working habits, physical activity and understanding of the importance of taking care of one's health, and play, learning, social and self-management skills develop.

The Private Schools Act determines the procedures for the foundation, operation and dissolution of private pre-primary institutions, questions of management and the rights and obligations of parents. A private pre-school institution operates as an agency of a manager entered in the commercial register, the non-profit associations and foundations register or the Estonian register of churches,

congregations and associations of congregations. A head teacher and a teachers' council manage the private pre-school childcare institution. The curriculum of a private pre-school childcare institution must comply with the national curriculum for pre-primary education. The curriculum of the childcare institution should be approved by the manager of the private childcare institution and the Ministry of Education and Research registers it upon the issue of an education licence.

In correspondence with the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, the head teacher of a school may form preparatory groups for pre-school children. The goal of these groups is to support the formation of school-readiness of those children who do not attend a pre-primary institution.

Deriving from the General Education System Development Plan 2007-2013, the objective is to ensure children's smooth transition to school, which is enabled by inclusion of all children under school age to pre-primary institutions at least one year before school, early acknowledgement of problems impeding a child's development and learning and by developmental support as well as modernization of the national curriculum and in-service teachers' training.

Requirements for the environment of a pre-primary institution (rooms, area, interior) as well as for its health promotion, composition of daily schedule and catering derive from the Public Health Act and are established by a decree of the Minister of Social Affairs.

Municipal pre-school institutions are financed from the budget of local governments and to some extent from the State budget – the State finances the in-service training of teachers, studies of Estonian as a second language. Parents also participate in covering the costs of the pre-primary institution – the management costs, remuneration of staff (except for teachers) and the cost of teaching aids may be partially covered by parents. Local governments shall establish the rate for the amount to be covered by parents, which may be differentiated according to the child's age, the family's financial possibilities etc. In any case, the share of costs per child covered by parents may not exceed 20 % of the minimum salary established by the Government of the Republic. The cost of catering is also covered by parents. Local authorities support financially less secure families in covering catering costs to the extent of 50 to 100 per cent of the daily cost of catering.

## **2.1 Admission**

As a rule, all children permanently residing in the catchment area of a pre-primary institution shall be admitted to the institution. Children are admitted without any pre-selection tests. Parents need to submit an application for admission. The procedures for admission to and dismissal of children from a pre-primary institution and the catchment area of the institution are established by the municipal government.

If vacant places exist at a childcare institution after the admission of children permanently residing in the catchment area, children from outside the catchment area shall be admitted to the pre-primary institution starting with children permanently residing in the same rural municipality or city and thereafter children of parents who are employed in the catchment area.

Rural municipalities or city governments provide children who have physical, speech, sensory or mental disabilities, and children who need special assistance or special care, with the opportunity to grow and develop in the adaptation group of the child care institution in their area of residence. Rural municipalities or city governments create special groups or establish special nursery schools if it is impossible for the local child care institution to create an adaptation group. Children are admitted to adaptation or special groups on the basis of a written application submitted by a parent and the decision of the counselling committee.



## 2.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue

The rural municipality or city government decides on the proposal of the board of trustees whether a pre-primary institution operates throughout the year or seasonally and the opening hours of a pre-primary institution, taking into account the needs of the families of the respective region. The school year begins on 1 September and lasts from the beginning of studies in one calendar year until the beginning of new studies in the next calendar year.

Usually nursery and kindergarten groups are formed in pre-primary institutions. A crèche group is for children up to 3 years of age. Kindergarten groups are divided as groups for children between 3-5, 5-6 and 6-7 years of age. Sometimes mixed groups for children between 2-7 years of age are formed.

Also adaptation groups may be formed in childcare institutions, where children with special needs learn together with other children, and groups for children with special needs, which include only children with special needs.

The maximum size of a nursery group is 14 children, of a kindergarten group – 20 children and of a mixed group – 18 children. With the consent of the board of trustees, the number of children in a nursery group may be increased by up to 2 children and in a kindergarten group by up to 4 children.

The number of children in a group for children with special needs is smaller: up to 12 children in a group for children with physical disabilities; up to 12 children in a remedial group for children with speech disorders and specific development disorders; up to 7 children in a development group for children with intellectual disabilities; up to 10 children in a group for children with sensory disabilities, up to 4 children in a group for children with multiple disabilities and up to 4 children in a group for children with a pervasive disability disorder (autism).

The number of children in an adaptation group depends on the number of children with special needs, while 1 child with special needs is considered to account for 3 ordinary children.

## 2.3 Curriculum

Education and schooling in a pre-primary institution should be based on the curriculum of the pre-primary institution, which complies with the national curriculum for pre-school child care institutions approved by the regulation of the Government of the Republic (2008). In a pre-primary institution and group for children with special needs, an individual development plan will be prepared for a child, where necessary. Purposeful education and schooling activities are carried out in pre-primary institutions starting from 18 months of age.

The curriculum includes the concept of learning that emphasises a child's active participation in education and schooling activities, whereas a teacher is the creator of an environment that supports the child's development. The national curriculum presents the objectives and principles of education and schooling activities and the presumed general skills and development results of 6-7-year-old children (immediately before they attend school). General skills include play skills, cognitive and learning skills as well as social and self-management skills. Development results are presented in seven fields of education and schooling activities: me and the environment, language and speech, Estonian as a second language (starting with 3-year-olds in cases of all children whose home language is other than Estonian), mathematics, art, music and movement.

Pre-primary institutions prepare their own curricula and activity plans of groups taking into account the national curriculum for pre-school child care institutions. In activity plans, the objectives of schooling and education are set and the activities are planned according to the age of children and their needs, including special needs. Teachers are free to choose the methods of instruction. In Estonia, the Step-

by-Step method is widely used, and elements of Montessori and Waldorf pedagogy are also popular. Discovery learning as a new method is also spreading (Estonia participates in Pollen).

## 2.4 Assessment

The basis for evaluation of a child's development is constituted by the presumed general skills and results in fields of education and schooling activities as described in the curriculum. In the evaluation process, the primary method is observation. Teachers carry out observations according to a precise plan and children are followed in everyday activities, free play situations and in activities guided by teachers. Indirect methods like interview or analysis of children's works are also suitable. It is also common to prepare a file or portfolio on a child's development. The methods used are introduced to the parents. Succeeding, development (progress), positive attitudes and interest are acknowledged.

Children are directed to analyze and evaluate the results of their activities themselves.

At least once per academic year, the teacher carries out a development process oriented interview with the parent(s) regarding the development of a child. The results of evaluation of a child's development and of the development oriented interview will be documented. Parents will be given feedback on the child's development and study results.

## 2.5 Teachers

Teachers are trained at a higher education level. The initial training of pre-primary teachers is carried out on the first level of higher education (professional higher education or Bachelor's study) or at Master's study. At the first level of higher education, the volume of the curriculum is 120 credit points (one credit point corresponds to 40 hours or one week of study by a student; the study load of one academic year is 40 credit points, corresponding to the 60 credit points of the ECTS). The volume of the curriculum in Master's study is 80 credit points. A person who has completed Master's study is prepared also, for example, to teach children with special needs and to provide colleagues with professional counselling.

Students graduating from teachers' training must, since the academic year 2003/04, undergo an on-the-job qualifying phase lasting the duration of 1 year. After finishing the qualifying phase, a young teacher shall submit an application to the teachers' attestation commission to be granted the qualification of a teacher.

Professional in-service training is compulsory for teachers. They are obliged to pass a minimum of 160 hours of professional training every five years. In-service training is financed from the state budget, the funds intended for in-service training are granted to pre-primary institutions via local authorities. There are several providers who offer a wide range of in-service training courses. Usually teachers/pre-primary institutions make a choice as to which courses are the most needed.

### 3. SINGLE STRUCTURE EDUCATION

Basic education (*põhiharidus*) is compulsory and organised as a single structure. Several legal acts regulate the acquisition of single structure education.

The general aims of single structure education are not distinctly established in Estonian legislation, instead the objectives of general education as a whole can be found.

The objectives of education as well as the supreme aim of the Estonian school are formulated very broadly, keeping in mind the diverse development of an individual, the family, and the Estonian nation, including ethnic minorities.

The general objectives of schooling and education are formulated in the national curriculum for basic schools and upper secondary schools by listing the personal qualities, values and attitudes to be developed in every student (for instance, respects and obeys laws; knows and respects the culture of his/her nation; takes care of nature; has a well-wishing attitude towards other people, respects their freedom and dignity; trusts himself/herself, is dignified and self-critical; thinks in a systematic manner, creatively and critically; actively supports the democratic development of society, etc.).

As the national curriculum for basic schools and upper secondary schools is being renewed, it is expected that the general aims and objectives will be formulated separately for both of these school stages. Also, separation of basic schools and upper secondary schools is under discussion on government level.

The Constitution determines the right to education. The Child Protection Act determines the right of a child to education, freedom of study and the principles of instruction. The Education Act defines the different levels of education, including basic education and upper secondary education. The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act determines the legal status and organisation of the management of a school in state or municipal ownership, also the organisation of schooling and education at school. The Private Schools Act regulates the same issues in private schools. The Local Government Organisation Act regulates the responsibilities of local governments in administering and developing the education network.

The standard of basic education and upper secondary education (requirements for the contents of studies and study results) is determined by the national curriculum for basic schools and upper secondary schools. Basic education can be acquired on the basis of three national curricula: the national curriculum for basic schools and upper secondary schools, the simplified national curriculum for basic schools, and the national curriculum for students with moderate and severe learning disabilities. The school as an employer (employment contracts, work time, salary, etc.) is regulated by regulations issued by the Government of the Republic. Regulations issued by the Minister of Social Affairs regulate the questions concerning the health of students.

