

# **THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION**

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

### **1.1. Major reforms, main policies, achievements and innovations in the education system**

The impact of a drastic decrease in the number of children for the education system, labour market and also for the state is discussed by the education community and general public. Compared to the academic year 2004/2005, the number of students in general education schools has decreased in four years by 35 000 (20%): in 2004/2005 there were 184,038 students, in 2008/2009 there are 148,050. According to forecasts, the number of students will decrease by approximately 10,000 more students by the year 2012 and will stabilise at around 138,000 students. Closing municipal educational institutions particularly in peripheral areas has made many parents decide to send their children already in an earlier age to schools (or child care institutions) at larger centres, prolonging their way to school or causing the parents' moving to areas where educational opportunities are more favourable for their children. Such a decrease in the number of students according to school stages has a direct influence on the school network, state-commissioned teacher training, the need for in-service training and retraining of teachers, the whole higher education system and also on the labour market.

**Developing efficient financing models**, which would ensure the quality and accessibility of education is an urgent issue at all levels of education.

Most progress has been made with renewing **the financing system of general education schools**, which was approved by the government coalition in 2007. The principles agreed upon foresee replacing the per-capita financing model with a per class model. The aim of the proposal is to retain small rural schools and to reform the school network. The broader objective of changes is to optimally regulate the school network, in order to guarantee to basic schools and upper secondary schools the implementation of the agreed availability and quality criteria and to offer assuredness to parents and teachers as regards the development of local schools. The reform offers a greater sense of future-related assuredness to peripheral and smaller community schools and helps to plan the development of schools for a longer period of time. The transfer to the new financing model took effect on 1 January 2008.

In recent years, national policies **prioritised financing of vocational training**. Bearing in mind the relative stagnation of vocational training and the notable support of employers' central organisations, the goal related to vocational training is reaching the price of a study place 1,5 times higher than the price of a study place in general education schools in 2008. With the support of European structural funds, investments in the vocational training system infrastructure have also been increased in the recent years, the study support system has been implemented and the government has approved the new curriculum group coefficients, which, compared to earlier, take better account of the price of studies in different professional spheres.

Preparing reforms **in the financing system is also relevant in higher education** where, according to the approved Higher Education Strategy, the 3-year result-based contracts will be implemented latest by the year 2009. The level of financing of the higher education system is a yet more prominent issue of debates as the ratio of the public sector has decreased in the recent years. According to the data from 2006, expenditure on higher education in the public sector comprised 0.87% of the GDP, which is considerably less than in developed industrial countries. One of the most intensive debates related to the financing of the higher education field in 2007 was reforming the system of students' social guarantees, i.e. transfer from the system of allocation of study merit based grants to the system of need based grants. The necessity for such a change in the Estonian higher education policy was also underlined by OECD experts in their recommendations published in 2007.

<http://www.oecdbookshop.org/oecd/display.asp?sf1=identifiers&st1=9264039112>

In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Research introduced the **compulsory internal assessment of pre-primary child care institutions, general education schools and vocational educational institutions**, and altered the system of state supervision. The changes served to support the development of internal quality assurance system in educational institutions. Such an approach represents a significant change: instead of exercising continuous state supervision to collect data for political decisions, the state encourages educational institutions to analyse their own performance through internal assessment. This is in line with the general educational political trends towards promoting the independence and self management of educational institutions. State consulting will be introduced to ensure the effective implementation of internal assessment.

A new issue raised in 2007 was preparation of the concept of special scholarship and **support scheme for students enrolled in teacher training programmes**. It is one of many initiatives of the government in the education sphere and its main idea is to pay a non-returnable allowance of 200,000 EEK during first three years worked at school to teachers having attained pedagogical higher education, with the aim to offer incentives to young teachers to start work in small towns and rural areas and to teachers with command of the Estonian language to start work at schools where Russian is the language of instruction. The scholarship and support scheme is being implemented starting from the academic year 2008/2009.

One of the most lasting debates relates to **a relatively high level of dropout** in basic school and the decreasing educational level of younger age groups. The ratio of early school-leavers in the 18-24 years age group was 14.3% in 2007 (the respective ratio being 14.2% in 2000) (see also 2.2.1.). Public debates focus on the need for strengthening social support structures more than in previous times and for this purpose a boarding school programme has been launched, and eligibility for free school lunch has been broadened to basic school students and to students acquiring vocational education after basic school. Discussions have been held on offering state

support on students' study aids. **The curriculum development process** is of principal importance in this context and related debates in the recent years have progressed with rather notable arguments. At the same time, there is a common agreement that the volume of syllabi has to be reduced and the syllabi need to be better integrated with one another, more attention has to be paid to general skills and implementation of knowledge and to enhancing the choices of schools to be able to take better account of students' needs and interests. Many measures are targeted at increasing students' individual counselling and at changing schools' assessment systems and it is also important to establish upper secondary schools with possibilities for vocational training in regions. Legal opportunities have been established for implementation of several support services (speech-therapeutic help, correctional education, individual curricula, classes for students with special educational needs, supervised study groups, home study etc.).

Public debates have started regarding a **mandatory pre-school year** financed from the state budget. In 2004, 85.7% of 6-year-old children in Estonia attended a pre-school children's institution and in 2006, participation rose to 93.4%. Bearing in mind the EU average, the indicator is positive but continuous efforts are made to achieve a 95% participation by the year 2010. The main responsibility related to introducing the foundation year lies with the state and no principal disagreements in relation to it are foreseen. The introduction of foundation year has however risen questions with parents who sometimes look at the initiative in a too narrow manner, viewing it merely as preparation for study work.

In the academic year 2007/2008, a **transfer of municipal upper secondary schools with Russian as the language of instruction to partial subject study in Estonian** has begun. The goal of the transfer is to ensure to students whose mother tongue is other than Estonian equal opportunities to attain higher education and cope on the labour market. The goal is to achieve a situation by the year 2011 where on the upper secondary level, at least 60% of compulsory courses are taught in Estonian. The question of teaching Estonian language to non-Estonian speakers is causing lots of internal debates. In Europe, Estonia as a small country however stands out in terms of foreign language teaching (the average number of foreign languages learned is 2,0 on the basic education level and 2,2 on the upper secondary education level).

As a negative trend, the decrease **in the number of adults (25 to 64 years) participating in training** must be outlined: in 2007, the respective ration was 7.0%, in 2004 – 6,7%. As Estonia is considerably lagging behind the objective set in the EU to achieve at least 12,5% participation of adults in life-long learning by 2010, the respective environment has to be notably improved. January 2008, the concept of a financing system was approved, creating more opportunities of self-improvement particularly to working people.

In the context of a changing labour market environment, it is necessary **to bring enterprises' needs and the structure of higher education curricula quickly into compliance** – curricula

tend rather to be subject centred and the output of curricula, i.e. the targeted formulation of students' skills and attitudes receives little attention. Bearing in mind the developments of the European higher education space, particularly higher education institutions have realised the importance of such measures (discussions are however held rather in higher education institutions than in public). In August 2007, the Government approved changes in the higher education standard that make it compulsory for higher education institutions to structure studies according to learning outcomes together with earlier principles of taking into consideration study and work experience.

On all levels of education, **raising young people's interest in natural and exact sciences and technology is being debated.** Although in Estonia, the ratio of students in science and engineering fields in higher education has considerably increased, the number of graduates per thousand young people in the 20 to 29 years age group is lower than the EU average (13.0 graduates): 11.2 graduates (data from 2006). The situation in Estonia similarly to a majority of European countries is characterised by a low readiness and interest among young people (especially among young men) to choose to study and start working in the field of science and engineering and this reduces the perspectives for innovation-based development of enterprise in a longer term. As measures to amend the situation, the following have been proposed: supporting respective hobby groups already on basic school level, making digital study aids available to schools and offering various e-study materials. Launching of special scholarship programmes, enhancing the role of employers in rendering respective professions more popular and better organisation of practical training are also deemed important.

By the year 2007, **the following strategies have been approved on the state level in Estonia in all areas of education:**

- *Development Plan for General Education System 2007–2013* (approved in 2007),
- *Development Plan for Estonian Vocational Education and Training System 2005–2008* (approved in 2005),
- *Estonian Higher Education Strategy 2006–2015* (approved in 2006),
- *Lifelong Learning Strategy 2005–2008* (approved in 2005),
- *Estonian Research and Development and Innovation Strategy 2007–2013* (approved by the Government in 2006 and approved by the *Riigikogu* in 2007),
- *Youth Work Strategy 2006–2013* (approved in 2006),
- *Development Strategy of the Estonian Language 2004–2010* (approved in 2004).

Although there is no single document for managing the areas of education, research, language and youth, the development plans approved so far cover the whole area. These development plans are closely related, their goals are in conformity with the goals set in the Lisbon strategy, and their principles are guided by the idea of the full development of the lifelong learning system.

In order to increase the coherence and coordination between the fields, in 2006, the Minister prepared and approved the development plan for the area of government of the Ministry of Education and Research *Smart and Active People 2007–2010*, which combines the goals of the development plans in the area of government into a whole and covers all sectoral strategies and source documents concerning the use of Structural Funds for 2007–2013. The development plan will serve as the basis for preparing the state budget.

*Smart and Active People* summarises the goals of all the strategies:

- everyone has equal opportunities for lifelong learning in conformity with their abilities and interests;
- the quality of learning is high;
- the Estonian language is a continually developing cultural language and Estonia values linguistic diversity;
- youth work supports the development of the personality of young people;
- research and development are of high quality and sustainable.

The development plan specifies several indicators that should be used to measure Estonia's development towards long-term goals.

### *1.1.1. Pre-primary education*

The greatest changes in the organization of pre-primary education took place in the 2007/2008 school year. Pre-primary education has become more important as the precondition for successful acclimatization and coping in schools and in everyday life. **Places at pre-primary institutions as educational institutions must be available to all children regardless of the socio-economic circumstances of the family and/or the child's special needs.**

The need for nursery school places is very high in certain regions (Tallinn, Harju County, Tartu). 26.482 children were waiting for a nursery school place at the beginning of 2007, 68% of whom live in Tallinn. Nursery school places are mainly needed for children less than 3 years of age. An equally serious problem has emerged with regard to finding teachers and specialists with the corresponding qualifications for pre-primary child care institutions. This is caused by the fact that teachers in pre-primary institutions have salaries that are markedly lower than those of teachers in schools (in the case of equivalent educational requirements). In 2005, the difference in salaries could amount to 2000–4000 EEK.