Acquiring basic education takes a period of 9 years. For the purposes of the curriculum, the single structure is divided into three stages: I stage – years 1-3; II stage – years 4-6; III stage – years 7-9. That means that the content of studies is divided into three wholes and learning outcomes are described at the end of each stage. Basic education can be acquired in basic schools (ca 46 % of all schools) and in upper secondary schools that include years of basic school (ca 40 %). Also primary schools exist (ca 14 % of all schools) that include years 1 to 6 depending on the needs and opportunities as the school network is planned according to the principle that a primary school must be as close as possible to a child's home. All schools are coeducational and education is free of charge for all pupils in municipally owned and state schools. Most schools are municipally owned (90 %) but also private schools (5 %) and state schools (5 %) exist. The latter are mostly for children with special educational needs.

Many types of financial support for students' families do exist:

Textbooks, exercise books, workbooks and worksheets and most of the study aids are free to all basic school students, their cost is covered from the state budget.

Daytime students of years 1-9 and, if possible, also evening or distance learning students acquiring basic education, get free school lunch.

Local municipalities are obliged to organize transportation of students to the local school in the catchment area of which the students live. Children who study at schools for students with special needs, who live in boarding school facilities of municipal schools and whose home is located outside the town or municipality of the school, will be compensated for travel between home and school up to four times a month.

The travel costs of those students who travel between home and school on daily basis will be compensated for one return trip per day.

In boarding school facilities of municipal schools, places financed from the state budget are created for children from families with coping difficulties.

According to the State Family Benefits Act, the partial reimbursement of expenses relating to the care, raising and education of children is available for families.

Until a child reaches 16 years of age (in case of studying in daytime study – until 19 years of age), families receive child allowance. One of the parents has the right to receive childcare allowance for each child of up to 3 years of age. If there are also children between 3 and 8 years of age in addition to a child of up to 3 years of age or if the family raises three or more children, childcare allowance is paid also for each child between 3 and 8 years of age. In families with seven or more children, one parent receives a monthly family allowance.

A child of a single parent and a child of a conscript in the service of the Defence Forces receives an allowance.

### **3.1 Admission**

Children who attain 7 years of age by 1 October of the current year are subject to the obligation to attend school. Students are subject to the obligation to attend school until they acquire basic education or attain 17 years of age. A school is required to ensure a study opportunity for each child subject to the obligation to attend school who resides in the catchment area of the school. Children are admitted to school without any pre-selection tests. Students also have the right to choose a school outside the catchment area but this requires the availability of vacant places in that school.

In pre-school child care institutions and preparatory groups for pre-school children formed by schools, the physical, mental and social development of children is assessed. A parent may apply to a counselling committee for postponement of the obligation to attend school, if needed.

### **3.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue**

Duration of an academic year is from 1 September of the current year until 31 August of the next year. An academic year consists of a period of study, an examination session and school holidays. A study period includes not less than 175 days of study (35 weeks). A week of study includes five study days, the duration of a lesson is 45 minutes. The Minister of Education and Research determines school holidays and the time of examination sessions on a yearly basis. Autumn, Christmas and spring holidays divide a school year into four quarters. Autumn and spring holidays last usually for one week and Christmas holidays last between 2 and 3 weeks.

A school curriculum determines the weekly study load of students but the highest permitted weekly study load is determined by the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools, falling between 20 lessons per week in year 1 to 34 lessons in year 9.

Usually children of the same age belong to the same class. The upper limit of class size is 24 students. A composite class shall be formed if the number of students in two or more classes together is twenty or less. Classes of years 1 to 4, 3 to 6 and 5 to 9 may be joined into composite classes. More than 95 % of all students attend schools with one shift. Usually a school day starts at 8.00 a.m. in town schools and somewhat later (until 9.00) in rural schools. Schools, which do not have a sufficient number of student places in one shift may organise the provision of education in two shifts. In that case, the lessons must end at 19.00 at the latest.

### 3.3 Curriculum

The standards for basic education are established by the national curriculum which is approved by the Government of the Republic. Each school prepares its own curriculum on the basis of the national curriculum. The national curriculum includes a general part, subject syllabi and cross-curriculum subjects.

The general part includes:

- the basis for the national curriculum;
- the objectives of the schooling and education of the school;
- the principles of the national curriculum;
- the formation of competences;
- the basis for integration of studies;
- the compulsory subjects;
- the basis for the formation of the schooling and education process and evaluation of study results;
- the basis for organisation of studies;
- the organisation of studies of school levels and general competences;
- the basis for preparation of the school curriculum;
- the structure of the school curriculum.

The school curricula shall set out the study objectives, study activities, study content and required study results (subject competence) at different school levels.

Teachers are free to choose the teaching methods. Within study activities, methods and forms to activate students such as working in pairs or in groups, discussions, excursions and study trips, preparing reports, researches and exhibitions, and their dramatisation and performance are important.

Textbooks, work exercise books, workbooks and other teaching aids are used in teaching, they have to conform to the national curriculum and the requirements established for teaching aids by the regulation of the Minister of Education and Research. The publisher approves the conformity of textbooks, work exercise books and workbooks to the above mentioned requirements with the respective certification note and registers the approved teaching aids in the sub-register of teaching aids of the Estonian Education Information System. Teachers have the right to choose suitable items

from the sub-register. In nearly all years and subjects, alternative textbooks exist, in some of them there are many alternatives.

### **3.4 Assessment, progression and certification**

The principles, conditions and procedures of assessment, assignment of supplementary study or repeating the study year and promotion of students to the next year are established at central level by the regulation of the Minister of Education and Research. According to this regulation, all schools may develop their own assessment procedures.

Students are assessed by teachers on the basis of oral performance, written and practical assignments and practical activities, bearing in mind conformity with the requirements of the curriculum. Usually a five-point scale is used where grade '5' means 'very good', '4' means 'good', '3' means 'satisfactory', '2' means 'poor' and '1' means 'weak'. In years 1 and 2, written and oral verbal assessment may be used in some or all subjects, describing a pupil's knowledge and skills in different subjects. For quarters of an academic year and for the full academic year students are given summative grades.

At least once during the academic year, a student development oriented interview is carried out in which a parent also participates. This has the general objective to support the development of a student.

To support the acquisition of the knowledge and skills required by the curriculum that were not acquired during the study period, a student may be given an assignment of supplementary study to be carried out after the end of the study period. A student in years 1-9 may be given an assignment of supplementary study in subjects for which, on the basis of the grades or verbal assessments for quarters of the academic year, the grade for the entire academic year would be 'poor' or 'weak'. A student may be, on the basis of a justified decision of the teachers' council, obliged to repeat a year if in at least three subjects a student has been given the grade 'poor' or 'weak' for the full academic year, if supplementary study has not given the desired results and if in order to reach the study results required by the curriculum it is not reasonable to follow a personal curriculum or other support systems.

At basic school level, students' external assessment is also conducted. It is carried out by means of basic school final examinations and national standardised tests. The achievement of the learning outcomes specified by the national curriculum for basic schools and upper secondary schools is assessed.

At the end of I and II stages of study, standardised tests may be carried out. These tests are designed to evaluate the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills of a subject necessary to complete a stage of study: ability to reproduce knowledge, to use it in a new situation and to link it to the knowledge acquired in other subjects.

Tests are carried out in the following subjects: 1) in year 3 in Estonian/Russian and mathematics; 2) in year 6 in two or three subjects: Estonian/Russian, mathematics and one other subject. The number and subjects of tests are prescribed by the Minister of Education and Research.

For finishing basic school, students of year 9 shall sit three final examinations. The final examination papers are marked in a school by a commission that operates on the basis of the marking scheme of final examination papers of the relevant subject. Final examinations with harmonised questions and assignments include an examination in Estonian language and literature or in Estonian as a second language, and an examination in mathematics. The third examination will be sat as a school exam on student's choice in one of the following subjects: Russian language and literature, English, German, French, Russian, biology, chemistry, physics, geography, history or social study.



Teachers carry out assessment in their respective subjects on the basis of objectives and assessment criteria laid down in the curriculum. Assessment is an inseparable part of the education and schooling process.

The student and his/her parents are notified of the student's quarterly or yearly summary grades via a school report or student record. A school report covers one academic year; a student record covers one stage of study (three academic years). The school determines the form of school reports and student records. Most of the parents can follow the grades of their children online via E-school as well.

The school awards the student a graduation certificate that is presented on a special form with security elements. Basic school graduation certificate is awarded to a student who has acquired basic education, achieved, as minimum, satisfactory results in all compulsory subjects specified in the curriculum and who has passed final examinations.

As an annex to the graduation certificate, a school report is compiled and issued together with the graduation certificate. The school report carries information on curriculum and the results of its fulfilment. The school report includes annual grades for compulsory and optional subjects presented numerically and verbally, as well as the subjects and grades of basic school final examinations taken.

### **3.5 Guidance and counselling**

Pursuant to the Youth Work Act, the organization of information and guidance services is the responsibility of the county governor who signs a contract with a provider every year. In each county (there are 15 counties), there is at least one centre, which provides young people with information on educational options and guidance in general. The centres also support teachers in giving good quality guidance services, as well as organise regular thematic trainings, seminars, lectures and tests for evaluating personal characteristics and abilities. These services are targeted at students of both general education and vocational education schools. They also cooperate with teachers, parents and companies. At the moment, the total number of such information and counselling centres is 24. Counselling services are also offered in some vocational schools where special staff have been hired for this purpose. The demand for professional counselling services has grown year by year and significantly exceeds its provision.

The national curriculum for basic schools and upper secondary schools indicates topics/ themes that should be addressed in all subjects (cross-curriculum topics). One of the cross-curricular topics is 'building up a professional career', which foresees that when studying different subjects the branches of economy and professions related to these subjects are also acknowledged.

Guidance of schools on methodological and school organisation issues is within the jurisdiction of local governments. Many schools employ so-called support specialists (psychologists, speech therapists, special education teachers, social educators) who offer guidance to parents of students with special educational needs and to teachers.

### **3.6 Teachers**

Teachers are trained at higher education level. Generalist teachers, specialist teachers of basic schools and upper secondary schools, teachers of general education subjects in vocational schools and special education teachers are trained at the second level of higher education, the total volume of teachers' training being 200 credit points (see 2.5.). Generalist teachers are trained according to the integrated curricula of Bachelor's and Master's study (5 years, concurrent model); other teachers are trained according to the consecutive model in three-year Bachelor's study, which is followed by the two-year Master's study.