In order to support the local governments, a national investment programme entitled “*A Kindergarten Place for Every Child*”. Within the framework of the programme, the local governments are provided with support from the national budget for the creation of kindergarten places, the modernizing of child care institutions and the harmonization of the salaries of kindergarten teachers with those of basic school teachers. The grants provided to local governments from the national budget for creating pre-primary education opportunities and guaranteeing the quality of pre-primary education are specified in the Pre-School Child Care Institution Act. Of 227 local governments, 200 provide equal pay for kindergarten teachers and basic school teachers. The investment plan has already resulted in 520 new kindergarten places being created this year and the conditions for a couple of hundred kindergarten children in child care institutions being improved. During four years, the total financing from the programme will support the construction of 16 new kindergartens and the renovation and expansion of approximately 56 existing kindergartens. The implementation of the planned programme (in the amount of nearly 625 million EEK) will enable the modernization of the growth environment for about 9,000 children in child care institutions, including the creation of approximately 4,000 new places.

**An amendment to the Pre-School Child Care Institution Act** regarding the internal assessment of child care institutions came into force during the 2006/2007 school year. The goal of internal assessment is to guarantee conditions that support a child's development and the consistent development of child care institutions, by ascertaining the strengths of the child care institutions and the areas for improvement. The schooling and education provided by the child care institution as well as its management is analyzed and its efficiency is assessed. Counselling



regarding internal assessment issues is conducted by the National Examination and Qualification Centre.

In 2005, a discussion took place regarding the trends and goals of pre-primary education (the last curriculum framework for pre-primary education was approved by the government in 1999). Intensive development of the curriculum was started, involving educationists, practitioners, politicians and the general public. **The updated national curriculum for pre-primary child care institutions was approved by the government on 29 May 2008.** The approach to learning has changed from being centred on the teacher's work to supporting the child's activity and focusing on the child's individuality. The following factors were considered to be important: developing the child's social skills, supporting creativity, taking into account the child's individuality and development potential, the early detection of peculiarities in development, and cooperation between home and the child care institution. The updated national curriculum for pre-primary child care institutions specifies the methods for assessing the child's development and the need to have conversations with the parents about the child's development (see also 2.4.5.)

### ***1.1.2. General education***

A new *Development Plan for the General Education System for 2007–2013* has been compiled, which determines the long-term development trends and objectives for the general education system and the measures and activities planned for their fulfilment.

The following courses of development will be followed in developing and modernizing the general education system:

- The general education system is open and flexible, is able to react to the changing demands of the society and individuals, and is open to international cooperation.
- The access to study opportunities and the fulfilment of the education obligation is guaranteed by the existence of student places, support systems and the individualization of instruction; the availability of quality education does not depend on age, ethnicity, residence, socio-economic background, health or special educational needs.
- Thanks to competent teachers, a modern study programme and learning environment, experienced management and appropriate quality assessment, the quality of education is high. Teacher education (incl. in-service training) guarantees the professional development of teachers throughout their careers; the salary system supports the good reputation of the teaching profession.
- The child/pupil is at the centre of the educational institution. In order to support the educational path of each student, the different needs and abilities of students are taken into consideration in the organization of studies and the shaping of the content of study.

There are functioning information and counselling systems, with the necessary support systems having been created for students with special needs. Individuals whose studies have been interrupted are offered opportunities to continue their education.

- The transitions from kindergarten to school and from one education level to the next are smooth; the organization of studies allows for flexible transitions from upper secondary school to vocational training and vice versa as well as taking into account informal education.

The general objectives for the development of the general education system are defined as follows:

**In the general education system equal opportunities will be created for all students for the acquisition of quality education that is suited to their abilities and interests, allowing them to continue their studies and to lead a dignified life.**

In order to realize the general objectives, the development process has been divided into three areas of activity:

1. Smooth transitions from one education level to the next;
2. Competitive education;
3. Access to study opportunities.

In order to support the smooth transition of students, individual activity plans have been compiled and additional years (1–3) can be utilized by students studying according to simplified curriculums or curriculums for students with learning disabilities.

Numerous effective methods and support systems have been implemented to increase the quality of education by guaranteeing the participation of every student in a study process that achieves good learning results.

The access to study opportunities starts with physical access which is provided in new buildings as well as 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings that have been renovated. All the ministries are addressing this issue and principles of universal design are being implemented to guarantee such access. Courses are organized and knowledge is disseminated through in-service training for the wider implementation of universal design. In order to guarantee access to the learning environment in the broader sense, the study materials are adapted and courses are organized for teachers on how to do this.

Support has been provided to local governments for the **modernization of the study and non-study environments of educational institutions** in order to create equal opportunities for all

students to participate in studies under modern study conditions, regardless of their financial and social status:

- 21 million EEK (1.2 million for state schools and 19.8 million for municipal schools) was allocated for creating a modern learning environment.
- In 2004, grants were allocated to all the counties for teaching aids for the following subjects: mathematics, physical education, art, manual training and handicrafts.

The **national boarding school facilities programme** has been expanded and developed. The programme was started in 2002, and it includes boarding school facilities located at municipal and special schools, as well as the state-financed student places in these facilities. The state-financed places in boarding school facilities are intended for children who come from families with small incomes or social problems – in other words, from families that cannot support their children’s compulsory school attendance and in cases when normal learning opportunities are not available for the children at home. The establishment of 35 boarding school facilities has been supported within the framework of this programme and there are currently 656 state-financed student places. This means that within the framework of the boarding school facilities programme, monthly grants of 3,000 EEK are provided from the national budget for the maintenance of 656 pupils. This capitation fee is allocated to the school and is used to cover the administrative costs of the boarding school facilities, the pupils’ catering costs, personnel costs for the boarding school facilities and, in correspondence to the possibilities of the boarding school facilities, the costs related to activities supporting the children’s development (hobby groups) in proportion to the number of children in state-financed places. Every year, 18 million EEK is provided from the national budget to support the boarding school facilities programme.

**National grants to guarantee socio-economic access to education** have been expanded:

- Grants for school food are guaranteed for the 1–9 grades:  
Starting in 2002, free school lunches were guaranteed to pupils in 1–4 grades; as of January 2006, school food grants are guaranteed for all basic school pupils
- Free textbooks and teaching aids for the acquisition of general education:  
As of 1 September 2007, school administrations are allocated grants from the national budget, which allow children acquiring basic education to be guaranteed free textbooks, exercise books, workbooks, worksheets, and other teaching aids necessary for fulfilling the curriculum (previously, these were financed by parents, and sometimes by school administrations).
- Study materials are provided for children belonging to risk groups and SEN children with extended class time.
- Expansion of the boarding school facilities programme (see above).
- Support of long day school activities (hobby activities and learning help after the end of scheduled activities):

In 2007, the state-financed long day school project (cost 10 million EEK) was launched by the Ministry of Education and Research in order to provide students with a greater choice of hobby activities and to extend the time spent by children under supervision, engaged in instructed activities until the end of the parents' workdays (six or seven in the evening). In long day school, students can demonstrate their abilities and develop in every creative field that they like, be it related to sports, music, handicrafts or art. Every day, various activities are offered, although pupils always have the opportunity to choose between several different activities. In addition, trips are organized into nature and to cultural institutions, along with walks and various joint undertakings. Every pupil can choose an activity that they like and enjoy, while also having the opportunity to participate in joint activities or develop themselves in their favourite subjects. If necessary, the pupil can also receive study assistance. Meals are also provided for the students. In 2007, 54 schools received long day group grants, which resulted in 65% more pupils than before taking part in long day activities at these schools. This year (2008) resources have been allocated to 59 schools.

Study opportunities close to home have been created for students in the first stages of study and upper secondary school students are guaranteed a more uniform quality of education. In 2008, a **new financing system** was implemented that takes into account the school's proximity to the home, study quality, effectiveness and students' special educational needs.

Opportunities for implementing various support services (speech therapy, remedial instruction, classes for children with behavioural problems, long day groups, home study, etc.) have been legally created in order to guarantee equal opportunities to **students with special educational needs (SEN)**.

The involvement of children with SEN in pre-primary child care institutions as well as ordinary schools requires the provision of more effective counselling services. An ESF programme entitled "*Development of an Educational Counselling System*" has been launched with the aim of creating support centres (educational counselling centres) that will service a region's educational institutions and organize the provision of psychological counselling, counselling related to special education and speech therapy, and social counselling services for the early detection of children's special developmental needs and for supporting the individual development of children, young people, parents, teachers at educational institutions, specialists and local government officials, as well as providing study assistance. As a result of creating regional educational counselling centres and improving the quality of counselling, students will have better access to counselling services, which will prevent students from dropping out of school and improve young people's competitiveness and ability to cope in the future both in

everyday life and in the labour market. The cost of the programme is 35 million EEK (2008–2011).

The modernization of educational institutions and boarding school facilities for children with SEN is also planned with the support of ERDF resources.

### ***Recent regulations concerning the organization of study process***

The regulation of the Ministry of Education entitled “*Procedure for Preparing and Implementing Individual Study Programs*” has established possibilities and obligations for preparing individual study programs for students with special educational needs based on the various needs of the students (2004). Instructions have also been prepared for teachers on how to prepare individual study programs.

Individual study programs can be prepared for students whose special aptitude, learning or behavioural difficulties, health problems, disabilities or long-term absence from a learning environment cause significant difficulties in working in the same room at the same time with their classmates or working based on the curriculum for the corresponding grade.

Individual study programs implement the following as needed:

- reduced or increased requirements for study content compared to the school curriculum
- exceptions in the organization of studies
- needs and principles of using teaching aids, space and human resources.

The creation of individual study programmes is permitted at every stage of study and for students studying according to any national curriculum.

The compilation of an individual study programme can be initiated by a parent or the school.

The regulation of the Minister of Education entitled “*Conditions and Procedure for Organizing Final Examinations in Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools*”:

- The 35% scale for the grading of basic school final examinations has also been expanded to single students (previously only groups or classes) of ordinary schools, who, based on a decision of the Counselling Committee or based on special educational needs, could study in a class for children with physical, speech, or sensory disabilities or mental disorders, for whom home study, remedial study or speech therapy has been provided, or whose language spoken at home differs from the language of instruction at the school, or who have lived in Estonia for less than 3 years;
- Upper secondary school students who have a specific deficiency in their ability to write (dysgraphia) and who have received an unsatisfactory grade in the

compulsory state examination of Estonian language may choose to take some other state exam instead;

- Students who have received an unsatisfactory grade twice in a state exam of the same subject may choose to take some other state exam instead.