A generalist teacher mostly teaches all subjects in his or her class in years 1-6. A basic school specialist teacher usually teaches one or several subjects in years 5-12 according to his or her qualifications and may also teach one or several subjects in years 1-6 according to his or her qualifications.

For further information about in-service training of teachers and on-the-job qualifying phase, see 2.5.



## 4. UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

In Estonia, ISCED 2 level forms part of a single structure and is described in chapter 3.

Upper secondary education is divided into general upper secondary education, which is acquired in general upper secondary schools (*gümnaasium*) and vocational upper secondary education, which is acquired in vocational schools. General upper secondary schools are mostly municipal schools and vocational schools are mostly state schools (69 %). Upper secondary students are usually between 16 and 19 years of age. The division of places between upper secondary schools and vocational schools is not subject to state regulation. In 2006, about 65 % of the graduates of basic schools learned in general upper secondary schools.

A general upper secondary school includes years 10-12. As an institution, a general upper secondary school may also include years of basic school. The acquisition of general upper secondary education provides the prerequisites and grants the right to continue studies to acquire higher education.

General upper secondary education is regulated by the same legislation as basic (or single structure) education, and the objectives of general upper secondary education, have not been established separately; they are common with those of the basic education and have been presented in the national curriculum for basic schools and upper secondary schools. For further information about legislation including objectives of education, see 3.0.

The acquisition of vocational upper education is regulated by the Vocational Educational Institutions Act (1998, last updated in January 2009) that enacts the types of vocational training, the vocational education standard and national curricula, the basis for the establishment, reorganisation and closure of vocational schools, the principles of school management, the basis for school budgeting and financing, the rights and obligations of members of schools, as well as internal evaluation of and state supervision over the activities of schools.

In vocational education, the students can choose between different pathways: vocational training for persons beyond minimum school-leaving age who lack basic education, vocational training based on basic education; vocational upper secondary education and vocational training based on secondary education. In all these pathways students acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for performing skilled work in a profession, speciality or occupation. The difference between each of these is the academic attainment of the applicant as a prerequisite upon commencing the studies. There are no restrictions related to the level of education for persons beyond the minimum school-leaving age who lack basic education upon commencing their studies.

In addition, vocational training in basic schools and general upper secondary schools is offered to students in cooperation with those schools. The aim of vocational training given in basic schools and general upper secondary schools is to provide the students with primary vocational, professional or occupational knowledge and skills as well as primary knowledge and skills necessary for planning a career, and to develop a readiness for continued studies.

The objective of vocational upper secondary education is to obtain the vocational and professional knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for independent skilled work and the general educational knowledge and skills prescribed by the curriculum. Persons who have completed vocational upper secondary education may continue studies to acquire higher education if admission requirements set up by the institution are followed (for example, National Examination Certificate may be required). For better competing to be admitted to a higher education institution, vocational upper secondary education graduates are given the possibility to continue general education studies to the extent of 35 weeks of study and a vocational school is required to organise the specified studies in co-operation with a general upper secondary school.

The compulsory contents of vocational schools' curricula are regulated by the national curricula established by a regulation of the Minister of Education and Research. The Professions Act (a new redaction in 2008) regulates the work of professional councils and issues related to professional qualifications. The procedures of professional councils and the duration of mandates are established by Government regulation.

Estonia has established a system of study allowances and created possibilities to get study loans (see also 6.2.). A study allowance consists of a basic allowance and a supplementary allowance. A student, who is an Estonian citizen or is staying in Estonia on the basis of a permanent or temporary residence permit and acquires vocational education according to a full-time curriculum which foresees state commissioned student places and has not exceeded the nominal period of studies, has the right to apply for the basic allowance. Students acquiring vocational education based on secondary education whose residence is located outside the local government unit or outside the bordering local government units of where the educational institution at which they study is located, may apply for a supplementary allowance. The last mentioned students also have the right to obtain a study loan if the duration of their studies according to the curriculum is nine calendar months or more.

Students who study full-time and whose place of residence is located outside the local government area in which the educational institution at which they study is located, are provided transport benefits to cover transport expenses between the institution and their home as follows: for students undergoing vocational training on the basis of basic education in a vocational school, transportation expenses are covered up to twice a month; for students of state upper secondary schools and of schools for students with special educational needs and sanatorium boarding schools – up to four times in a month. Also transportation expenses for travelling to the permanent place of residence and back during national holidays and school holidays are covered. For students travelling every day to an educational institution and back to the permanent place of residence, transportation expenses are covered to the extent of one return ticket per day for the distance of up to 40 kilometres (period tickets are recommended).

Local authorities may decide on organising transport and allocating transport benefits to students of schools with municipal ownership.

School lunch allowances are available to vocational students studying on the basis of basic education.

Regarding family support schemes, see 3.0.

## **4.1 Admission**

Commencement of studies in an upper secondary school or vocational school requires successful graduation of the previous stage of study: a basic school graduation certificate is required. As an innovation, it is possible for people beyond the age of compulsory school attendance (17 years) since the year 2006 to begin studies in a vocational education institution without having previously obtained basic education. The state and local authorities must provide all interested persons with the opportunity to acquire vocational secondary education on the basis of basic education.

Upper secondary schools that are obliged to offer services to an entire town or to the whole country establish additional criteria for admission. In most cases, supplementary tests are taken in basic subjects or in the subjects of the chosen field, which are followed by interviews with students. The students who have been successful at regional or national subject contests are favoured at admittance.

## **4.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue**

For arrangement of time during the day, week and year in upper secondary school, see 3.2.

The lowest permitted weekly study load of students in the upper secondary school stage is 32 lessons. No maximum work load has been established. The upper limit of the size of a class is 36 students. Usually students of the same age belong to the same class but, if a course arrangement is used, children of different age may belong to the same group. People who are at least 17 years old, work or have interrupted their studies in a diurnal school can also study in the form of evening classes or distance learning or as an external student.

With regard to vocational training, the traditional forms of study (diurnal, evening and distance learning) have been abolished. They have been replaced with a school-based form of study and workplace-based form of study (apprenticeship, since 2007/08). The intensity of studying is determined by the workload (full-time and part-time study). The difference of apprenticeship (workplace-based study) from regular school-based study is that at least 2/3 instead of 1/4 of the studies is carried out working at an enterprise under the instruction of supervisors of that enterprise. Vocational schools give students general skills and knowledge and professional theoretical preparation. The number of students in workplace-based study is not sizeable (673 people as of 10 November 2008) but it is growing.

In vocational schools an academic year consists of at least 40 weeks of study. The total duration of school holidays is at least eight weeks a year. Studies are conducted in cycles and a year-based arrangement of study period is predominantly used in preparing the timetable as well as in planning the working time. The study period includes examinations as well as practical training in companies/institutions. The size of study groups in vocational schools is not regulated and is decided by the school.

The weekly and daily timetable of a vocational school is determined by the school, no uniform requirements are set in this respect. A week of study is defined by 40 hours of student's work; the share of lectures is formed according to a timetable in a specific school. The volume of a student's individual work comprises, according to the vocational education standard, at least 10 % of the total volume of studies.

### **4.3 Curriculum**

The general part of the national curriculum is common for both basic schools and upper secondary schools as indicated in 3.3. Concerning upper secondary schools, the national curriculum determines the list of compulsory subjects and the number of compulsory courses per subject, teaching goals, activities for gaining teaching goals, subject content and required study results by the end of upper secondary studies. The specifications of compulsory subjects, lists of optional subjects and conditions for choosing them are established by a school's curriculum. A school establishes its own fields of study through the optional subjects and courses and/or by intensified study in some subjects. A student's curriculum includes compulsory subjects and optional subjects (courses) the choice of which depends on the selected field of study.

The subject syllabi in the national curriculum are compiled in the form of courses, whereas the word 'course' refers primarily to a 35-hour study unit. In schools with Estonian language of instruction the curriculum includes 72 compulsory courses, in schools with Russian or other language of instruction, due to compulsory Estonian language study, 81 compulsory courses. It means that 75 % and 84 % of study time respectively is filled by compulsory courses.

According to legislation, instruction in vocational schools shall be carried out according to the vocational education standard and the school curricula prepared on the basis of the national curricula for vocational education. The preparation of national curricula was co-ordinated by the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre and the work was organised in working groups of vocational

education experts. Altogether, 45 national curricula were prepared and a major part of them only approved by the Minister of Education and Research in 2009. Therefore schools have worked for many years on the basis of school curricula that are based on the requirements of professional standards and have been prepared by the schools themselves.

The new national curricula are based on professional standards which now have a new format as a result of an ESF project in 2005-2008. The qualifications must, according to the new format, be output based, taking into account the learning outcomes and the actual competences of an applicant. Thus the new national curricula, which are based on the new qualifications, are also output based.

A vocational school prepares a curriculum for each area of specialisation taught. The curriculum is a basic document for studies in a specific area of specialisation, taking into account the requirements of professional standards and the relevant national curriculum. It also defines the list of elective courses with their volume and short descriptions as well as the possibility and conditions for choosing courses. The introduction of competence-based curricula has motivated vocational education providers to strengthen their contacts with employers and graduates as a way to gauge the skills needed on the labour market.

The content of vocational training established by the curriculum is presented in modules. The volume of a module depends on its objective and contents. The volume of study determined by the module is calculated in weeks of study, the smallest volume of a module being 1 academic week, which corresponds to 40 hours of a student's work on studying.

Work practice in an enterprise or institution (in-company training) is an integral part of a curriculum. The school must guarantee a student with a place of work practice as well as the preparation, guidance and evaluation of the work practice.

The standard period of acquiring vocational secondary education is at least 3 years, i.e. 120 study weeks and vocation or profession related studies must account for at least 50 % of the total volume of the curriculum. The volume of practical study is at least 25 % and the volume of work practice is also at least 25 % of the volume of vocational training. The curriculum must contain at least 40 study weeks of general educational subjects, of which 32 (33 if the language of instruction is Russian or other) study weeks are compulsory and common to the curricula of all vocations, professions and occupations. The remaining 8(7) study weeks include compulsory subjects related to the speciality of the vocation, profession or occupation being acquired. In addition, a selection and volume of general subjects necessary for acquisition of a vocation have been integrated into the basic skills modules (vocational study).

Both general upper secondary school and vocational school teachers may choose the teaching methods they use. Concerning teaching aids, see 3.3.

#### **4.4 Assessment, progression and certification**

See 3.4 as assessment principles are mainly the same in basic schools and general upper secondary schools.

In the upper secondary school stage, course grades and study stage grades are given. Students are usually assessed in a five-point system. The same scale is used in vocational schools.

In upper secondary school a student is generally not left to repeat the academic year. A student acquiring upper secondary education is expelled from school if there are three or more subjects in one academic year where more than half of the course grades he or she has obtained are 'poor' or 'weak'. At the same time, students of the last year of upper secondary school cannot be expelled from school.

The conditions and procedures of assigning a student to supplementary study and progression of a student to the next year are set out in the school's curriculum.

In vocational education, the teachers' council of the school decides promotion of a student to the next course. For promotion, the student must have concluded the studies foreseen in the curriculum for this course. A student may also be promoted conditionally, i.e. when some of the requirements of the curriculum are not fulfilled and a deadline is given for their fulfilment.

Students of vocational education institutions have the right to receive academic leave related to health problems, raising a child or compulsory military service. In case of academic leave, the study period is prolonged.

For graduation from upper secondary school, students of the 12th year have to pass 5 final examinations, at least 3 of which have to be national examinations and 2 may be passed as school examinations; but students may also pass all 5 final examinations as national examinations. In general, national examinations are written examinations. The national examination of the mother tongue (Estonian or Russian) is compulsory for all students graduating from upper secondary school. In schools where instruction is in another language than Estonian, students also have to pass an examination of the Estonian language. The rest of the national examinations can be chosen from mathematics, foreign languages (English, German, Russian, French), physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography and social study. A 10-point or 100-point system is used for assessing national examinations. The final examinations of the upper secondary school are generally unified with entrance examinations to higher education institutions.

A student is considered a graduate from a vocational school if the student has covered the full curriculum, meaning that he/she has acquired all the material foreseen in the curriculum, has taken all necessary tests and passed all required assessments, practical training and the final examination. The final examination may be replaced by a professional qualification examination. The number and fields of the required examinations are established in the school curriculum. The examinations can be oral, written, practical or a combination of these, depending on the vocation, profession and occupation. At the point of graduation from vocational upper secondary education, passing national general education examinations is voluntary and they are held according to the same principles as with regard to students graduating from general upper secondary schools. Passing these examinations may become necessary if a student wishes to continue his or her studies in a university or a professional higher education institution where national examination certificates are generally a precondition for entry.

Students of general upper secondary school receive an Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate together with the National Examination Certificate. The National Examinations and Qualifications Centre issues the National Examination Certificate. The school where the student is studying issues the Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate. A National Examination Certificate is valid only together with an Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate and vice versa. A student of year 12 gets a class certificate if he or she did not pass graduation examinations or if he or she has received a 'poor' study stage grade in any subject.

A student studying according to the vocational upper secondary education curriculum receives a Certificate of Acquisition of Vocational Secondary Education upon graduation.

The school report is an annex to the certificate. As a document certifying acquisition of vocational secondary education, the certificate is also valid without the school report but the school report is not valid without a certificate.

When graduating from a vocational education institution, people who so wish have the right to take a professional qualification examination, instead of a respective graduation exam, and be attributed a professional qualification. A professional qualification certificate proves the professional qualification. The owner of a professional qualification certificate has the right to use the name of the profession or the respective abbreviations. Professional qualification certificates are registered by the issuing organisation and will be inserted in the professional register according to the rules set out in the statute of the professional register.

#### **4.5 Guidance and counselling**

For information about information and guidance services organized in counties, see 3.5.

The agreement regarding career and guidance services in Estonia was signed between two ministries – the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Research, on 12 March 2008. Until then, the provision of career services had been very fragmented. From now on, the development of career services will take place in close cooperation with the two ministries who have recognised the need for the integrated model.

In some upper secondary schools, students are provided with vocational training within the framework of optional subjects (vocational education in basic schools and upper secondary schools, see 4). Such training is provided by vocational educational institutions. The studies take place on the basis of a separate curriculum and last for at least 15 study weeks during which pupils acquire basic knowledge of the selected profession and receive a certificate confirming the completion of the vocational education course. The knowledge and skills acquired in the basic school or upper secondary school can be taken into account in further studies if the pupil wishes to continue their studies in the same specialty.

#### **4.6 Teachers and trainers**

For general upper secondary teachers, see 3.6.

A vocational school general education teacher shall be able to link general education subjects to subjects related to vocations. A vocational teacher teaches speciality subjects in a vocational school and the requirements for his or her training and qualifications are different than the requirements for teachers of general education subjects: at least 75 % of such teaching staff must possess pedagogical higher education or higher education related to the specialization, and all vocational teachers must in addition have specialized work experience and acquired qualifications either in pedagogy (in case of specialised higher education) or the specialization (in case of pedagogical higher education).

The professional standard of vocational teachers developed in 2006 differentiates between three levels of qualifications of vocational teachers depending on their educational level and work experience. Teacher's training takes place at higher education institutions. Access to the teaching profession depends upon previously acquired professional education, be it higher education, vocational upper secondary education or post-secondary non-tertiary education coupled with teacher's training (one or three years). The standard period of study is 3 years (120 credit points = 180 ECTS credits). A vocational teacher teaching only practical vocational skills and instructing practical lessons is not required to have obtained higher education but he/she is required to have at least 3-year work experience in the field of speciality he/she is teaching.



## 5. POST-SECONDARY NON-TERTIARY EDUCATION

After acquiring general upper secondary (ISCED 3A) education in general upper secondary schools or vocational upper secondary (ISCED 3B) education in vocational schools, students can choose to continue their studies in post-secondary (non-tertiary) vocational education (ISCED 4B) which may be acquired in vocational schools and, depending on the curriculum also in institutions of professional higher education. The objective is to prepare workers for skilled work and students are given the knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes to perform complicated work independently. Some studies are only available at post-secondary (non-tertiary) level, such as: business and administration, social services, environmental protection and security services. Other subjects can be studied at upper secondary and post-secondary level, e.g. engineering and engineering trades, manufacturing and processing agriculture.

About 13 % of general upper secondary graduates continue their studies in vocational schools although most students wish to pursue higher education which is valued higher. 8 % of graduates of vocational schools continue in post-secondary vocational education. Post-secondary vocational education is also targeted at graduates from higher education who wish to complement their academic education with practical skills.

### 5.1 Admission

Persons who have completed upper secondary education (general or vocational) may commence studies according to the curricula based on secondary education. In most cases, admission criteria comprise grades of graduation of upper secondary education in the subjects of the chosen field, which are followed by interviews with students; in some cases supplementary tests are taken.

### 5.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue

No differences exist compared to vocational upper secondary education, see 4.2. In post-secondary (non-tertiary) vocational education, part-time study and more flexible study arrangements (distance and e-learning and cycles) are now also used more to better suit adult learners whose share among students is increasing.

### 5.3 Curriculum

The length of the vocational education curriculum on the basis of upper secondary education is generally 0.5 to 2.5 years, i.e. 20 to 100 weeks of study. The volume of practical study is at least 25 % and the volume of work practice also at least 25 % of the volume of vocational training. See also 4.3.

### 5.4 Assessment, progression and certification

Graduates receive the Certificate of Passing Vocational Studies Based on Upper Secondary Education. See also 4.4. for progression and graduation.

### 5.5 Guidance and counselling

See 4.5.

### 5.6 Teachers and trainers

See 4.6.

## 6. TERTIARY EDUCATION

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The general principles of legislation relevant to higher education are set out in the 1995 Universities Act and in the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act (1998). The Vocational Educational Institutions Act (1998), the Private Schools Act (1998) and the Adult Education Act (1993) also regulate certain aspects of higher education. The Standard of Higher Education (2002, renewed 2008) establishes the general requirements for higher education. Estonia has passed the Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications Act that came into effect on 1 January 2001. The issues of academic recognition are regulated by the Lisbon Convention on the recognition in the European region of the certificates of higher education and the certificates giving access to higher education, which was ratified by the Parliament of the Republic of Estonia on 1 April 1998. In 2006, conditions and procedures for evaluation and academic acknowledgement of documents certifying education acquired in a foreign country, and for usage of titles of qualifications given in the education system of a foreign country, were additionally established with a decree of the Government of the Republic of Estonia.

In November 2006, the Parliament approved the Estonian Higher Education Strategy for the years 2006-2015 (the implementation plan of the Higher Education Strategy was approved in August 2007). Prioritised paths of development comprise linking higher education to the needs of the Estonian society and the expectations of the labour market, strengthening quality assurance, curriculum development, internationalisation and renewing the financing system. In 2006, the Estonian Higher Education Internationalisation Strategy for the years 2006-2015 was also completed to increase academic mobility, including the share of foreign students in both Master's and Doctoral study.

In June 2008, amendments to the Universities Act, the Private Schools Act, the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act and acts related to these acts were approved by the Parliament. These changes create new rules for issuing national diplomas by higher education institutions, for academic work distribution and cooperation in the higher education system as well as for modernisation of the quality assurance system of higher education. Also the renewed Standard of Higher Education was adopted in 2008, establishing the general requirements for higher education.