According to the regulation of the Minister of Education entitled “*Bases for the Organization of Work in Remedial Study Groups*”, the number of classes per week for remedial study groups was increased and the procedure for assigning remedial study was made more flexible.

Significant changes to the regulation of the Minister of Education entitled “*Bases, Conditions and Procedure for Grading Students, Transferring them to the Next Grade and Leaving them Behind to Repeat a Course*” (2005):

- Repeating a course is only allowed in special cases;
- Students studying according to the simplified national curriculum (supplementary learning curriculum) or the national curriculum for students with moderate and severe learning disabilities and students studying at the upper secondary school level will not be left behind to repeat a course;
- Students must be given the opportunity for follow-up answering if the student has received a grade of “poor” or “insufficient” for their oral answer, written paper or practical work
- If an individual study programme has been compiled for the student, the exceptions specified in the study programme will be taken into account when grading;
- The organization of grading in school and the bases for grading must be made known to the students and their parents and must be disclosed on the school’s website;
- For students whose quarterly grade is “poor” or “insufficient” or who have not been given a grade in a specific subject, an individual study programme will be drawn up in that subject or some other support system will be assigned in order to help them acquire the required knowledge and skills.

With the objective of creating a secure learning environment in general education schools and to **prevent and reduce school violence**, the following amendments have been made to the Basic Schools Act and Upper Secondary Schools Act and have entered into force:

- It is possible to create classes for students who are acquiring basic education and have behavioural problems starting from the second stage of study.
- The upper limit for class size is established at 24 pupils.
- The school’s responsibilities regarding the provision of mental and physical security have been specified.
- Student evaluations have become compulsory.

- Internal assessments at schools have become compulsory.

The regulation of the Minister of Education and Research entitled “*Procedures for Home Study*” has extended the opportunity for participating in home study at the request of a parent until the end of basic school, has specified the procedure and bases for being assigned to home study, for compiling the study programme for and grading the study results of students participating in home study.

The regulation has also broadened the opportunities and **obligations for carrying out hospital study:**

- students have the right to receive instruction from the first day of their hospital stay (formerly from the 10<sup>th</sup> day);
- the possibility of carrying out hospital study has been extended to all hospitals providing care to students (previously only children’s and psychiatric hospitals);
- the organization of instruction provided in hospitals has been made more flexible and based on the state of the student’s health (a teacher present at the hospital all day).

### ***1.1.3. Vocational and adult education***

*The Estonian Vocational Education System Development Plan to the Year 2008* was completed in 2005. It sets three main objectives:

- vocational education corresponds to the development needs of the Estonian economy;
- enhancement of the quality of vocational education leads to the improvement of the reputation of vocational education, an increase in the number of students and the successful employment of graduates;
- the vocational education system uses its resources efficiently, operates in cooperation with other types and levels of education and guarantees all applicants access to vocational education.

The future tasks in VET are:

- to work out the new concept for qualification system and quality assurance principles,
- classifying and cataloguing vocations,
- renewal of vocational standards,
- developing of the system of certifying vocational qualifications.

The learning environment in VET institutions has been modernised, primarily with the assistance of European Union structural funds. **More than half of the investments made in VET over the last three years have been EU funded.**

In 2007, the Ministry of Education and Research could for the first time apply the state-commissioned study places scheme to labour market oriented training of adults. In autumn 2007, the Ministry of Education and Research launched an additional request for labour market oriented training within an EU Structural Fund (ESF) project. In 2007/2008 ca 2, 8 million EUR worth of labour market oriented training is offered to adults. During the next few years, the provision of vocational training will continue within the framework of the ESF programme entitled “*Continuing Vocational Training and Development Activities*”. Approximately 6.3 million EUR will be invested in providing training opportunities in 2008–2012.

The Educational Institutions Internal Evaluation Counselling Department was established under the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre. Its main activities are to analyze the internal evaluations performed by educational institutions and to provide counselling for educational institutions in matters of internal evaluation, as well as the analysis and development of internal evaluation systems.

***New legal provisions in VET:***

- In November 2006, the Vocational Standard of VET teacher was approved. It enables the VET teacher to acquire qualification on three different qualification levels. The necessary knowledge, skills, proficiency, values and other competencies have been mapped. The VET teacher’s vocational standard serve also as the basis for the VET teachers’ formal education curriculum - two Estonian universities, preparing VET teachers, have based their output-based curricula on them.
- Standard for VET has been approved by the Government in 2006.
- The first fifteen national curricula were approved by the Minister of Education and Research in 2007-2008.
- On January 1, 2007, the part of the Vocational Educational Institutions Act relating to the membership and functions of school boards entered into force. According to the Act, employers and employees (i.e., their representative organisations) shall constitute more than one half of the membership of the board. In addition, the school board should comprise a representative of the ministry into whose sphere of responsibility the vocational educational institution falls, the local representative of the Labour Market Board and the representative of the corresponding rural municipality or city government (or a local government association). The school board is formed by the owner of the school.
- Amendments to the Professions Act were made in 2008. Professions Act is the basis on which the professions system of Estonia will be thoroughly changed in autumn 2008. There will be a transfer from the five-stage profession system to an eight-stage lifelong learning qualification framework that combines educational and professional qualifications. All professional standards and the principles of qualifying in professions will also be reviewed.



***Curricular policies, educational content, teaching and learning strategies, teachers training***

Creating and renewing the content of national curricula will continue in the next Structural Funds programming period of 2007-2013, accompanied by creating the supporting study materials and continuing education for VET teachers (ESF Programmes “*Development of study programmes and quality assurance systems of VET*” and “*Developing E-learning in VET*”).

Through the 2005-2008 project “*The development of VET curricula*” VET teachers are involved in revising the content of VET training through participation in curricula committees and creating the school curricula.

Thanks to the ESF project launched in 2006 “*E-Võti*” (E-key), the teachers are involved in creating a modern study environment. 2,310 teachers, IT specialists and education technologists have taken part in the training of how to compile electronic study materials. As a result of the training, the teachers have created a lot of electronic study courses (in the amount of 615 study weeks) and over 600 study aids, which are all gathered in one database, available for everybody. Thanks to the project, 11 professional networks have emerged, which have been conducive to promoting the new learning and methodology. E-VET thematic networks work together with E-University networks in Estonia, with specialists in the fields and with national VET curricula development working groups by National Examination and Qualification Centre.

Programmes “*Developing the system of qualifications*” and “*Development of the study programmes and quality assurance systems VET*” also contain measures for validating non-formal and informal learning both in VET institutions and by qualification awarding organizations.

In 2006-2008, with the help of several ESF projects, **a professional continuous education system has been created for VET teachers.** Teachers are also involved in the renewal of the content of curricula and methods of teaching (e.g. E-learning). VET teacher’s vocational standard has been established where the necessary skills/knowledge/attitudes of the VET teachers have been mapped. Development of continuing education for teachers will continue during the ESF programming period 2007-2013.

The purpose of the ESF project “*Developing the Qualification system*” carried out in 2005-2007 is the sustainable Qualification System in Estonia that provides lifelong learning for employees and the correspondence of the vocational training and continuing education as well as re-training to the needs of labour market and international comparability of qualifications.

Vocational training will be more targeted to the adult learner (presenting state financed study possibilities for work based continuing education for the next programming period, promoting

activities). A promotion campaign is being launched about the study opportunities through 2 ESF programmes “*Promoting Adult Education*” and “*Promoting VET*”.

In continuing education, attention is paid to people with low levels of education and without occupational training. In 2007, a new type of state-commissioned vocational education, continuing vocational training, was legalized, which is primarily directed at increasing the training opportunities for people who have attained the first or second level of education. At the same time, people who have attained the third level of education are not excluded from participating in state-commissioned courses, if doing so increases their vocational competitiveness. People who are currently at home or pensioners and want to return to the job market will also be able to participate in training.

In 2006, conditions and policies for the compulsory internal evaluation and internal evaluation counselling were approved.

More and more schools implement VET schools Quality Award model as a tool for internal evaluation and improvement.

#### ***1.1.4. Higher education***

The amendments to the *Standard of Higher Education* that came into force in 2007 were supplemented with the regulation of the requirements for **APEL (accreditation of prior experience and learning)** and the wording of learning results. The implementation of APEL supports the principle of lifelong learning and equal opportunities in education by valuing various study methods and the fair assessment and recognition of prior learning in the context of continuing education. The implementation of APEL is an important means for bringing people who have interrupted their studies back into the educational system and motivating experienced people to acquire higher education by providing the opportunity to shorten their studies.

**As of September 2008 amendments came into force in the Universities Act, Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act and the Private Schools Act, that emphasize the need to guarantee quality in higher education.** The quality control system for higher education will be changed with the aim of creating clearer work divisions between educational institutions, as well as increasing the quality and reducing the number of curricula. As of 2009, the quality of higher education will be assessed by an independent quality agency. It will become compulsory for institutions of higher education to submit to institutional accreditation which will be carried out every seven years and will assess the educational institution as a whole. The existence of a quality assurance system will also be important. Furthermore, assessment of the quality of studies will be carried out. The rights of the educational institutions that have completed the

assessment to provide higher education (groups of curricula) will be confirmed by a regulation of the Government of the Republic (in the annex to the Standard of Higher Education). The right will be directly related to the issuing of officially certified graduation certificates, which for the students means that conducting studies with unaccredited curricula that have no education licenses will no longer be possible. The transition period for the law will last until 2012. The system for state-commissioned education will be updated by switching to a 3-year performance-related contract for the financing of institutions of higher education. The effectiveness and quality of the studies will be considered, as well as the number and needs of the graduates. If an educational institution is unable to fill the student places, it will be given an opportunity to offer vocational training to the employees of companies and institutions within the framework of in-service training and retraining. Also, the state commission for 3+2 Master's study graduates will no longer be connected to the current obligation to admit 1.5 times as many Bachelor's students. In Doctoral studies, Doctoral allowances will be extended from the current 10 months to 12 months.