The renewed Standard of Higher Education sets uniform requirements for study at higher education level, including the objectives of study and learning outcomes to be achieved, total study load and principles for recognition of prior learning and professional experience, as well as general and specific requirements for institutions concerning their teaching staff. The Standard of Higher Education is the document on the basis of which (since 2009) an educational institution can apply for, and the Government of the Republic can award to, an educational institution the right to carry out studies at higher education level in broad groups of curricula and to issue corresponding academic degrees and diplomas accordingly. In case of teachers' training, the provisions of the Standard of Higher Education are applied, taking account of the specifications prescribed in the Framework Requirements for Teachers' Training. In addition, 'Framework requirements for medical training, veterinary training, pharmacist training, dentistry training, study in obstetrics, nursing training, architectural studies and civil engineering studies' have been established.

To present more clearly the peculiarities of the objectives and the acquired qualifications of the academic and professional study branches, and to describe the relations with vocational education, the learning outcomes of higher education cycles were spelled out in the renewed Standard of Higher Education. One of the changes involved a link to the national qualification framework established with the 2008 Professions Act being added to learning outcomes. The Estonian qualification framework is consistent with the European Joint Qualification Framework (EQF) and with the qualification framework approved in the joint European Higher Education Area (EQF for EHEA).



All quality-related assessments to higher education institutions are given by the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency, which is independent in its assessments and must itself undergo regular external quality assessment in order to be submitted to the Register of European Higher Education Quality Agencies. Higher education institutions are also required to regularly engage in quality-related self-improvement. See also 1.4.

The Diploma Supplement has been implemented and has been compulsory for all higher education institutions since 1 January 2004. It is free of charge and issued automatically in Estonian and English to all students who have completed specialised studies (e.g. professional higher education, Master's, integrated curricula of Bachelor's and Master's or Doctoral studies). The Diploma Supplement is issued upon request in the case of students who have completed Bachelor's studies only, as they usually continue their studies at Master's level.

Opportunities to create joint curricula and joint degrees came into force in 2008.

In Estonia, the higher education system is binary and two types of institutions operate.

A university is an educational and research institution where studies are undertaken in three cycles of higher education. The function of a university is to advance science and culture and to provide services based on educational, research and other creative activities necessary for society.

The function of an institution of professional higher education is to promote lifelong learning responding to the needs of the labour market and to prepare motivated specialists with very good professional skills and work attitudes at the first level of higher education. Additionally Master's study may be conducted in an institution of professional higher education under some conditions and vocational training on the basis of secondary education may be undertaken in the same curriculum group as professional higher education.

Thus, students can make a choice between two types of curricula of the first cycle of higher education: Bachelor's study or professional higher education.

It is possible to commence studies according to the Master's curricula after the completion of either of the above curricula, on the presumption that the admission conditions established by the institution of professional higher education or university are fulfilled.

Since the 2002/03 academic year, university curricula have been structured into three main cycles: Bachelor's study, Master's study and Doctoral study. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System have been applied to curricula since the academic year 2009/10 and the national credit points used in the calculation of study load before academic year 2009/10 are being converted into the credit points of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. The Master's degree requires 120 ECTS credit points if it follows a Bachelor's degree of 180 credit points, and 60 credit points if it follows a Bachelor's degree of 240 credit points. The 3 + 2 model is prevailing and the 4 + 1 model is a rare exception. Existing curricula leading to a Doctoral degree last for 3 or 4 years (180-240 ECTS credit points) and the access requirement of Doctoral study is a Master's degree or a corresponding qualification. Additional admission criteria may be set by each university.

The two-cycle structure applies to most disciplines, but some studies are based on integrated curricula of Bachelor's and Master's study. The standard period of medical training and veterinary training is six years (360 ECTS credit points) and the standard period of pharmacist training, dentistry training, architectural studies, civil engineering studies and teachers' training for generalist teachers (years 1-6) is five years (300 ECTS credit points). The completion of studies results in the granting of a Master's degree.

It is possible to continue studies at Master's level after completing the professionally oriented first-cycle curriculum in a professional higher education institution or at a university.

Professional higher education programmes mostly continue to follow the one-cycle structure. The standard period of study in professional higher education is three to four years (180-240 ECTS credit points). As an exception, the standard period of study in midwifery studies is four and a half years.

Occasionally, it is also possible to study according to professional higher education curricula in some vocational schools.

## **6.1 Admission**

All persons with secondary education acquired in Estonia or with foreign qualifications equal thereto have an equal right to compete to be admitted to a university, an institution of professional higher education or a vocational school. The entry requirement of Master's study is a Bachelor's level degree, higher education acquired by completing a professional higher education curriculum or a corresponding qualification. In an institution of professional higher education, work experience of at least one year in a field corresponding to the Master's curriculum is also required. To start Doctoral study, a Master's level degree or corresponding qualification is required.

The council of the higher education institution establishes the conditions and procedures for the admittance of students. In addition to an upper secondary education certificate the National Examination Certificate may also be required and the results of entrance exams and/or professional aptitude tests considered. Academic aptitude tests have also been used for admission. Higher education institutions have also created specific possibilities for students with special needs to compete for study places. An open university may exist at the university, usually admitting students without entrance examinations. In an open university, studies are organised in a manner as flexible as possible, taking into account the needs of adult students.

Students are admitted both to state-commissioned and non-state-commissioned student places. The Minister of Education and Research establishes the number of state-commissioned student places. In cases of public universities or private educational institutions, the provision of state-commissioned student places is formalised as a three-year contract under public law (with an outcome-oriented contract as an appendix) between the Ministry of Education and Research and the educational institution. In case of state-owned institutions of professional higher education or vocational schools, the provision of state-commissioned student places is approved by the decree of the Minister of Education and Research.

State-commissioned student places shall initially be filled following the procedures established by the council of the higher education institution and according to the results of the entrance examinations. The institution may group persons according to their prior qualifications or special needs, and in such event, may establish different admission requirements for different groups, fulfilment of which shall be the basis for the ranking list. The quota beyond state-commissioned student places is set by the council of the higher education institution. A student who did not pass the competition to state-commissioned student places has the right to compete for admittance to non-state-commissioned student places within the quota. These principles are applicable to all different kind of students' groups. The procedures for admission and covering of study costs of persons who study on the basis of international agreements and who are not residents of Estonia are set out in accordance with these agreements.

For admission to a private vocational school or a private university, the same conditions and procedures for admission are applied that are established by the law for admission to a state or municipal educational institution or a public university. The board of a private educational institution has the right to set additional conditions.

In terms of completing a curriculum, an educational institution may take account of the previous study results and professional experience of the given person in all higher education cycles, following the principles stated by the Higher Education Standard and within the limits and pursuant to the procedures established by the board of the university or institution of professional higher education.

## **6.2 Students' contributions and financial support**

Students who study at student places beyond state-commissioned education have to reimburse their study costs under the conditions and pursuant to the procedures established by the council of the higher education institution. The council of the higher education institution establishes the rate for reimbursement of study costs at least four months before the beginning of an academic year but the rate should not be increased for already matriculated students by more than 10 per cent compared to the preceding academic year. Also studying in Open University is payable. The amount of tuition fees is differentiated for different fields of study and specialisations. Generally these principles are applicable for all students. There are no differences on tuition fees for foreign students dependent whether they are EU or non-EU citizens.

Registration fees or any other service fees related to commencement or finalisation of studies are not applicable to students occupying state-commissioned student places.

Estonia has established a system of study allowances and created possibilities to get study loans. A student, who is an Estonian citizen or is staying in Estonia on the basis of a permanent or temporary residence permit and acquires higher education according to a curriculum which foresees state commissioned student places in full-time study and has not exceeded the nominal period of studies, has the right to apply for a study allowance. Students whose residence is located outside the local government unit or outside the bordering local government units of where the educational institution at which they study is located, may apply for a supplementary monetary allowance in order to cover expenses related to housing and transport.

Study allowances and supplementary allowances are granted according to the order of merit lists of students within the limits of the funds specifically allocated to educational institutions for this purpose in the state budget. The size of the allowances is established by the state budget and the study allowance funds are allocated to educational institutions from the state budget through the budget of the Ministry of Education and Research.

An Estonian citizen or a person staying in Estonia on the basis of a permanent residence permit, the duration of whose studies according to the curriculum is nine calendar months or more, has the right to obtain a study loan if he or she is enrolled in higher education study at a higher education institution. The study loan can be obtained as many times as there are academic years foreseen for the nominal period of studies of the curriculum. Persons studying abroad have the right to obtain a study loan to the extent that corresponds to the standard period of studies of the curriculum in the corresponding or closest field of study in Estonian educational institutions.

Credit institutions are deemed to be lenders of study loans, granting study loans from the funds of their credit resources. The Minister of Finance enters into a contract with the credit institution on behalf of the state regarding the management and grant of study loans. The state guarantees the study loan of the recipient to the extent of the maximum rate established by the Government of the Republic and the interest to be paid to the credit institution on the amount of the study loan by the recipient.

The recipient of a study loan pays interest to the credit institution on the amount of the loan guaranteed by the state.

The recipient of a loan shall commence repayment of the loan amount not later than twelve months after finishing his or her studies, if during that time the recipient of the loan has not begun to continue his or her studies in a vocational school based on secondary education or in a higher education institution, including in an educational institution abroad.

A person who has finished his or her studies at a vocational school or higher education institution and who has commenced service or employment in a state or local government authority or with a legal person in public law has the right to have the part of the amount of his or her study loan, which has not yet been repaid, cancelled by the authority or legal person in public law. The relevant conditions shall be established by the Government of the Republic.

A Doctoral student has the right to apply for a Doctoral allowance if he or she is an Estonian citizen or is staying in Estonia on the basis of a permanent or temporary residence permit, studies in student places formed on the basis of state-commissioned education at a university in public law or a private university and has not exceeded the nominal period of studies of the curriculum.