The objective of legalizing joint curricula and joint qualifications (joint diplomas and joint degrees) is to promote cooperation between the institutions of higher education in Estonia as well as their cooperation with foreign educational institutions. Curricula and field training programs that are created jointly increase the students' options, the individualization of studies, and encourage academic mobility. At the same time, this form of cooperation provides educational institutions with the opportunity to concentrate resources, avoid the duplication of specialties, and acquire information about the institutions of higher education and quality of studies in other countries, thereby promoting the development of reciprocal trust and the recognition of qualifications that will contribute to the free movement of people and successful functioning in the labor market.

All **study programmes** (including Bachelor study) will be stand-alone, i.e. they will provide access to the labour market. The study programmes of university and professional higher education will have different orientations – study in universities will be theory-based, and applied skills will be acquired proceeding from theoretical principles. The programmes of both university and professional higher education will take into account the changes taking place in research and employment. Proceeding from developments in European higher education, the principles for a unitary qualifications framework will be developed, in order to ensure the recognition and comparability of Estonian education abroad. The transition to competence-based study programmes will be supported by information and training targeting the teaching staff, and covering the topics of modern teaching methods and assessment (with an emphasis on assessing the competence acquired). In study programme development (incl. in-service training), the professional standards developed on the higher education level, and the need for in-service training, will be taken into account. There will be a clearer linking of work practice with the achievement of competence in the completion of a study programme. In order to strengthen

international cooperation, and to expand the specialisation opportunities for students, the issuing of joint degrees and joint diplomas will be developed.

In the first half of 2008, the broad-based working group formed by the Minister of Education and Research completed the *Draft Teacher Education Strategy for 2008–2011*. In this document, the activities for the next four years were stipulated with the aim of developing the initial training of teachers, supporting the professional development of teachers, valuing the teaching profession, and supporting teachers' professional organizations, as well as managing the field of activity based on research and analyses. The draft strategy also includes an analysis of the field of activity and proposals for changing the regulations. The working group included representatives of the universities that educate teachers, professional teachers' organizations, parents and students.

#### ***1.1.5. Language policies***

The foundations for regulating Estonian-language relations are provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia – the official language of Estonia is Estonian. **The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia was updated in 2007 in order to improve the status of Estonian**, and now stipulates that the preservation of the Estonian language is also a task of the state of Estonia alongside the preservation of the Estonian nation and culture.

In 2004, the Government approved the *Development Strategy of Estonian (2004–2010)*, which is the basis of all activities aimed at the official language of Estonia. Realization of the current national programmes that target Estonian – *Estonian and National Memory, Technological Support for Estonian, Humanitarian and Natural Science Collections* – will continue in 2008. The preparation and implementation of the new national programmes, *Supporting Terminology in Estonian* and *Compilation and Publication of Textbooks in Estonian for Institutions of Higher Education*, started early this year, having been initially conducted as pilot projects in 2007.

As of 2007, **sign language** has the status of an official language in Estonia.

An **amendment to the Language Act** was approved in 2007, pursuant to which the assessment of proficiency in Estonian as a second language will be based on the levels of language proficiency determined in the framework document for European language study compiled by the Council of Europe. Estonian language proficiency will be assessed by Estonian language proficiency examinations. The amendment to the law also concerns the teaching of Estonian as a second language and the assessment of proficiency in formal education, while the requirements for language proficiency for people working in certain positions was also reviewed. In order to apply for Estonian citizenship and residence permits for long-term residents, it is necessary to complete an Estonian language examination at the B1 level.

### ***Teaching of Estonian to non-Estonian speakers and national integration policy in the field of education***

Currently, non-Estonians form about 30% of the country's population and make up about 19% of school-aged children. These students are treated in Estonian education legislation as subjects of education equal to Estonians, and all school-aged children, except for the children of foreign representatives, are liable to compulsory school attendance.

On 10 April 2008, the Government of the Republic approved the *Estonian Integration Plan for 2008–2013 and the operational programme for 2008–2010*. The objective of the integration plan is to describe the primary achievements and challenges of Estonian society in the field of integration and to determine the central activities and their financing. The plan divides the established objectives into three areas: the educational and cultural field; the legal and political field; and the social and economic field.

The priorities of the Ministry of Education and Research are:

- guaranteeing the implementation of a new curriculum in pre-primary education;
- promoting Estonian-language subject instruction in schools with Russian-language instruction;
- supporting non-Estonian-speaking children in schools with Estonian-language instruction, incl. developing methods for providing instruction in second languages and multicultural education in teachers' in-service training;
- promoting Estonian language study and Estonian-language subject instruction in vocational education;
- supporting language and cultural studies of national minorities;
- supporting extracurricular and youth activities;
- organizing Estonian language study for the public.

In Estonia, there are 73 **kindergartens where Russian is the working language**, as well as 50 kindergartens where both Estonian and Russian are used as working languages, 24 of which are immersion kindergartens. Thirty-one percent of students attend groups taught in languages other than Estonian. Of children who do not speak Estonian at home, 8% attend groups that are taught in Estonian. Several amendments to the Child Care Institutions Act will come into force in 2008 and will be implemented in 2009. One of the amendments guarantees state financing for **the study of Estonian language in kindergartens and groups where the working language is not Estonian**. On 29 May 2008, the Government of the Republic approved a new national curriculum for pre-primary child care institutions, providing for the participation of children who do not speak Estonian at home in Estonian-language activities, starting from their fourth year (i.e. when they are three years old). Resources are also allocated for the in-service training of teachers, as well as for children's study resources and parental counselling. The amendments will take effect on 1 September 2008 and will be implemented on 1 March 2009. Currently, (since

2000), the study of Estonian as a second language is compulsory for children between the ages of 5 and 7 at least twice a week.

**Financing will be provided for the salary resources of teachers of Estonian** as a second language in 2009 to support of the expansion of the study of Estonian as a second language **in pre-primary child care institutions** (starting with 3-year-olds). The basis of the calculation is the average number of groups in child care institutions with non-Estonian-language instruction and the minimum teachers' salary, which is equal to the salary rate for junior basic school teachers. In 2009, it will be possible to base the allocation of support on the number of children from homes where Estonian is not spoken. Currently, 6 million EEK is earmarked for this purpose in state budget funds.

In the 2008/2009 academic year, 30,626 students are studying in **Estonian schools with Russian-language instruction**, constituting 19.7% of all students. In Estonia, there are 69 schools with Russian as the language instruction and 27 schools with both Estonian and Russian as language instruction. There are 62 upper secondary schools with Russian as the language of instruction, where 10<sup>th</sup> grades will be opened, and 32 schools that have joined the language immersion programme.

In 2007, an amendment to the national curriculum for basic and upper secondary schools was passed, which specified the conditions for the **transition to Estonian-language instruction at the upper secondary school stage**: the amendment determined the sequence of the compulsory subjects to be taught in Estonian until 2011/2012. The national curriculum established the transition to Estonian-language instruction in the subjects of Estonian literature, social education, music education, Estonian history and geography. Every year, one compulsory Estonian-language course will be added to the curriculum of students starting 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The progress and schedule of the transition will be confirmed in the school curriculum. It is important that the students starting their studies at the upper secondary school level have an overview of the curriculum for the entire stage of study.

Similarly to the last academic year, during the 2008/2009 academic year, the Ministry of Education and Research will finance **all schools with Russian-language instruction that teach other subjects in Estonian in addition to the compulsory subjects with 70,000 EEK per subject**. All of the schools have received support for the purchase of Estonian-language study resources in Estonian literature, social studies and music. The teachers of Estonian literature, social studies, history, music and geography have completed the corresponding training, and additional teaching aids have been prepared. Training courses for teachers of music and social studies are continuing. In the 2008/2009 academic year, the training of teachers to acquire the methodology for conducting studies in a second language will continue. The main target group is

physical education and art teachers (these are subjects that the schools choose most often for Estonian-language study). At the same time, training is also provided for other subject teachers.

**A targeted counselling system** was launched at schools with Russian-language instruction with **the goal of methodologically supporting the teachers teaching subjects in Estonian and the schools' directors of studies**, and if necessary, to help pupils and parents obtain information about the effectiveness of the methodology for teaching in second language.

The level of the Estonian language acquired by young people graduating from basic school and acquiring secondary education is currently remaining stable based on external assessments (state examination results). In 2007, 67.5% of students who took final exams scored more than the 50 points required to complete their basic education. The results of students graduating from upper secondary school in the state examination for Estonian as a second language do not significantly differ statistically from the results of the two previous years. The results of the state examination continue to differ by region, with the lower results achieved by students in East-Viru County and Harju County (except Tallinn). In 2006, 79% of those graduating from upper secondary school completed the intermediate level examination, and in 2007, 78% of those graduating from upper secondary school did so, which indicates that the situation has remained stable.

In order to support the development of **Estonian language proficiency among basic school students**, one of the most effective activities has been the implementation of the **language immersion programme**. The number of students participating in the language immersion programme has constantly increased. Although the number of schools where the language immersion programme is implemented has not significantly increased, all the schools that started the programme are continuing to implement it and the number of students is thereby increasing. As of 2005, language immersion classes are differentiated in the Estonian Educational Information System as a separate type of class, and since 2006, the coefficient for the cost of a student place for students in the language immersion programme has been 1.2.

In Estonian **vocational education**, 8,864 students or 31% of the total number of students at vocational schools are studying in groups with Russian-language instruction. The compulsory volume of Estonian-language education in foreign-language groups operating in vocational educational institutions is four weeks of study. *The Strategy for the Development of the Estonian Language for 2004–2010* prescribes that the graduates of vocational educational institutions be able to communicate in Estonian in their vocation and to work in Estonian-language environments, and that their Estonian-language proficiency should correspond to the qualification requirements of their jobs. To achieve this, the quality of language instruction must be increased and more attention must be paid to the teaching of specialized language. Furthermore, the volume of Estonian-language study must be increased in vocational educational institutions with Russian-language instruction or bilingual instruction. In the fall of 2008, a plan

of action for the implementation of Estonian-language subject study will be worked out based on a flexible model that is suitable for the specifics of vocational education (a balance of general education and vocational subjects).

The majority of the national **higher education system** is Estonian-language based (although there are some bilingual curricula such as social and liberal arts subjects in basic school, class teacher, Russian-language teacher, etc.). Private higher education schools also provide Russian-language and English-language study.

Among the people who proceed to acquire higher education, the number of students who have acquired their secondary education in schools providing Estonian-language and Russian-language instruction is proportionally equal. According to data from 2007, 8,929 students graduated from Estonian-language upper secondary schools (73% of all graduates), and 5,770 (65%) went on to study at institutions of higher education. There were 3,258 graduates of Russian-language upper secondary schools (27% of all graduates), 2,169 (67%) of who, went on to acquire higher education (the number in 2005 was 60%). Among the graduates of schools with Russian-language instruction, the number of students who proceeded to institutions of higher education after graduation has increased during the last three years and, in 2007, exceeded the percentage of graduates of Estonian-language schools who went on to study at institutions of higher education by two percent.

Language study will become more flexible and efficient for students who have acquired their secondary education in Russian or another language and do not have sufficient Estonian language proficiency to study at the higher education level. The corresponding regulation of the Minister of Education and Research was amended as follows: by assigning the determination of the language proficiency necessary for undertaking studies to the competence of the education institution (allowing for the flexible consideration of the needs of the specialty being studied, etc.); and by obligating the educational institution to take into account the language proficiency levels specified in the European framework document for language study and to implement the appropriate methodology in their assessment of language skills. This makes it possible to organize effective language study conforming to the levels of the target groups identified on the basis of correct methodology. The state will finance up to one year of language study in the volume agreed upon with the institutions of higher education within the framework of state-commissioned education.

### ***Preservation of language and culture of ethnic minorities through education system***

A small growth trend can also be observed among students whose language of instruction differs from their native language enrolling at schools and in classes with Estonian-language instruction. In the 2007/2008 academic year, 5,200 students whose native language is not Estonian studied in classes with Estonian-language instruction. The majority of these students were native Russian



speakers. Meanwhile, 640 students whose native language is not Russian studied in classes with Russian-language instruction.

In 2006, the provisions of the national curriculum for basic and upper secondary schools were amended, allowing **students from foreign countries to study a foreign language** that is not included in the list of languages studied as first and second foreign languages **as their second foreign language**. This includes allowing the student to study their native language if the school prepares the corresponding subject syllabus and guarantees the conditions necessary for study. A student from abroad, whose native language is not Estonian and who studies at a school with Estonian-language instruction may also study Estonian as a second language and take the corresponding examination upon completing basic school.

As of the fall of 2007, basic financing for **the Sunday schools of ethnic minorities**, where knowledge about one's national culture is acquired and one's native language learned, is provided directly by the Ministry of Education and Research. The basis for the financing is the existence of a school permit and an application. Financing was provided to 12 Sunday schools, with a total of 178 students.

#### ***1.1.6. Youth policies***

Pursuant to the Education Act, education is categorized in two ways: by the level of education (pre-primary, basic, secondary, higher education) and by function (general, vocational and hobby education).

**Hobby education** is one of the possibilities for supporting the development of young people by shaping their knowledge and skills for the challenges they will encounter and for positively coping with choices and opportunities. Hobby education is not compulsory, although it is increasingly a part of multifaceted education, which is why it is important to develop hobby education as well as promote its availability and quality.

A new **Hobby Schools Act** and, for the first time, a **Standard of Hobby Education** as a regulation of the Minister of Education and Research, entered into force on 1 September 2007. The Hobby Schools Act replaces the Hobby Schools Act of 1995. The principal reason for creating the new law was the need to regulate the organization of hobby education and to determine the common bases for the activities at hobby schools. The law creates opportunities for increasing the quality and the comparability of the hobby education being provided, as well as opportunities for increasing equal opportunities for the availability of hobby education and to maintaining a more thorough overview of the content, providers, number of participants, and organization of hobby education.

## 2. Inclusive education: the way of the future

### 2.1. Approaches, scope and content

#### (a) Concept and current vision of the inclusive education in Estonia

Since 1996, Estonia has been gradually and purposefully moving in the direction of inclusive education. Estonia has begun to pay considerably more attention to the target groups who have limited access to training or who have had no access. This has been supported by numerous national projects for inclusive education (*Integration of Students with Special Needs into Ordinary Schools, School for All, Teacher Training in an Inclusive School, Support of Transitions, Development of the Counselling System and the Development of the School Environment with Teamwork*) in cooperation with UNESCO, the Council of Nordic Ministers, and the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. Education for All, a UNESCO development plan, has been prepared for this purpose. Through these projects, numerous seminars and in-service training, effective work has been done to train teachers and other school personnel in order for the idea of inclusive education to be implemented.

In 2004, the **conceptual bases for the special needs education (SNE) sphere** were compiled in the Ministry of Education and Research as a general education guide for providing education to children with special educational needs (SEN). According to these documents, the following actions should be taken in order to implement the principles of inclusive education:

- Creating preconditions and implementing measures necessary for the early detection and intervention with regard to developmental needs and differences of all children
- Updating the legal bases that allow for the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities with regard to access to high-quality education and transition from the basic education level to the next levels of education
- Changing the financing system for children with special educational needs in order to motivate and obligate the schools to:
  - compile and implement individual study programs based on the developmental needs of each pupil;
  - carry out instruction in small groups and classes in order to provide all students with experiences of success and the support they need;
  - implement in-school support systems and recruit support specialists (special teachers, speech therapists, psychologists, social educational specialists).
- Increasing the relative importance of choices, cooperation and responsibility of the various parties (state, local government, school, parents) in resolving the educational and social problems of students with special educational needs
- Increase the importance of IT in the study process for children with SEN by making greater use of IT resources in teaching, learning and diagnostics, etc.

The inclusion of children with SEN at all levels of education has improved. The understanding of early intervention has broadened, and the goal is to support the child, the family and the entire network around the child by giving them the needed skills. Extensive programs have been started up to adapt study resources to students with SEN. The flexible organization of studies and the development of support systems in cooperation with the social sphere have contributed significantly to the implementation of the principle of inclusion. The number of students with SEN has increased and the implementation of support systems has become more effective.

*(b) Most important challenges for ensuring educational and social inclusion*

The most important challenge in guaranteeing inclusion in education is **teacher training**. A module has been added to the continuing education of teachers, which deals with inclusive education and special educational needs.

Research indicates that poor social skills have a significant role in causing difficulties in learning and adapting in school. One approach to preventing the occurrence of this problem is involving all children in pre-primary child care in order to guarantee the development of school readiness and the smooth transition of children to school (pursuant to the Pre-School Child Care Institutions Act, local governments are obligated to provide all pre-school children with a place in a pre-primary child care institution).

While access to continuing training has improved and **vocational education** can be acquired in several ways, it is especially important to create opportunities for **young people without basic education**. The plurality and flexibility of options is what characterizes our vocational education in 2008. This has been contributed to by the updated *Conditions and Procedure for Providing Instruction at Vocational Educational Institutions to Persons with Special Needs*, which establishes the procedure for compiling individual study programmes, implementing support systems and drawing up individual transition plans to support finding employment.

The changes that have taken place in Europe in the **higher education sector and the labour market** have created new opportunities in education for transition and entering the labour market. In Estonia's transitional society, there are many people in the labour market who have not completed their educations for various reasons. As a result of the aging of the population, it is important that various target groups participate in employment and that adult learners arrive (return) to education and the job market. People who have been away from formal education often do not understand their rights and obligations, do not know how to effectively plan their study process, and therefore need more support in their studies. It is also important to provide greater support to higher education students with special needs, whose educational path is often interrupted due to insufficient counselling and the lack of the necessary support systems.

The involvement of those who have withdrawn from education increases their competitiveness and creates better preconditions for companies and organizations to implement modern work methods and technologies, thereby increasing their effectiveness. The multitude of opportunities and lack of clarity facing students and potential students requires more professional counselling services and the appropriate training of faculty members and support personnel. The development plan for the area of government of the Ministry of Education and Research prioritizes the development of an information and career counselling system. The need for effective career counselling is also stressed in the strategy for higher education.

In order to promote **youth participation** at the county level, county-based youth participation bodies, county youth councils, have been created by Estonia's county governments since 2006.

The goals of the youth councils are best achieved when their representatives are involved in as many discussions as possible and, most importantly, in decision making in fields such as the general development of the county (regional development), public transportation, the environment, education, youth work, crime prevention, etc. The function of youth councils is to involve young people in decision-making processes and in making decisions related to youth life, to allow them to have equal opportunities and participate more actively in society and social life. Youth councils serve as a means of communication between young people, county governments and local governments.

*(c) Specific legal or regulatory frameworks referring to inclusive education issues*

Reference to inclusive education can be found in the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, the Education Act as well as the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, where all children and their rights are treated equally. Pursuant to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, all students with special educational needs have the right to attend schools near their home. However, teachers are worried that conditions in the schools and their own professional skills are not up to the task of working with SNE students.

The focus in **higher education** has been on guaranteeing access and implementing universal design principles in the planning of space, as well as strategies and study materials in order to guarantee the total participation of students with SEN in the study process at the level of higher education. A support system for students at institutions of higher education has been implemented in cooperation with organizations of disabled people.

In the course of the new program period of the European Social Fund, the **PRIMUS** program for the development of quality at the third level of education will be launched for 2009–2013 within the framework of the **Development of the Quality of Research Policies and Higher Education** measure of the priority direction for the implementation of human resources entitled “*Development of Human Resources for Research and Development Activities*”. The program

connects with various objectives set for the Strategy for Higher Education for 2006–2015, and provides institutions of higher education with better opportunities to achieve these objectives. The program is primarily focused on supporting the quality of study and increasing the competitiveness of higher education graduates.

The program aims to provide special support for activities at institutions of higher education directed at improving the capability of the student to cope with their studies. The activities are divided as follows, based on the characteristics of target groups:

- 1) supporting the coping of new students;
- 2) creating a network of learning and career counsellors at institutions of higher education and providing the corresponding services;
- 3) **providing support services for higher education students with special needs.**

To date, the government has supported the provision of support services for higher education students with special needs (sight, hearing, physical and other disabilities) to a small extent as part of state-commissioned education. Most of the support allocated has been aimed at providing sign language services for higher education students with hearing disabilities. In order to create equal opportunities, support services must also be provided to others in need of assistance. Furthermore, students themselves should be involved in providing services to students with physical disabilities, visual disabilities, hearing disabilities and other special needs. The first implementation of the activity in the form of a program helps to chart the volume of support services required according to the number of higher education students and budgetary needs, to identify the bottlenecks related to higher education students with special needs and to improve their general access to higher education. Various support schemes can be implemented, including paying scholarships directly to students with special needs, who will then pay for the necessary service themselves, paying compensation for providing the necessary services to support students (helping a physically disabled student, making audio recordings of textbooks) or to specialists (sign language service, ICT solutions, training of guide dogs), etc.