Since 2003, 10-15 grants have been offered every year for doctoral candidates to study in foreign universities as a part of state-commissioned education. The Kristjan Jaak Programme launched by the Ministry of Education and Research is operating for the fifth year and its purpose is to support the studying abroad of students of Estonian institutions of higher education and visits of academic staff to conferences and training courses in foreign countries. The programme allocates grants for up to 1 year and up to 5 months to Master's and Doctoral level students. The EU Social Fund programme DoRa 2008-2015 supports the studying in Estonia of foreign Doctoral candidates whose goal is also to secure their Doctoral degree here. These students receive a Doctoral allowance and a relocation benefit to cover the costs incurred by moving to Estonia from abroad (costs associated with travelling, moving, primary rent, residential permit and insurance). The programme also allows successful Doctoral level students to conduct research or pass training courses in a foreign university/research institution at least once during his or her studies. The application for support will be submitted by the doctoral candidate and the grant will be paid on the basis of the standard of living and travel cost table established with a directive of the Minister of Education and Research. Support will be provided for 5 months and the goal is that 75 % of Doctoral students allowed to defend their degrees have also studied abroad. Master's candidates who have achieved excellent results in their studies and who have already chosen the subject of their Master's thesis also qualify for the grant under the DoRa programme. The grant application will be submitted by the student and he or she can apply for a grant that covers a complete study period (semester, trimester) abroad. The grant will be paid on the basis of the standard of living and travel cost table established with a directive of the Minister of Education and Research.

A provision of the Act of Income Tax, establishing the right of a resident natural person to deduct his or her schooling costs or the schooling costs of a dependant of up to 26 years of age paid during a taxation period, from his or her income of the taxation period, serves as an indirect benefit. Schooling costs include the documented costs paid for studying at a state, public law or licensed private higher education institution or a foreign educational institution equal thereto, or for studying at payable courses provided by these educational institutions. The interests of a study loan are also regarded as schooling costs.

### **6.3 Organisation of the academic year**

Organisation of the academic year is generally the same in all higher education institutions but the exact dates vary as they are determined by the institutions themselves. An academic year is divided into two terms – the autumn and the spring term. An academic year usually begins in September and ends in the first half of June. The autumn term usually lasts from September to December and the

examination session is in January. The spring term lasts from the end of January or the beginning of February to the end of May, but examinations often take place until the end of June. Students have at least eight weeks of holiday each year.

## **6.4 Assessment, progression and certification**

The basis of student assessment in higher education institutions is a unified evaluation system of these institutions. The system is also used for assessment of students studying according to professional higher education curricula at vocational schools. The differentiated assessment of study results in a subject or its parts is carried out in a six-point assessment system, using both numeric and alphabetic forms and referring to the below assessment results:

grade 5 or A – excellent – an outstanding and particularly exhaustive knowledge of both the theoretical and applied content of the subject, free and creative ability to apply the material obtained, extensive independent work, a multi-faceted knowledge of professional literature. 91-100 % of the extent of the subject has been obtained;

grade 4 or B – very good – very good knowledge of both the theoretical and applied content of the subject, very good ability to apply the material obtained, some minor errors not concerning the principal content of the material have occurred in the examination. 81-90 % of the extent of the subject has been obtained;

grade 3 or C – good – good knowledge of both the theoretical and applied content of the subject, good ability to apply the material obtained, some hesitation in the details and more thorough areas of the subject and some uncertainty in answering the questions can be noted. 71-80 % of the extent of the subject has been obtained;

grade 2 or D – satisfactory – knowledge of most of the more essential theoretical and applied principles, facts and methods and their application in typical situations. Notable deficiencies in the answers and hesitation can be noted in examinations. The satisfactory grade may be accepted as sufficient to continue studies in the normal way. 61-70 % of the extent of the subject has been obtained;

grade 1 or E – unsatisfactory – a student has obtained a minimum level of knowledge but a serious deficit is noted in the application of the material, which will not allow the acquisition of following subjects. 51-60 % of the extent of the subject has been obtained;

grade 0 or F – insufficient – a student has not attained the minimum level of knowledge. 0-50 % of the extent of the subject has been obtained.

An examination or assessment is considered positive if a student receives a grade ranging from 1 (E) to 5 (A). A non-differentiated evaluation of study results is carried out as an assessment on a subject or its parts, and here a positive result is 'passed' and a negative result is 'failed'. Persons who have completed a higher education level curriculum are awarded an academic transcript that gives information about the study programme, results achieved, the academic degree awarded or qualification acquired and about the Estonian higher education system. Grades used before the academic year 1999/2000 are recorded on the academic transcript together with an explanation of the assessment system. An academic transcript is not an independent certificate of higher education.

The currently applicable assessment system established by the decree of the Minister of Higher Education and Research is being amended (due to take effect in 2010) since it is incompatible with competence-based curricula.

Since the academic year 2003/04, higher education studies may be undertaken in the form of full-time study, part-time study or external study. The provisions of the Adult Education Act concerning formal

education apply to students in part-time study and to external students; such provisions mainly deal with the right to be granted study leave.

In full-time study, a student shall cumulatively complete at least 75 % of the study load required by the curriculum to be completed by the end of each academic year, and in part-time study – less than 75 %. The first year when a student enrolls at a higher education institution, he or she shall decide whether he or she will study full-time or part-time, unless only full-time study may be conducted according to the curriculum. In the following academic years, the higher education institution shall base its decision as to whether the student is studying full-time or part-time on the student's completion of the study load required by the curriculum to be completed by the end of each academic year. The higher education institution transfers a student who does not meet the requirements of full-time study to part-time study and may demand reimbursement of study costs.

The council of a higher education institution establishes the general rules of study activities, as well as conditions and procedures for dismissal of students from the university.

Professional higher education study, Bachelor's study, Master's study and study based on integrated curriculum of Bachelor's and Master's study end with the taking of a final examination or the defence of a thesis. Doctoral study ends with the defence of a Doctoral thesis. The completion of studies based on the integrated curriculum of Bachelor's and Master's study results, similarly to finishing Master's study, is the grant of a Master's level degree. The title of academic degrees offered by educational institutions carrying out higher education studies must conform to the titles determined by the decree of the Government of the Republic.

Persons who have completed professional higher education study, Bachelor's study, Master's study, study based on integrated curriculum of Bachelor's and Master's study and Doctoral study are, after completion of the full study programme, awarded a diploma certifying completion of the curriculum or the academic degree awarded together with an academic transcript.

A person who has completed professional higher education study, Master's study, study based on integrated curricula of Bachelor's and Master's study or Doctoral study is issued free of charge a Diploma Supplement in English by the educational institution. A person who has completed a joint curriculum to the full extent shall be awarded a joint diploma or a diploma certifying completion of the curriculum and the qualification granted together with an academic transcript.

A person who has completed Bachelor's study, Master's study or study based on the integrated Bachelor's and Master's study may, under the conditions established by the Minister of Education and Research, be awarded a diploma *cum laude*.

## **6.5 Guidance and counselling**

Legislative amendments have been approved in 2008 according to which students have the right to receive study and career counselling. Most educational institutions have established counselling centres for students, in which, apart from information on organisation of study, advice and, if possible, assistance in finding jobs is provided. Some educational institutions have employed a psychologist. Since 2008, the EU Social Fund programme Primus, aimed at quality development of tertiary education, supports higher education institutions in offering study and career counselling services.

## **6.6 Academic staff**

Teaching staffs of higher education institutions consist of professors, associate professors, lecturers, assistants and teachers. They are further divided into ordinary teaching staff and visiting teaching staff. Research staff consists of lead research fellows, senior research fellows and research fellows. The members of the research staff may participate in conducting studies. Members of research staffs



of other educational institutions and other persons with required qualification may participate in conducting Master's study and Doctoral study under the conditions and pursuant to the procedure established by the council of an institution.

A member of the ordinary teaching staff or research staff shall be elected to office by way of competition for up to five years. In some circumstances determined by law, a position in the teaching staff or research staff may also be filled without announcing a competition if a person meeting the qualification requirements is employed for a specified term.

The requirements for the ordinary teaching staff and visiting teaching staff shall be established by the council of a university, based on the principles set out in the Standard of Higher Education. Under the conditions established by the council of an institution, the Rector has the right to invite scientists or other prominent creative persons or practitioners in their field of study to conduct studies as members of the visiting teaching staff for up to five years.

So far, members of teaching staff have been valued in universities primarily based on their research performance and the development of teaching competencies has been left in the background. By virtue of national strategic objectives, amendments to legislation have been made in 2008, as a result of which institutions of higher education must establish the conditions and procedure for attestation of members of teaching staff. In order to achieve a high quality of higher education studies, an institution of higher education must enable its teaching staff to continuously develop their teaching competencies. Teaching competency covers the planning of a study process, conducting the study, evaluation and giving feedback, supervising and reviewing as well as educational methodological work.

One of the objectives of the EU Social Fund programme Primus is to develop sustainable and high-quality competency in higher education pedagogy in the two universities responsible for the broad area of study of education. This will enable training to be given within all institutions of higher education interested in improving the teaching competencies of their teaching and research staff. In addition, the programme supports the activities of all institutions of higher education that are partners of the programme in ensuring continuing education for their staff conducting studies and Doctoral candidates, while helping to initiate the performance of the role of mentoring teaching staff.

## 7. CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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The learning activities of those returning to education after having left initial education (adult learners) are regulated by the Adult Education Act (1993), which defines an adult learner according to the study workload (part-time student, student beyond the daytime form of study, external student). The act differentiates between formal education, work-related training and popular adult education as types of training.

In 2005 the strategy of lifelong learning for the years 2005-2008 was approved by the Government of the Republic. The general objective of the strategy was to increase the opportunities and motivation of the people to participate in formal, non-formal and informal education, in order to improve one's knowledge and skills according to one's own needs, the needs of civil society, society and the labour market.

The declared goal of the strategy was to increase the ratio of people aged between 25 and 64 years participating in training to 10 % of the whole number of people in the respective age (in 2005, the respective ratio was 5.9 %). According to the Statistics Estonia, the ratio of people aged between 25 and 64 participating in training was 9.8 % in 2008. Up to 2007 the indicator was between 6-7 % but in 2008 there was a positive shift and the indicator raised to 9.8 %.