The general objective of the **EduKo** program implemented within the framework of the same measure and aimed at supporting educational research and teacher training, is to create a flexible and coherent teacher education system supportive of the sustainable development of the society. The program will improve research-related competence in the field of education, allow the content and organization of teacher education to become more systematic and more responsive to the needs of the school, and guarantee that management decisions in the field of teacher training are based on research and analysis.

In addition to the six-month to year-long official language study programs, the Ministry of Education and Research finances supplementary language studies for higher education students through the ESF program entitled “*Development of Language Studies*”. The focus lies on developing short-term supplementary language courses for higher education students who are not

proficient in Estonian as a language of study (for instance, intensive summer courses, support study provided simultaneously with the main study program, courses in academic Estonian, integrated language and culture courses), carrying out initial training, compiling study materials and developing a language proficiency testing system. The Ministry of Education and Research is also financing the training of teachers of Estonian as a second language for the acquisition of modern study methods while taking into account the characteristics of the target group.

## **2.2. Public policies**

### *(a) Current dimensions of the phenomenon of exclusion from and within education. Indicators and data used to inform inclusive education policies.*

There are no public policy regulations that lead directly to discrimination or exclusion, but exclusion from education is caused by a lack of resources that prevents the implementation of many provisions: problems related to guaranteeing total access, the partial shortage of study materials and the lack of readiness on the part of the teachers to work in the field of special educational needs.

A web-based information system called the **Estonian Education Information System** (EHIS, [www.ehis.ee](http://www.ehis.ee)) was implemented. It comprises all educational institutions that possess education licenses for continuing education, aimed at maintaining a register of students, teachers/faculty members, school infrastructure, curricula and graduation certificates. EHIS contains information on all students, including students with SEN, the support systems, curricula, etc. implemented for their benefit, as well as the sanctions applied to young people who have violated the law. The data contained in EHIS is also the basis for allocating financial resources to school administrations.

Important indicators include the percentage of inclusion of students with SEN in ordinary schools, the percentage of dropouts from basic school and the comparison of educational levels between various target groups.

In 2008, the percentage of pupils with SEN in compulsory education in all educational settings in Estonia compared to the EU average was very high - 19% (the EU average was 3.6%). The percentage of pupils in compulsory education with SEN in segregated settings was 4.8% (the EU average was 2.0%).

According to EU education indicators, the general level of education in Estonia is quite high (in 2007, with 27.3% of its population aged 15–64 having higher education, Estonia ranked sixth among the EU countries; the EU average was 20.6%), while the ratio of early school leavers (population aged 18–24 with less than upper secondary education and not in education or

training) is still alarmingly high at 14.3% in 2007 (the EU average was 14.8%). There has been no significant decrease in the percentage of early school leavers in 2000–2006. The numbers have remained roughly the same, with only small fluctuations during the entire period (14.2% in 2000 and 13.2% in 2006). Although society has been made aware of the problem, the measures implemented have not achieved considerable results.

The ratio of young people with secondary education among people aged 20–24 has increased, although the growth has not been sufficiently fast. The ratio of people with secondary education was lower at the beginning of the period (79% in 2000, 82% in 2006 and 80.9% in 2007, with the EU average for 2007 being 78.1%).

In April 2006, Estonia participated in the OECD **PISA comparative survey** of the educational performance of 15-year-olds for the first time. The objective of the educational tests is to provide an all-round assessment of the knowledge and skills of the students in their last years of basic education, primarily focusing on the skills related to implementing their knowledge.

Based on the acquisition of basic skills, the Estonian students ranked as 2<sup>nd</sup> in natural history literacy, 9<sup>th</sup> in mathematical literacy (3<sup>rd</sup> in Europe) and 12<sup>th</sup> in functional reading (7<sup>th</sup> in Europe). This means that the majority of our students have achieved at least a basic skill level and work with less gifted students has been effective. The percentage of young people among 15-year-olds with low functional reading skills in Estonia was 13.7%.

In the international context it is also important that neither the socio-economic background of the students or the location or size of the school significantly affected our students' results. Estonia was among the five countries where the results were least dependent on the socio-economic background of the students. The performance of our students by school also did not differ markedly, which shows that the level of basic education is equally high throughout Estonia. Nevertheless, a statistical analysis of the results shows that in Estonia, females are stronger in reading. Also, a statistically significant difference appears between the mean scores achieved by students in Estonian and Russian language schools - the performance of Russian-language schools was significantly below the performance of Estonian-language schools.

*(b) Inclusive education issues relevant for educational policies*

An important topic in education policy is the **inclusion of new immigrants**, as well as the implementation and productivity of learning assistance and support systems. It is also important to introduce inclusion as a process in all fields of activity, as well as to develop necessary measures and introduce implementation plans for the implementation of inclusion (see also 1.1.5, 1.2.5).

Increasing the **accessibility of continuing training for adults** is going to be relevant for educational policies. In 2007/2008, based on the scheme of state commissioned study places, training working adult learners was launched in educational institutions in all counties. It is important for Estonia in coming years to bring more adults to study in order to raise the competitiveness and well-being of workers and to improve the quality of work. The aim of the present project is to help raise the number of people in training by providing free occupational training in all counties of Estonia. The trainings are offered by vocational institutions and institutions of professional higher education, because the emphasis is on training the people with primary and secondary level of education, who, based on studies, take less part in training than people with tertiary level of education. With targeted free training it is possible to involve those who are unable to pay for their own training.

The availability of **vocational training for people with special needs** got its renewal 2006, when new policies for people with SEN in VET were adopted. Based on this legal act, the school, as well as the owner of the school are obligated to provide a suitable study environment and study process for the learner with SEN. The school and the enterprise have a shared responsibility for the practical training and compiling the plan of transfer from school to life. Every student with SEN will be made an individual study plan and regular evaluations are carried out with all necessary counterparts present.

Among other things, large-scale activities for reorganising education were completed in prisons in 2007. Specialised schools in prisons were liquidated; from now on, **general education training in prisons** is provided by municipal general education schools. This has created more favourable conditions for imprisoned persons and convicted offenders for continuing their studies in a general education school after they are released from prison. The quality of teaching and studying as well as the learning environment have improved too, while the number of people who have acquired basic and general secondary education has increased.

*(c) Most vulnerable groups to various forms of exclusion from and within education*

The most vulnerable groups are students with severe and profound disabilities, who are unable to make use of the learning possibilities in schools close to their homes. There is a shortage of special education teachers who are specialized in this field. The current financing model is also inadequate, as the general model is not sufficient in some special cases.

The current policies target young people without basic education. The organization of studies has been made more specific and flexible; essentially, it is possible to acquire education through evening classes and distance learning starting from first grade. It is possible to study individual subjects or as an external student (regulation of the Minister of Education entitled “Conditions and Procedures for Studying in Basic School and Upper Secondary School through Evening Classes and Distance Learning, and Graduating Basic School and Upper Secondary School as an



External Student”). Opportunities have been created for acquiring basic and vocational education simultaneously (see also 2.1. b).

**In higher education**, increasingly more attention is being paid to higher education students with SEN (students with hearing, visual and physical disabilities), who require support services for participating in studies, to students who have insufficient proficiency in Estonian as a study language and require supplementary language study; to students, including foreign students and new students, who require study counselling or career counselling services and psychological counselling services; to former students who have interrupted their studies at an institution of higher education and wish to complete their studies.

In order to guarantee deaf people **high-quality sign language interpretation** for their personal business and for participating in the educational system (study translation), the training of sign language interpreters was started in 2006 as part of the applied higher education curriculum. The Minister of the Education and Research supported the development of the curriculum and finances the training of specialist according to the curriculum.

*(d) Current educational reforms addressing inclusive education*

All educational reforms are directed at the better implementation of inclusive education and the involvement of all children and young people. The development plans in the social sphere also support the involvement of children with special educational needs and the reduction of inequality.

We are gradually moving in the direction of an inclusive educational system, so that studies would be productive for all students and would take their needs and abilities into account. The designation of “special educational needs” includes all children who have additional needs in acquiring education: special aptitudes, learning or behavioural difficulties, health problems, disabilities, students for whom the study language differs from the language spoken at home or who come from different cultural backgrounds, children that have been absent from school for a long period, children with substance abuse problems, etc.

### **2.3. Systems, links and transitions**

*(a) Main barriers (e.g. economic, political, social) to inclusive education*

The main obstacle preventing the implementation of inclusive education is the insufficient treatment of inclusive education in teacher training. Another definite obstacle is the limited nature of both human and financial resources. The third obstacle is time – the issue of inclusive

education has been topical for 10 years, which is too short a period for the complete acceptance of changes, the development of support systems and the training of a new generation of teachers.

*(b) Most important facilitators of inclusive education*

Facilitating factors include Estonia's membership in the EU and participation in many inclusive education projects and working groups, where it is possible to cooperate with countries where the principles of inclusive education have already been accepted for 30 years.

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

Special measures are described in 1.1.2. in the introduction of the general education development plan (the individualization of studies, increasing the flexibility of legislation, eliminating discriminating provisions, providing support for all students and increasing openness of the education system).

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

Measures for **dropouts from the school system** (vocational study of young people without basic education, apprentice training, etc.) have been approved in the vocational education development plan. There is a series of measures in continuing education that guarantee free participation in courses.

In 2005, amendments to the law of vocational institutions came into force by which new and more appropriate types of vocational training were established. If before 2005 it was only possible to be admitted to 3 year upper secondary vocational education programmes on the basis of basic education and post-secondary vocational training, then the amendments to the law in 2005 provide opportunities for the students without basic education and to those for whom 3 year upper secondary VET education is beyond their abilities. Since 2006, it is possible to provide the following types of training in vocational institutions:

- Upper secondary VET education;
- Vocational training for people with upper secondary education;
- Vocational training for people with basic education;
- Vocational training for people without basic education;
- Preliminary vocational training;
- Vocational training in basic school and upper secondary school is meant for pupils of general education schools and it is provided by vocational educational institutions. 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 about the studies they have passed. The knowledge and skills acquired in basic school or upper secondary school can be considered in further studies if the pupil wishes to continue their studies in the same specialty;

- Vocational institutions can also carry out professional higher education;
- Continuous training and retraining for adults.

Since the 2006/2007 academic year, pupils who have completed the secondary vocational education curriculum in vocational schools can also study general subjects of their choice within the extent of 35 study weeks (so-called additional year) and take state examinations. This makes vocational school graduates more competitive in acquiring higher education. The voluntary additional year can be taken in adult upper secondary schools or in the evening or distance learning departments of upper secondary schools and is free for students.

The aim of the above mentioned strategy is supported also by “applying work based training”, adopted in 2007, which gives the legal framework to the so called “apprenticeship training”. The task of implementing the apprenticeship program was to provide a flexible study process for those for whom a practically oriented training is more suitable. Apprenticeship training enables access to education also to those, who are already working. In work-based study form, 2/3 of the training is carried out in the enterprise and 1/3 in the school, which also means that part of the responsibility for the study process, is transferred to the enterprises. Apprenticeship training is also a measure appropriate to decrease dropout rates.

Vocational education without the requirement of basic education, where only the profession is acquired, was implemented for persons without basic education who have exceeded the age of compulsory school attendance (17 years) in the 2006/2007 academic year. General education studies for acquisition of basic education can also be continued after the completion of vocational education.

In the situation of an ageing population, it is important to provide access to education for all age groups. In the society that values academic education, less attention has been paid to continuing training, which the vocational institutions are ready to offer. In 2007, a pilot project of ESF was launched by which a free of charge continuing education and training opportunity was created also for the adult population. Compared to 2006, thanks to the ESF project, the number of participants in continuing education in VET institutions has increased by 31%. The legal framework was completed in autumn 2007 when the policies for arranging continuous training for adults in VET institutions was established and legalized.

Creating social guarantees fulfils the objective of the development plan to provide an access to vocational training to people from disadvantaged families. Here, major changes have taken place in two years

Since autumn 2006, VET students (except post-secondary students) are provided with free lunch, which is based on Minister's regulations.

Since January 2007, the education allowance system became more flexible. The right to receive education allowance was extended to students studying following the basic school (incl. those with and without basic education). Transport allowance is also paid to students acquiring vocational education based on basic education to compensate the cost of travelling between school and home.

Access to vocational training will be provided in all regions and counties even after the reorganization plan of the school network has been implemented.

#### **2.4. *Learners and teachers***

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

##### ***Pre-primary education***

On 29 May 2008, the Government of the Republic passed the National Curriculum for Pre-School Child Care Institutions, where learning is regarded as a lifelong process that results in changes in behaviour, knowledge, attitudes, skills, etc., and the connection between them. Children learn by imitation, observation, examination, experimentation, play, practice, etc.

In planning and implementing schooling and education, it is necessary to take into consideration the unique traits of the child, including their abilities, linguistic and cultural background, age, gender, state of health, etc. Teachers direct the development of children and create the environment that supports development.

Children are active participants in schooling and education and activities make them happy. Children are involved in the planning of activities, they are encouraged to make choices and analyze what has been done.

In schooling and education, conditions are created to develop children's ability:

- 1) to plan their activities and make choices;
- 2) to relate new knowledge to earlier experiences;
- 3) to use the acquired knowledge in various situations and activities;
- 4) to discuss the acquired knowledge and skills;
- 5) to assess the effectiveness of their activities;
- 6) to be happy about their own successes and those of others and to cope with failure.

Monitoring the features of children's individual development starts at their birth. Great attention is also paid to the early intervention of child care institutions, which serves to assist children with special needs to develop according to their abilities and to support the children's families. Early intervention is defined as the monitoring of the development of children born with risk factors, the detection of children with special needs as early as possible, the assessment of aspects that are lagging or less developed (for instance, physical, social, cognitive development) and the planning and execution of suitable development work.

Children are accepted into special kindergartens (special groups) and students into sanatorium schools and special schools (special classes) for students with special needs upon a resolution of the counselling committee or based on the written application of a parent or guardian.

Local governments create development and education opportunities in local child care institutions for children with special needs (physical, speech, sensory or compound disorders; mental, nervous, psychiatric and behavioural disorders) and children requiring special assistance or special care. Conditions are created for the education of children with special needs in compatibility groups alongside other children. If the local child care institution does not provide the opportunity to form a compatibility group, the rural municipality or city government will form special groups or establish special kindergartens.

To support the individual development of children with special needs, a medical institution will compile a rehabilitation plan, the fulfilment of which supports the individual development plan compiled by the special education teacher at the pre-primary child care institution. For promoting cooperation between child care institutions and families, counselling centres are being formed, where children with special needs and their parents are provided with comprehensive information and assistance.

Groups that prepare 6-year-old children with speech, hearing and visual disabilities for starting school are being formed at state schools. Each of these preparatory groups will have up to ten members. The activities of the preparatory groups operating in state schools are financed from the national budget.

In 2006/2007, an amendment to the Pre-School Child Care Institutions Act regarding the internal evaluation of child care institutions took effect. The objective of internal evaluation is to guarantee conditions supportive of child development and the consistent development of child care institutions by ascertaining activities and areas for improvement at the child care institution. The schooling and education provided at the child care institution, as well as its management are analyzed and their effectiveness is evaluated. Consultations regarding internal evaluation are provided by the National examination and Qualification Center.

### ***Basic education***

According to the national curriculum for basic schools and upper secondary schools, the development of the schooling and education process is based on the concept that learning is a lifelong process, the awareness and prioritization of which depends on the age and individual characteristics of the learner. Learning occurs through play and imitation, observation and analysis, feeling and experience, exercise and experimentation, remembering and creating. The learner's internal motivation is important to the development of lifelong learning as a lifestyle.

The schooling and education process entails learning that is prioritized and results in understanding, the teaching and education efforts that offer direction, consultation, analyses and evaluations of the learning process, and the reciprocal connections between these activities. Students participate to the best of their abilities in the prioritization, planning and evaluation of their learning, and learning may occur in real or virtual environments.

In the course of the schooling and education process, the students learn:

- 1) to use existing knowledge and skills, and to see the connections;
- 2) to ask, learn and acquire new knowledge and skills;
- 3) to act; to use their intellect, fantasy and emotions; to create, design and experiment;
- 4) to develop oneself, to learn how to study;
- 5) to learn alone or together with others, by observing and evaluating one's own activities and those of others;
- 6) to resolve problems, make choices, decide on the correctness of statements, to disagree, debate, and defend one's positions;
- 7) to follow and direct one's thoughts and learning.

When children start schooling, their level of readiness for school is important. If the parent believes that their child is not ready for first grade, they may apply for a postponement of compulsory school attendance from the counselling committee.

To prevent school fatigue, timetables that reflect rotations in the study load are prepared and learning activities are distributed evenly throughout the days of study during the academic year. The timetable for a day of study must alternate liberal arts subjects with sciences and skill-based subjects, and take into consideration the fact that students generally have a greater capacity to learn and work during the first half of the day and on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

One test can be conducted during a day of study. Students will be informed of the time for a test at least five study days before the test is given. Up to three tests can be conducted during a study week. Tests are not planned for Mondays or Fridays, as well as for the first and last lesson of the day, except in cases when the subject is in the timetable on Mondays and Fridays or only on one of these days, or as the first or last lesson.

Homework is not assigned in the first grade. Homework is not assigned for the day after a holiday or the first day of an academic quarter.

In order to support the acquisition of knowledge and skills required of the students, changes have been made in the procedure for grading students.

Students, who get a grade of “poor” or “insufficient” for the academic quarter, and who have been given an equivalent verbal evaluation or not been given a grade, will have an individual study program prepared for them, or be assigned some other support system (e.g. speech therapy, remedial study, etc.) according to the provisions of the school’s curriculum in order to help them acquire the required knowledge and skills.

If an individual study program has been drawn up for the student, the exceptions specified in the individual study program will be taken into considers during the evaluation.

If the student has not acquired the knowledge and skills required by the study program during the study period, the student may be assigned to supplementary study carried out after the end of the study period in order to support the achievement of the study results. Supplementary study entails the student completing special study assignments under the direct supervision of the teacher. The results of supplementary study will be checked and graded.

In order to guarantee the personal development of the student and the consideration of individual learning needs in the organization of studies, the following opportunities for supported study are implemented at schools:

- preparation of individual study programs;
- remedial study for overcoming study difficulties;
- speech therapy;
- study in long day groups;
- home study with participation in skill-related subject lessons, if possible;
- classes for students with behavioural problems;
- boarding school facilities for students with social problems;
- social educational specialist assistance;
- psychological assistance.

The transfer of a basic school student in need of support services to remedial study will take place with the resolution of the teachers’ council based on the student’s observation card. If necessary, a speech therapist, psychologist, remedial study teacher, other teachers teaching the student and the corresponding medical specialist will be involved in the decision-making process of the teacher’s council.

During the first stage of study, remedial study will be implemented for up to four hours per week. It will be implemented for at least three hours per week at the second stage of study and for at least two hours per week at the third stage of study. No more than six students are allowed per remedial study group. Students from different classes can be included in remedial study groups.

Basic school students are provided with support and supervision in long day groups to help them use the free time after their classes and complete their homework assignments. They are also provided pedagogical guidance and direction for the development of hobbies and interests.

Upon the manifestation of learning difficulties, the student is directed to the counselling committee, where, if necessary, a study plan that suits their abilities is determined for the acquisition of basic education or the student is directed to a sanatorium school, a special school for students with special needs, or a special class.

The rules of organizing the studies of students with special needs in the catchment area of the school have been specified from the standpoint of the availability of education. The home studies of students according to a simplified national curriculum for basic schools will be organized locally by the school with the catchment area that covers the residence of student or by a corresponding special school for students with special needs.

The home study for students is provided locally according to a national curriculum for students with moderate and severe learning disabilities by the special school for students with special needs with the corresponding curriculum or the school with the catchment area that covers the residence of student.

### ***Vocational education***

The opportunities for study at vocational educational institutions and the implementation of the necessary support systems have been created for all SEN students by a regulation of the Minister of Education and Research. Based on this regulation, the school as well as the owner of the school are obligated to provide a suitable study environment and study process for the learner with SEN. The school and the enterprise have a shared responsibility for the practical training and compiling the plan of transfer from school to life. Every student with special needs will be made an individual study plan and regular evaluations are carried out with all necessary counterparts present.

### ***Young people***

In order to place value on informal learning and to explore more opportunities for adopting a comprehensive view of informal and formal learning in the school environment, a training project was initiated by the Estonian office of European Youth in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Research. Within the framework of the training project, two training sessions



were conducted in 2007, which were called learning journeys entitled “The Informal is Valuable Too!” The training will continue in November 2008.