Based on the strategy, the development of a financing system of adult education was commenced in 2006, giving people better access to continuing training and retraining, and in 2007, an inter-ministerial working group elaborated a scheme of financial responsibilities of adults' work-related training according to which primarily three ministries will be responsible for the financing of adults' work-related training: the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications. The Government of the Republic approved the financing responsibility scheme as an annex to the Lifelong Learning Strategy in January 2008. According to the annex, each of the mentioned ministries has a specific area of responsibility in the National financing of adults' work-related training. The target group of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications comprises working adults whose work-related training is financed through enterprises; the target group of the Ministry of Education and Research comprises working adults whose work-related training is financed through education and training institutions; and the target group of the Ministry of Social Affairs comprises primarily the unemployed and job-seekers belonging to the risk groups of the labour market whose training is financed through the Unemployment Insurance Fund. The elaborated model is addressed to the adult population at large; it does not treat or exclude specific target groups (e.g. teachers, civil servants, etc.). For the purpose of creating possibilities of work-related training to the population, the ministries make use of the funds of the European Social Fund, and when these funds will be exhausted, sustainable activities satisfying Estonia's needs will be guaranteed from the state budget. The distribution of areas of responsibility related to the financing of work-related training does not rule out the financing or co-financing of the training of adults from other sources: the individual, employers, foundations.

In 2006, preparations were started for the usage of European Union structural funds in the years 2007-2013. For development of the field of adult education and creation of study opportunities, funds are allocated on the basis of the human resource development operational programme and support is received from the European Social Fund. The Ministry of Education and Research lead the preparation of the human resource development operational programme and it was composed in cooperation with other ministries and social partners. The Government of the Republic ratified the programme in January 2007 and The European Commission also approved it in 2007. Funds for adult education are allocated under the four paths of the human resource development operational programme: lifelong learning (the Ministry of Education and Research is in charge of implementation); long and high-quality working life (the Ministry of Social Affairs is in charge); knowledge and skills (the



Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication is in charge); better administrative capacity (the State Chancellery is in charge).

Because of the end of the implementation period of the underlying document of adult education called the Lifelong Education Strategy 2005-2008, the Minister of Education and Research presented in 2008 a proposal to the Government of the Republic to assemble a new development plan; the proposal was approved by the government on 4 December. The Minister of Education and Research presented the Adult Education Development Plan 2009-2013 for approval to the Government of the Republic and it was approved on 24 September 2009. The development plan has three main goals. The first one is the same as that of the strategy of lifelong learning: to enable better access to formal and non-formal learning in order to improve one's knowledge and skills and increase the ratio of people aged between 25 and 64 years participating in lifelong learning to 13.5 % by 2013. The two other goals are more qualitative than the first one: to reduce the number of people only with general education and without professional qualifications. The percentage of those people aged 25 to 64 should be 32 % by the year 2013, in 2008 it was 34.6 %. The third goal is to offer qualitative training in order to create better circumstances for people to acquire a level of education or qualification that is one step higher than what they have already attained. The goal is to increase the percentage of people with IV-VIII qualification levels to 48 % by 2013. In 2008, the percentage was 41 %. These goals will be targeted through different measures and actions. The development plan has an implementation plan where concrete actions and their costs are indicated.

## 7.1 Policy and legislative framework

The Adult Education Act (1993) provides the basis for adult education and the legal guarantees, the definition of adult education institutions, provision of learning opportunities, classification of adult education depending on its objectives, and regulates the financing of adult education. The act does not provide the age of the target group; the provisions of the Adult Education Act mainly apply to people who study part-time, in evening study, distance learning or as an external student.

The Adult Education Act also regulates the possibilities of adult learners to apply for study leave. It is possible to receive study leave with regard to studying in formal education, work-related training and popular adult education. According to the Adult Education Act, persons employed under an employment contract and persons in public service shall be granted study leave in order to participate in training. In 2008, a new Employment Contracts Act was prepared, the aim of which was to render the labour market more flexible. Together with the aforementioned act, the paragraphs concerning study leave in the adult education law were also changed. The main change is that if previously a study leave for those acquiring formal education was only allowed in case of distance learning, evening or part time study, or for externs, then after July 2009 when the new law took effect, study leave is also granted for those participating in daytime study and full time study. The amendment also affects the number of calendar days granted for study leave, and payments for such days. The amended law establishes that an employee or civil servant has the right to receive 30 calendar days of study leave for the purpose of participation in training (before the amendment – 30 calendar days for formal training, 14 for work-related training and 7 calendar days for popular adult education). In case of formal and work-related training, an employee must retain the average salary for 20 calendar days (before the amendment, it was 10 days in case of formal training and the minimum salary for the remaining time, and 14 days for work-related training). Study leave for participation in popular adult education is unpaid. For graduation from formal education, the new law establishes the possibility to receive 15 additional days with minimum salary (before the amendment, it was 28 to 42 calendar days, depending on the level of education acquired).

The act also governs the activity of the Adult Education Council. The council is a board counselling the Government of the Republic on issues related to adult education, consisting of representatives of

different ministries, trainers, as well as employers' and employees' organisations. The minister of Education and Research is the chairman of the council.

Adult education is also covered by the provisions of other acts governing the operation of the educational system:

Attending a basic school or upper secondary school in the form of evening courses or distance learning and graduating from school as an external student is regulated by the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act (1993).

The Vocational Educational Institutions Act (1998) allows, since 2006, vocational education institutions to implement very flexible study opportunities: vocational training in basic school and upper secondary school, giving basic vocational skills; vocational training for persons beyond minimum school-leaving age who lack basic education; vocational secondary education; vocational training based on basic education; vocational training based on secondary education; work-related training; Work-related training of adults in vocational education institutions is carried out according to the regulation of the Minister of Education and Research.

In 2007, the Vocational Educational Institutions Act and its secondary acts were amended and a legal basis was created for financing from the state budget of work-related training of adults offered in vocational schools and institutions of professional higher education.

The Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act (1998) governs, among other issues, studying full and part time and as an external student. The act gives the council of the educational institution the right to set the fields, forms and procedures of offering work-related training to adults.

The Universities Act (1995) governs, among other issues, studying full and part time and as an external student. The act gives the council of the university the right to determine the fields, forms and procedures of the work-related training organised.

In 2008, an amendment was made, obligating higher education institutions to use the surplus of the resources dedicated to state commissioned initial training for the funding of adult work-related training. Before this amendment, adult work-related training courses in higher education institutions were not funded from the state budget.

Development of a system of taking into account earlier study and professional experience has been launched in recent years, helping people, when entering educational institutions, continuing interrupted studies, moving between curricula or acquiring qualifications, to take better account of their previous studies passed in educational institutions, of continuing training, retraining or individual study and of knowledge and skills acquired through their professional experience.

The Standard of Higher Education was amended in 2008 and it was stipulated that in the admission process, higher education institutions have the right to take into account their prospective students' previous studies and professional experiences. Amendments to the vocational education standard have been prepared, enacting the policy of recognition of the previous educational and professional experience in vocational education.

The Labour Market Services and Benefits Act (2005) belonging to the area of responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs regulates keeping track of unemployed people and job seekers, offering of labour market services and paying of labour market benefits. The classes of labour market services are: provision of information on the situation on the labour market, and of the labour market services and benefits; job mediation; labour market training; career counselling; work practice; public work; coaching for working life; wage subsidy; business start up subsidy; adaptation of premises and equipments; special aids and equipment; communication support at interviews; working with support person. Labour market training is professional training organised for unemployed persons, during

which the persons receive or develop professional or other skills which facilitate their employment. Labour market training shall last for a period of up to one year. The Unemployment Insurance Fund orders labour market training from educational institutions, legal persons and sole proprietors who hold an education licence.

## **7.2 Distribution of responsibilities**

The role of central and local authorities in continuing education and training depends on the type of training – formal education, work-related training or popular adult education.

Concerning formal education, the responsibilities are divided similarly as in the case of young learners. General education can be obtained in adult upper secondary schools in the form of evening study, distance learning or as an external student and in evening study and distance learning departments of general education schools. These schools are generally municipal schools.

Vocational schools and higher education institutions offer adult students the possibility to acquire vocational or higher education in the form of part-time study. The role of the state is remarkable in managing work-related training.

The Ministry of Education and Research contributes to the general development of the adult education system and supports the development of work-related training courses, key competences for lifelong learning and carrying out popular adult education training courses in various educational institutions.

The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for the training of unemployed people. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications supports training in enterprises through Enterprise Estonia.

In offering popular adult education the role of private schools, funds and non-profit organisations is the most remarkable. The Ministry of Education and Research has allocated funds to popular adult education centres for the remuneration of their teachers and managers since 1995 on the basis of competitions (to approximately 45 popular adult education centres per year). Since 2005, the activities of popular adult education centres have also been supported by ESF.

Co-operation with social partners is considered very important.

The Adult Education Council, working under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Research, counsels the Government of the Republic on issues related to adult education. The council consists of representatives of different ministries, trainers, and employers' and employees' organisations. The minister of Education and Research is the chairman of the council. The council's activities are regulated by the Adult Education Act.

In vocational education, special attention is paid to inclusion of the parties of the labour market in the state-run management of vocational education, in decision-making related to the structure of subject fields and content of training as well as to management on the level of educational institutions. Cooperation with social partners and enterprises is one of the important goals of developing vocational education and offering training.

## **7.3 Financing**

Obtaining basic education and general upper secondary education in the form of evening courses, distance learning and external study is financed similarly as in the case of young learners; it is free for students. Within the scope of the state commissioned student places, free education is also provided for obtaining vocational education in the form of part-time study. Obtaining higher education in the part-time form of study is mostly payable, with the exception of for instance teachers' training, which is financed from the state budget.

The learner or the employer shall pay for work-related and popular adult education training. In the last few years, thanks to the implementation of measures co-financed by the European Social Fund, many work-related training opportunities are free of charge for learners or their employers. In 2007, offering work-related training courses free of charge begun in vocational schools and institutions of professional higher education. Since 2008, free-of-charge study places for acquisition of the key competencies for lifelong learning and work-related training have been created in the popular adult education training centres of all counties. Studies are financed from the state budget and from the funds of the European Social Fund and are carried out under two programmes:

- work-related training of adults and development activities (during the period of 2009-2013) implemented by the Ministry of Education Research;
- training of adults in popular education training centres (during the period of 2008-2012) implemented by the Estonian Non-Formal Adult Education Association ([www.vabaharidus.ee](http://www.vabaharidus.ee)).