The general objective of the entire training project is to try and guarantee that the value of informal study in the various fields of youth work is recognized and utilized – that the fact that the informal is also valuable is perceived. Hobby counsellors, teachers and administrators from different schools participated in the training. Further training is planned for the teachers of hobby schools.

The principal message of the learning journey can be summarized as follows:

- informal study is not offered as an alternative to formal study;
- the participants in the learning journey apparently already utilize informal learning, but increasing awareness will help to enrich the school environment;
- informed use of informal learning helps to support the popularization of formal learning among young people.

*(b) Changes in the curriculum to respond to the diversity of learners*

### ***Pre-primary education***

At child care institutions, the organization of schooling and education and the preparation of the study program are based on the national curriculum. From 1999 until 30 August 2008, the national curriculum was the framework study program for pre-primary education approved by the regulation of the Government of the Republic. On 1 September 2008, the updated national curriculum for pre-primary child care institutions confirmed by the regulation of the Government of the Republic came into force.

The general schooling and education objective of the national curriculum for pre-primary child care institutions is the multifaceted and consistent development of the child with cooperation between the home and the child care institution. Based on the general objective, schooling and education supports the physical, mental, social and emotional development of the child, which results in the child developing a comprehensive and positive personal image, understanding the surrounding environment, ethical behaviour and initiative, primary work habits, physical activity and an understanding of the importance of health, as well as emerging play, study, social and reflexive skills.

The principles for carrying out schooling and education in child care institutions are:

- 1) taking into account the individuality of the child and their development potential;
- 2) maintaining and fostering the child’s health and satisfying their need for movement;
- 3) supporting the child’s creativity;
- 4) learning through play;
- 5) valuing humane and democratic relations;

- 6) creating an environment that promotes the development and socialization of the child;
- 7) guaranteeing the child's sense of security and success experiences;
- 8) implementing generally instructive work methods;
- 9) cooperation between the home and child care institution;
- 10) valuing Estonian cultural traditions and considering the unique features of other cultures.

The planning of schooling and education is based on child-centered methodologies based on the principle that the child's development and learning is affected by the child's individuality, their needs and interests and their social relations and surroundings. An important aspect of these methodologies is the linking of schooling and education to the child's physical development and shaping of health behaviour habits, especially with outdoor play and activities.

The analysis and evaluation of the child's development is important for understanding the nature of the child, ascertaining special needs, supporting a positive self-image and development and for planning educational activities in cooperation with the parent. The assessment of the child's development is a part of the everyday schooling and education process. Teachers conduct observations based on a definite plan and the child is monitored in everyday actions, free play and activities directed by the teacher.

The child's development is described based on the child, by valuing achievements and acknowledging the child's ability to cope, their development, positive attitudes and interests. The group teacher introduces the principles and organization of assessing the child's development to the parent.

At least once during the academic year, the teacher conducts a student evaluation with the parent in order to assess and support the child's development, thereby:

- 1) providing feedback on the child's development and learning results;
- 2) ascertaining the positions and expectation of the parent regarding the child's development.

Supporting the development of children with special needs, including talented children, requires teamwork and it is the responsibility of the director of the child care institution to guarantee that there is functioning teamwork.

If necessary, the teachers of the group, in cooperation with the speech therapist/special education teacher as well as other specialists and the parent, compile an individual development program for the child. At least once during the school year a summary is made of the implementation of the individual development plan, the suitability of the developmental environment, and the child's future needs.

The child care institution supports families with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in introducing their language and culture to their children as well as valuing Estonian language and culture.

### ***Basic and upper secondary school education***

At basic schools and upper secondary schools, schooling and education is based on the national curriculum for basic schools and upper secondary schools approved by a 2002 regulation of the Government of the Republic.

For the successful acquisition of education that is suitable to the abilities and interests of the students, the following opportunities have been created for basic school and upper secondary school students by amending the national curriculum in 2005–2008:

1. In order to guarantee the successful acquisition of education that is suitable to the abilities and interests of the students, the class size limit for basic schools has been reduced from 36 students to 24 students.
2. In order to differentiate study, take into account the distinctive features of the school and the area, and provide for pre-vocational education, up to five lessons per week may be added to the school study program as an exception to the provisions of § 20 (1), without thereby reducing the number of weekly lessons for a subject by more than one lesson and without coming into conflict with the largest permissible weekly study load for students.
3. In the third stage of study of general education schools offering pre-vocational music education, specialized subjects related to the field of pre-vocational education may be taught instead of manual training.
4. Students from abroad may study foreign languages not specified in section 6 as B foreign languages, if the school prepares the corresponding subject syllabus and provides the necessary study conditions.
5. Students from abroad who are studying in schools with Estonian-language instruction may study Estonian according to the subject syllabus for schools with Russian or some other language of instruction, if their native language is not Estonian.

### ***Vocational education***

In the “Development plan for the Estonian Vocational Education and training system in 2005-2008” one of the objectives set is to rearrange and fully develop the system of curricula. The creation of a modular and output based curriculum enables better tailoring and breakdown of the study, helps people to return to studies and better evaluation of the study results. In 2007/2008, the first 15 national curricula were approved.

*(c) Instructional hours per year dedicated to learning reading in the early primary grades*

Based on the national curriculum for basic schools and upper secondary schools, the largest weekly study load is 20 lessons in the first grade, 23 lessons in the second grade, and 25 lessons

in the third grade. A total of 19 native language lessons which also include learning to read are permitted in grades 1–3. The national curriculum does not separately determine lessons for learning to read. However, the teacher will conduct individual work with the students as needed. The school will determine the number of native language lessons in its school study program. Generally, schools have divided native language lessons as follows: 7 lessons in the first grade, 6 lessons in the second grade, and 6 lessons also in third grade.

*(d) Teacher training to meet the learners' diverse expectations and needs*

The preparation of teachers should be knowledge-based and take place at the level of higher education in order to provide teachers with modern subject-related, subject-instructive and pedagogical knowledge and skills (incl. ICT), knowledge about the functioning of democratic society, which also includes the concept of inclusion, and the ability to analyze their work and provide feedback. Many different training methods have to be implemented in the training of teachers.

It is not possible to provide training to everyone in the form of primary studies. It is important to support new teachers in their first working years. In Estonia, induction years have been organized since 2004. New teachers gather in universities once per academic quarter and form discussion groups, where they discuss education-related problems and search for solutions with the help of experienced advisors. Each new teacher also has a mentor at their school.

The professional development of teachers must be a continuing process that is constantly supported. The development of teachers' learning communities and the resolution of education-related issues within the schools should be encouraged by involving specialists in the process if necessary (for example in the case of students with serious disabilities). The state must guarantee that teachers are provided with sufficient high-quality in-service training programs, including programs that explain the principles of inclusive education. Schools and teachers must create better strategies for planning and organizing the professional development of every teacher.

The role of schools in decision-making regarding the organization of studies and hiring support personnel, as well as the freedom of teachers regarding which teaching methods to choose and how to fulfil the curriculum, should be increased.

### 3. Documentary references

For an overview of the education system at all levels in Estonia please refer to the following documents:

- Education and Research in Estonia, 2008, Ministry of Education and Research, <http://www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=8022>
- The Education System in Estonia (2007/2008), Eurybase - The Information Database on Education Systems in Europe, [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/ressources/eurydice/eurybase/pdf/0\\_integral/EE\\_EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/ressources/eurydice/eurybase/pdf/0_integral/EE_EN.pdf)

The progress made in putting in place the national lifelong learning strategy is described in the national report to the European Commission:

- Preparation of the 2008 Joint Interim Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, Member States' contribution, Estonia, [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/natreport07/est\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/natreport07/est_en.pdf)

#### *Institutions:*

Ministry of Education and Research, [www.hm.ee](http://www.hm.ee)

National Examination and Qualification Centre, [www.ekk.edu.ee](http://www.ekk.edu.ee)

#### *Laws and regulations:*

Constitution of Republic of Estonia

Republic of Estonia Education Act

Pre-School Child Care Institutions Act

Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act

Vocational Educational Institutions Act

Adult Education Act

Universities Act

Standard of higher education; Government of the Republic regulation

Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act Private Schools Act

Youth Work Act

Framework curriculum for pre-primary education; Government of the Republic regulation

National curriculum for basic schools and upper secondary schools; Government of the Republic regulation

National curriculum for students with moderate and severe learning disabilities; Minister of Education regulation

Procedure for the registration of children subject to the obligation to attend school; Government of the Republic regulation

Conditions and procedure for referral of children with special educational needs to a counselling committee; Minister of Education regulation

Conditions and procedure for the formation of classes for students acquiring basic education who have behavioural problems; Minister of Education and Research regulation

Establishment of the register of pupils and students; Minister of Education regulation

Procedure for home schooling; Minister of Education regulation

Procedure for the registration of children subject to the obligation to attend school; Government of the Republic regulation

Conditions and procedure for admission to and dismissal from nursery schools or groups for children with special educational needs, schools and classes for students with special educational needs and sanatorium schools; Minister of Education regulation

Procedure for counselling of pre-school child care institutions and schools in questions of internal evaluation; Minister of Education and Research regulation

Requirements for health protection, health promotion, nutrition and composing a daily schedule in pre-school child care institutions; Minister of Social Affairs regulation

Strategiline juhtimine ja sisehindamine lasteaias.

Conditions and procedure for offering students who are acquiring basic education and whose mother tongue is not the language of instruction the opportunity to learn their mother tongue and to learn about their national culture; Government of the Republic regulation

Procedure for studying on the basis of an individual curriculum; Minister of Education and Research regulation

Simplified national curriculum for basic schools (supplementary learning curriculum); Minister of Education regulation

National curriculum for students with moderate and severe learning disabilities; Minister of Education regulation

Toimetuleku riiklik õppekava; haridusministri määrus

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[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/ressources/eurydice/eurybase/pdf/0\\_integral/EE\\_EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/ressources/eurydice/eurybase/pdf/0_integral/EE_EN.pdf)

Preparation of the 2008 Joint Interim Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, Member States' contribution, Estonia  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/natreport07/est\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/natreport07/est_en.pdf)

European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document "Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training", Indicators and benchmarks – 2008  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/progressreport\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/progressreport_en.html)

Eesti kutseharidussüsteemi arengukava aastateks 2005-2008. Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium, Tartu, 2005, <http://www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=3812>

[Eesti kutseharidussüsteemi arengukava aastateks 2005-2008](#) täitmise vahekokkuvõte.

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