The programmes cover the training of at least 73 000 people.

With the aim of raising awareness of lifelong learning and related learning opportunities, a third programme – popularisation of adult education (during the period of 2008-2012) implemented by the Association of the Estonian Adult Educators ANDRAS – is carried out.

Enterprises are supported by the Enterprise Estonia which offers ESF support to increase the level of professional skills and knowledge of the employees and managers of companies. From August 2009, a new grant – training voucher for micro and small companies is implemented. The training voucher is a grant for work-related training.

Funds for work-related training of employees and public servants of state authorities are allocated from the state budget and are reimbursed only in the case of budget availabilities. The funds for in-service training of teachers whose salaries are covered from the state budget are allocated from the state budget to the extent of at least 3 per cent of the annual wage fund of those teachers. The funds for work-related training of employees and servants of local municipalities are allocated from the local municipality's budget. Training of public servants, local government and non-profit workers is also supported by the ESF.

The funds for training courses for the unemployed are allocated from the state budget. Labour market training for the unemployed shall be ordered and paid for by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The unemployed persons who participate in labour market training courses are also granted a study allowance from the state budget. In addition to free training, which should help a person to engage in work, many other labour market services (e.g. job arbitration, vocational counselling, work practice, support to begin entrepreneurship) and benefits (unemployment benefit, scholarship, travel and lodging benefit) are designated to unemployed people. From September 2009, the Ministry of Social Affairs implemented a pilot project, under which personalized training vouchers are applied. During the pilot project people can participate in courses that raise their qualification in a previously acquired specialization. A training voucher gives a greater choice to find an appropriate training course and provider of that training course within a shorter time compared to procurements that are implemented in training of the unemployed. The value of a training voucher is 15 000 EEK (ca 955 EURO). The pilot project is carried out under the ESF programme.

Funds for the support of popular adult education may be foreseen in the state budget and rural municipality and city government budgets. The state supports the financing of education by employers and learners also through tax benefits: work-related training financed by an employer is not regarded as a specific benefit and in case of private person financing, income tax exemption applies.

## 7.4 Programmes and providers

The acquisition of formal education within the adult education system enables an adult to continue his or her education within the formal education system and to obtain a position in the labour market, which is in accordance with his or her interests and abilities.

Formal education provides the opportunity to:

- acquire basic education and general upper secondary education. General education can be obtained in adult upper secondary schools in the form of evening study, distance learning or as an external student and in evening study and distance learning departments of general education schools. In the framework of adults' formal education, people having not acquired basic education or being beyond the age of compulsory school attendance (a person is subject to compulsory school attendance until acquisition of basic education or reaching 17 years of age) may start to acquire basic and general upper secondary education;
- undergo vocational training in the form of part-time study. Based on the law amendment made in 2006, vocational education institutions may offer several flexible opportunities to participate in vocational training (see 7.1). State financing applies to part-time study on the same basis as to full-time study but implementation of part-time study is determined by the school;
- acquire higher education in part-time study or as an external student. Both professional higher education institutions and universities offer flexible forms of study for acquisition of higher education. Acquisition of higher education in part-time study is generally payable to students, only nationally prioritised spheres receive state financing (e.g. teachers with no higher education).

Work-related training of adults is offered by vocational education institutions, professional higher education institutions, universities and private schools. The work-related training of adults can also take place in enterprises and at the workplace. In some fields (teachers, doctors), mainly higher education institutions offer training. At the same time, the private sector is very active on the training market. According to the Private Schools Act (1998), private schools that organise training for more than 120 hours a month or 6 months in a year must apply for an education licence from the Ministry of Education and Research.

Work-related training is carried out as courses of a varying duration and passing a course does not automatically lead to the next higher level of education, except in cases when a person's earlier study and work experience in a formal education institution is taken into account. Work-related training can however form a basis and precondition for ascription of a higher level of qualification if a person passes a qualification examination either at his or her own will or if proving a professional qualification is established on the state level or compulsory for an employee. In case of certain positions (e.g. teachers), in-service training is obligatory.

Completion of work-related training is certified with a certificate awarded by the training institution, the content of a certificate is not regulated by law.

Popular adult education is provided by popular adult education centres which are mostly non-profit private schools. Study is carried out in the form of courses but it is also possible to participate in study groups and summer schools. Similarly to work-related training, popular adult education does not lead automatically to a higher educational level, except in cases when a person's earlier study and work experience in a formal education institution is taken into account.

Completion of popular adult education is certified with a certificate awarded by the training institution, the content of a certificate is not regulated by law.

In cases of formal education, the requirements for beginning studies are the same for everyone. This means that certifying the education previously obtained / the existence of a certificate of the necessary level of education is required. Access to adult education is generally not limited according to age but general education may be obtained in the form of evening study or distance learning or as an external student only by people who have finished basic education or are past the age of compulsory school attendance (17 years of age).

In case of work related training and popular adult education, admission is usually free but a certain level of knowledge may be required (language studies, ICT studies, technical fields of study, etc.) to be admitted to a certain study group. With regards to training financed through various projects and programmes, limitations to the target group are set by the project's objectives. In cases of training courses for adults, the prioritised target groups mostly comprise less qualified people, non-Estonians or representatives of specific professions. People who have registered themselves as unemployed or have received a layoff notice are able to participate in labour market training financed by the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

To motivate non-Estonian speaking people to learn Estonian, the state reimburses the expenses made on Estonian language courses with the help of the ESF. The costs are reimbursed for those who pass the language proficiency examination or who apply for citizenship. The Estonian Integration Strategy 2008-2013 includes actions like training on multiculturalism, workforce exchanges and other joint action projects. Support is also given to national cultural societies and Sunday schools. In addition, it is planned to launch free of charge Estonian language courses as well as constitution and citizenship courses for citizenship applicants.

Increasing interest towards adult education has resulted in a greater flexibility of studies. In the framework of formal education, adult upper secondary schools offer increasingly flexible study opportunities, including compilation of individual curricula and studying of separate subjects. Vocational education institutions have the possibility to implement notably diverse study opportunities. In cases of training programmes, the interests of learners/parties requesting training are taken into account and in most cases, when preparing the programme, the wishes of learners or employers requesting the training are taken as the point of departure.

Education and training institutions are increasingly using the opportunities of e-study. However, the ratio of e-courses among all courses is relatively low. Elements of e-study are in most cases used to complement ordinary courses.

In the years 2002-2004, four private companies financed a project that offered 8-hour free-of-charge computer and Internet courses. 102 697 people participated in these courses; this is 10 % of the adult population. In 2009, three private companies and the Vaata Maaailma Foundation have initiated a similar project under which free-of-charge computer training, low-price computers and internet services are offered. The aim of the project is to train 100 000 people and get 50 000 households to use Internet within three years. The target groups are both Estonian and non-Estonian speaking people who today lack the skills and opportunities to use Internet – such as families with children, rural residents, the older generation as well as people with a lower or middle-size income.

## **7.5 Quality assurance**

Formal education institutions are developing quality assurance systems that are based on internal and external evaluation, cover whole organizations and also apply to adult training carried out in those institutions.

In general, no common quality assurance system exists for private training institutions offering adult training courses. One exception that does exist however is popular adult training centres which belong



under the umbrella organization Non-Formal Adult Education Association; these institutions implement quality assurance based on external and internal evaluation.

Private training institutions must, according to the Private Schools Act, apply for a training licence if the training offered exceeds 120 hours a year. An individual who studies in an educational institution that possesses a training licence has a right to a refund of the income tax from the amount of money spent on training.

Quality assurance in adult training institutions is one of the issues treated in the Adult Education Development Plan for the years 2009-2013.

## **7.6 Guidance and counselling**

Career guidance and counselling is not currently equally guaranteed to all adults. According to the Labour Market Services and Benefits Act, services financed by the state are only available to unemployed people registered in the Labour Market Board and job seekers who have reported the end of their employment relationship. Since 2008 however, the availability of services is, with the contribution of the European Social Fund, also extended to working adults.

From the year 2007, within the adult learners' week, a learning bus has been used to provide people living in different counties (focus is on rural areas) with information and counselling services. The initiative has been successful – the number of people visiting the learning bus has risen remarkably every year.

## **7.7 Teachers and trainers**

The teachers of educational institutions offering formal education to adults must meet the same qualification requirements that apply to teachers that teach young people in these educational institutions.

For trainers of adults offering professional and popular adult education, no state approved qualification requirements exist. Many educational institutions set out the trainers' requirements in their internal rules.

However, the professional standard for trainers in adult education has been developed and ratified in Estonia, based on the principles of the Professions Act, and the qualification of a trainer in adult education has been awarded since 2004. The profession of trainer in adult education is a sub-qualification (the main qualification is a profession or vocation of a trainer which is obtained in a higher education institution or a vocational school by way of initial training or in-service training). Every person engaged in teaching adults may apply for the qualification. Through the qualification, trainers can certify their professional competence and increase their competitiveness. It also serves as a guarantee to students and the person/entity commissioning the training that the latter is in conformity with high quality requirements. The application for the profession of adult trainer is voluntary and at state level, no requirements have been presented to any training institution that an adult trainer working there should possess the profession of a trainer. Professional qualification certificates are issued on four levels (levels 2, 3, 4 and 5). In May 2008, the Parliament approved the new Professions Act. The main aim of the new law was to replace the previous 5-level qualification framework with an 8-level one, which is based on the principles and criteria of the European qualification framework. According to the new Professions Act, professional standards have to be adjusted to the new law. It is planned to renew the professional standard for trainers in adult education in the coming years.



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Ministry of Education and Research: <http://www.hm.ee>

Ministry of Social Affairs: <http://sm.ee>

National Examinations and Qualifications Centre: <http://www.ekk.edu.ee>